

FINAL ATTEMPTS

In the months leading up to the Slovene declaration of independence on 25 June 1991, the Yugoslav Presidency convened frequently. In our sessions we dealt with specific critical situations and conflicts. President Jović wanted – not just once – to call out the Army to intervene against the Croats. We had a series of highly dramatic night-time sessions. The Presidency also met several times with the presidents of all the republics. At these meetings we sought an agreement, or rather a solution, to the Yugoslav crisis; we were looking for a formula – confederation, independent Slovenia, closer ties between certain republics, looser with others, and a range of other variations. At times it seemed that there was a possibility that we might actually come to an agreement and a solution, but this period was marked by a steady stream of incidents, and there had already been clashes in Croatia. I organised a meeting in Belgrade which was attended by Slovene President Kučan and head of the Slovene government Lojze Peterle. We had a meeting in Marković's office with General Kadijević. At this meeting everyone said their piece, and basically nothing came of it. Prime Minister Marković argued for the federation and was trying to preserve the integrity of the

state. By this time his economic programme had already collapsed. It had been impossible to maintain it in such a situation of political crisis, when the individual leaderships in the republics were each doing their own thing. First of all Serbia destroyed the monetary system, and then each simply tried to do what he was able to. The next meeting was held in the JNA headquarters. I went there together with Peterle. We met Generals Kadijević and Adžić. The conversation revolved around what to do with Slovene participation in the JNA. Slovenia had actually passed a resolution that Slovene conscripts would no longer go off to other republics to do their national service in the JNA. The JNA responded with threats and fist-shaking, and we had to debate this issue several times in the Presidency, where I defended the Slovene position. In our meeting now, Kadijević was relatively calm. He proposed that an agreement should be reached in the Presidency, since the Army needed formally to cover itself for this decision from Slovenia.

It was up to the Presidency, as commander-in-chief, to pass a resolution approving this move. Indeed the Presidency debated this issue several times. We came very close to a decision which had the support of Serbia but the opposition of the others – Macedonia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Their reasoning was simple: if Slovenia alone was off the hook, the other republics would find themselves in a tight spot, and with their position not so cut and dry as Slovenia's, they could ill afford this. It seemed to me, however, that we might be able quite soon to gain a majority decision in the Presidency in Slovenia's favour. On 15 May 1991 a new problem arose in the Federal Presidency. The Serbs opposed the appointment of the Croatian representative Stipe Mesić as the next President of the Presidency, although constitutionally he was in line to take office. They had four votes, and the result was four against four. So Mesić was not elected President of the Presidency, and the Presidency was without a leader. In the voting I strongly supported Mesić and publicly condemned the Serbian veto. I announced that I would no longer come to sessions of the Presidency, since it had not elected the President who was constitutionally in line. In the meantime we were inexorably approaching the day of Slovene independence. The months had passed. Up until the conflict in Slovenia I did not venture from my home republic. I did not want to participate in sessions of the

Presidency, when the Serbian members were meeting just for themselves. The other three members and I were in touch with each other and were trying to coordinate our activities. Then followed ten days of war in Slovenia.

WAR IN SLOVENIA

On the evening of Tuesday 25 June 1991 the Slovene Assembly declared the sovereignty of Slovenia and adopted a constitutional law with which it would rearrange relations with the federation over a transitional period. It was anticipated in this constitutional law that Slovenia should continue to have a representative in the Federal Presidency who would represent the republic's interests in the process of secession. It was expected, for example, that the JNA would withdraw from Slovenia over a period of three years from the declaration of sovereignty. I had already joked on several occasions that I was no good at breaking up, and that in this period of separation Slovenia should be represented by someone else. So on the following day, 26 June 1991, I wrote a letter to the president of the Assembly, France Bučar, tendering my resignation as Slovene representative in the Yugoslav Presidency. In explanation I wrote that for some time the Presidency had been functioning illegitimately, since Stipe Mesić had not been elected President, while earlier the Albanian representative had been forcibly replaced, so that for over a month now the Presidency had in effect not been meeting in a quorate, legal form. In the evening there was a public celebration

marking the declaration of independence. That same evening federal air force jets started flying over Ljubljana. Croatia also declared independence. On the night of Tuesday to Wednesday the federal government met under the leadership of Ante Marković and passed a resolution that the decisions of Slovenia and Croatia to declare independence were illegal and illegitimate. It passed a resolution guaranteeing the normal functioning of the state and the securing of the borders.

Early on Thursday morning, at around 3.30 a.m., a security officer woke me and said there were tanks in the streets. I called President Kučan and asked him what was going on; he confirmed that there were indeed tanks on the move. We agreed to meet immediately in the Slovene presidency. When I arrived, Janša and Bavčar – Slovene defence and interior ministers, respectively – were already there, and Peterle also came. They were all in combat fatigues. I was not sure if they would have invited me to the meeting if I had not called. Gradually other people arrived. To begin with we dealt with the question of what to do as an immediate step. So far the tanks had managed to get around or flatten some improvised road blocks. There had not yet been any shooting. Janša and Bavčar asked whether they should now mine the barricades. This would certainly have been a "baptism of fire" for the conflict. Since it was still not clear from the information they gave us what these tank movements signified, I suggested trying to call Kadijević and Marković and clear up what this was all about. Perhaps it would still be possible to avoid war. Everyone agreed with this.

I was not able to get General Kadijević, but I reached Marković. The conversation produced no result. He accused us of adopting a unilateral declaration of independence, and I accused him of resorting to irresponsible military action. I demanded that he immediately call a halt to all the JNA manoeuvres. Since it was not possible to get hold of Kadijević, it was clear that the action could not now be stopped. The first explosions rang out, and the shooting started. The relevant decrees and resolutions had been passed for us to be able to defend ourselves. I then spent virtually all of the next ten days, from morning to late at night, in the presidency building. Kučan, Janša, Bavčar, Peterle and I met at least twice a day for several hours, familiarising ourselves with both the military and international political situation, and

agreeing on further measures. The mood was generally good, and so was our fighting morale. I only went home to sleep, and that very little, so towards the end I lost the feeling of what day it was. Right on the first day we agreed that I should communicate with Belgrade, in particular with Marković and Kadijević and the other members of the Presidency. We also agreed that I should be as active as possible internationally, letting my political friends and acquaintances around the world know what was happening in Slovenia, and that I should appeal for their help. I stayed in the presidency late into the night, and normally I was last there with Kučan, finally going over the situation again and working out how to move forward. The Slovene presidency gave me formal authorisation to represent Slovenia in its foreign policy affairs and to negotiate with Belgrade. We agreed that my formal resignation, which I had submitted a day before the start of hostilities, should be withheld, and not be forwarded to the Assembly, in case the need arose for us to use my formal status as a member of the Yugoslav Presidency in negotiations with foreign countries or with Belgrade. Since Slovenia had of course still not been recognised, in our international dealings it would be generally easier to communicate through me as the Slovene member of the Federal Presidency, rather than through the representatives of the as yet unrecognised Slovenia. It would be a pity to jeopardise the chance of communication while the situation remained unclear and while Slovenia's sovereignty was still not established. From the first day I was frequently on the phone to the federal Prime Minister Ante Marković. We quarrelled on several occasions about who was responsible for the outbreak of this conflict, while I put to him the fact that the Army was intervening on the basis merely of a resolution from the federal Executive Council, and demanded to know what was going on in their heads if they thought that violence could be meted out to all the nations of Yugoslavia, and that they could be forced to live in a state which no longer functioned and which they no longer recognised. We have offered you plenty of chances to negotiate, I told him, we have discussed this business for long enough, we still wish to settle all this together in peace, but the JNA had taken the first definite step into war. Marković of course disagreed, although it was obvious that the whole situation was very unpleasant for him and that he wanted to have the hostilities stopped. On the first day General Kadijević offered no

response to my telephone calls, and we only spoke on the second day, the Friday. A very important part in all of this was played from the beginning by the German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher. I called him on the very first day of the aggression, on Thursday. We agreed to remain in telephone contact and to keep each other informed up to the minute of all developments. The German foreign ministry had instructions to find Genscher wherever and at whatever time if I called. And they did. I was also in regular telephone contact with Austrian Chancellor Vranitzky; I even had his home number, and he was very ready to help. I had a permanent telephone link with the President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, and the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, Catherine Lalumiere. I was in contact with Delors just before the summit meeting of the European twelve, and even during the meeting. I think that I was never more pleased to have my knowledge of foreign languages than during those days, since I was able to have a really considerable number of telephone conversations with leading politicians in a very short time. Jacques Delors also set up a special duty service over the weekend, so that he was always available whenever I called. I spent entire days either sitting at the phone or in meetings of the expanded Slovene presidency.

I started talking to Kadijević on the Friday about the first ceasefire, for that night, which did not hold. At times our conversations were very heated, when we started telling each other whose fault all this was. We managed to have slightly calmer discussions over what the individual sides should do for a ceasefire. It was clear that the generals and Marković, as well as the federal leadership, wanted to maintain this contact with Slovenia, since they always responded to my telephone calls and themselves called me. This was practically the only communication between Ljubljana and Belgrade, in other words between Slovenia and the federation, and this was therefore the link most used for agreeing on the various ceasefires. Other agreements, which were more of an operational and implementational nature, were concluded between Ljubljana and Zagreb, command centre of the 5th military region. I recall most of all the fourth day of the conflict, Sunday 30 June 1991. In the morning we began the session of the presidency at the command post in Cankarjev Dom. We had by then obtained information suggesting that an air raid was being prepared. I called Ante Marković and told him

about this, but he apparently knew nothing about it. I called Kadijević, but could not get hold of him, and then I called Marković again. We continued the session. From outside we suddenly heard loud bangs, and also air raid sirens. This whole time I was in contact with Belgrade and other countries. There was anxiety everywhere, and foreign powers were using what channels they had to put pressure on Belgrade. When I left Cankarjev Dom and returned to the presidency building, the air raid warning was still in effect, but I had forgotten about it. When I came into my office in the presidency, there was not a soul about. I finally discovered from the security guards that they were all apparently in the shelter. I was annoyed, and wondered what they were all scared of. I picked up the phone and dialled Belgrade, getting through to Kadijević and Marković. Marković was anxious, but Kadijević was beside himself, claiming that we Slovenes were playing around too much, and that now they would show us. I had Kadijević on the line quite a few times, while at the same time I was being told by our own people that the Army was now truly putting on the pressure. Another possible air raid was signalled. I spoke to Kadijević and told him that they should not do anything foolish, that we should talk about a ceasefire, and they should call off the attack. Were they really prepared to take responsibility for major bloodshed? Later he told me that at that time they really were ready to launch a massive air raid. In the afternoon the situation calmed down a bit. Ante Marković was already on his way to Ljubljana, along with Admiral Brovet, General Čušić and other aides from Belgrade. We discussed a ceasefire. The JNA and the federation wanted our defence forces to lift our blockade of certain of their units which had been pinned down and to free the prisoners we were holding. This was being increasingly demanded by the international community and foreign leaders, and it became very clear that we would need to establish a ceasefire on this basis. Such was the course of our conversations, interspersed by occasional new tensions, into Monday and Tuesday. In the afternoon there were more rumblings from Belgrade about an all-out attack, and I had another series of white-knuckle phone conversations with Kadijević. This was the general run of events up until Tuesday afternoon, when Stipe Mesić, whom the European troika of ministers had somehow managed on Sunday evening to have finally appointed President of the Federal Presidency, arrived in

Ljubljana together with Vasil Tupurkovski. I had already been in contact with them both, and they announced that they would be coming to Ljubljana to seek a peaceful solution, and to mediate a ceasefire, to which we agreed. I had given instructions that upon their arrival they should be shown directly into my office, since I had been in effect holed up on the phone there, and right at that time Kadijević was making more threats. The secretary did not know that Mesić and Tupurkovski would be coming right into the office, and she nearly fell off her chair in shock when they suddenly appeared at the door. The negotiations in Ljubljana and with Belgrade lasted the whole evening, and then we held a joint press conference in which we announced that Slovenia was ready for a ceasefire. When I set off home in the middle of the night, I heaved a sigh of relief, thinking that the worst was over and that somehow we were close to an end to the hostilities, even though in the evening Kadijević was still making threats and on Belgrade TV the generals were continuing to make threatening statements. I had been straining myself to the limit to get a ceasefire. I knew that the whole business was hanging on a thread, that the generals wanted revenge, and they were itching to renew their strike on Slovenia with greater force and exact retribution. It therefore seemed to me most important to buy some time, to keep on talking to Kadijević and Marković, to cool the situation down a little and perhaps in the meantime secure the appropriate pressure from abroad. In this way we might pull the situation back from the imminent outbreak of a major military conflict and steer it towards a more secure ceasefire. That evening I thought that we had managed to achieve this. Very early in the morning, however, I was woken by a phone call from German foreign minister Genscher, who was very worried about a column of tanks that was on the move from Belgrade and heading west – towards Slovenia. He said that he would immediately take up the matter at the UN and in the European Community in order to put pressure on Belgrade. Immediately after this I called the American ambassador in Belgrade, Warren Zimmerman, who said that he was also aware of the tank movements and that he was already in touch with Washington. When we spoke again later, it was obvious that international pressure had produced some results; the generals had halted the advance of the tank column towards Slovenia.

During these days I started to face pressure to return to the Yugoslav Presidency in Belgrade. It was something the European Community called for and at the same time a condition of the ceasefire. I strongly resisted, and explained that I would continue to help in any way I could, but it was virtually impossible for me to even consider returning to Belgrade after this aggression. The EC troika of ministers kept up their demand, and in some quarters of the Slovene leadership there was talk of going along with it.

Right at the beginning of the aggression it was proposed that I should travel abroad and attempt as much as I could to work in Slovenia's interest from outside. For the entire week of the war I could not decide on this, somehow unable to bring myself to leave Slovenia while it was under attack, while at the same time the telephone lines were open and it was possible to get a great deal done by phone. It also seemed to me that I would be an incomparably more convincing prospect for our foreign contacts if I was speaking from Ljubljana, where I was at the very centre of events the whole time, than if I was abroad, where I, too, would only have second-hand information. It was only after the situation calmed down a bit that I left on Friday for a half-day trip to Berne in Switzerland. Since Ljubljana airport had been put out of action, I first had to go by car to Klagenfurt in Austria and then on to Berne in an executive plane owned by a Slovene company. In Berne I met the vice-president of the Swiss Confederation and foreign minister Rene Felbert. The reception was very warm, and it was given a high public and media profile. Switzerland offered us all the help it could, and showed great sympathy. They offered to host our negotiations with Belgrade in Geneva. They said even then that they would recognise Slovene passports and that they would contribute whatever was in their power to the international efforts to stop the war in Slovenia. It was interesting to see the extraordinary security measures they implemented. There was a marksman behind every bush, and helicopters circled overhead. Although of course Switzerland was peaceful and safe, they had been so influenced by the conflict in Slovenia that they were definitely taking no chances.

We were rather late getting back because the plane experienced some technical problems. In the meantime Tupurkovski and Bogičević were already on their way to Ljubljana as the new federal negotiators, and I

was supposed to be taking part in the talks. So we drove flat out from Klagenfurt back to Ljubljana, so much so that the car accompanying us went off the road. Luckily the two security officers in it were unhurt. There were barricades and road blocks all over the place, and we travelled mainly on side roads.

On Saturday morning the talks with the federal delegation continued, and in the meantime we discussed where we should meet with the European representatives and the federation for the deciding talks on a ceasefire. Following the talks in the morning I travelled to Vienna – again via Klagenfurt – where I was met by Austrian Chancellor Vranitzky. I gave him an exhaustive update on events. He, too, followed our efforts with great sympathy and offered all possible help. I hurried back to Ljubljana, without stopping even for a moment. I had spoken to the new presiding minister of the European Community, Hans Van den Broek, and it was agreed that on the following day, Sunday 7 July 1991, there would be a meeting on the island of Brioni in Croatia. When I arrived back in Ljubljana from Vienna on the Saturday evening, I therefore went straight on in the car towards Pula and to the ferry for Brioni. Funnily enough, I arrived in Pula at the same time as the European troika, to whom federal foreign minister Lončar had already attached himself like a leech. So we ended up all crossing to the island together, to the obvious frustration of Lončar, who now did not have a chance to speak unhindered to the European ministers, since I was with them the whole time and was in on the conversation. We arrived on Brioni at around ten at night. Ante Marković was already there with the federal delegation. Stipe Mesić arrived, and Borisav Jović was there, too. They sat down to dinner, and since they had also invited European ministers Pinheiro, Van den Broek and Poos, I joined them for a while, to make sure they did not get fed purely one-sided, "federal" information. The atmosphere at this dinner, during which I ate practically nothing, was very strange indeed. I was meeting the majority of the "federals" for the first time since the aggression, and the air was thick with tension. It was noticeable in our conversation, and a number of verbal blows were exchanged. The European ministers hurried off to bed, as I did. The rest of the Slovene delegation (Kučan, Peterle, Bučar and Rupel) arrived the following morning. The talks were scheduled to have the participation of the Slovene,

federal and European delegations, with Croatian President Franjo Tudjman also being present. An interesting situation arose, for the Europeans demanded that Slovenia and Croatia put a three-month moratorium on their independence. At the same time they also demanded that for these three months I return to the Federal Presidency. This therefore meant that on Brioni I would also be participating in the federal delegation, since it contained all the members of the Federal Presidency and Ante Marković, plus foreign minister Lončar and Admiral Brovet as the JNA representative. I immediately consulted with the other members of the Slovene delegation, and we agreed that I would take part in the talks both in the Slovene and federal delegations, since in that way I would gain the opportunity of being present during talks between the federal delegation and other parties. The "federals" would then not be able to talk about us without us knowing all about it. This of course provided a very unpleasant surprise for the federal delegation, since on Sunday morning I joined their consultative meeting before the start of the talks. They all eyed me askance, but I just played dumb, with the excuse that it was they who wanted me to return to the Presidency. My presence very obviously put Marković's nose out of joint. The talks lasted sixteen hours. I took part in them almost the whole time, since I was present in the negotiations between Slovenia and the federation on the Slovene side, and in those between the federation and the Europeans on the federation side. I also spoke separately with the European ministers whom I knew from before. In this way I was constantly circulating, negotiating and forming agreements. Aside from all this I was besieged by journalists. A huge number of them had gathered there, from all over the world, and they were relaying up-to-the-minute reports to the outside world on what was said and what was developing. The talks between the federal and European delegations became tangled when I quarrelled with Marković. In fact complications were arising the whole day, and at times the situation was acutely antagonistic, but Dutch foreign minister Van den Broek led the talks extremely well.

When we were negotiating with the federal delegation, I sat right next to Borisav Jović and quietly asked him what was the Serbian position on a possible withdrawal of the JNA from Slovenia. He said that this was something we might be able to talk about. We continued this discussion

in the break, and agreed that we would pursue the subject in the coming days over the phone. Jović warmed to the idea of the JNA withdrawing from Slovenia, and said that he would try to get the required number of votes in the Presidency to pass the necessary resolution. Since Serbia controlled four members, and therefore four votes in the Presidency, together with my one vote they would have enough for a majority. The Montenegrin representative, Branko Kostić, who was present during these talks, said that he agreed with the idea. I also spoke about it with Admiral Brovet, who as usual remained very formal. This was then a clear step forward from everything else that was going on at Brioni, where we were supposed to be first consolidating the ceasefire between Slovenia and the federation, in other words the JNA. The Slovene Territorial Defence force was supposed to allow the JNA units to withdraw to barracks, and both sides were expected to release prisoners. The most contentious issue was control of the border, which was resolved in Slovenia's favour when we obtained effective control of the border through these negotiations. Federal jurisdiction would have to be observed on paper during the three-month moratorium on independence, but in such a way that it was clear to everyone that Slovenia retained actual control.

Towards evening Admiral Brovet approached me in great anxiety and said that he had spoken to Kadijević in Belgrade and that the mood there was very bad. If Slovenia would not release the captured officers and men, we could expect an immediate attack. We heard the same thing from Van den Broek. Together with the other two ministers, Van den Broek addressed me and asked if we could do this, since it was also a part of the Brioni agreement and the ceasefire terms. The Slovene delegation then assembled, and Kučan called the other members of the Slovene presidency by phone, in this way passing a resolution to immediately release the prisoners. Admiral Brovet was still very worried, and kept repeating that we had to resolve this issue, otherwise the entire Brioni agreement would fall through. Later General Kadijević told me that twice they had thought very seriously about an air attack on Slovenia. The first time was on that first Sunday, when we were wrangling over the phone and when they simply postponed the air raid. The second time was on the Sunday when we were on Brioni, when the situation was obviously very tense in Belgrade and there was clearly

enormous pressure within the JNA for them to attack, and we only escaped it by a hair's breadth. The talks ended very late at night with a concluding session, in which we all participated. Here Marković had another go at turning the agreement around. But Van den Broek would not allow it, and concluded the meeting with the basic points of the ceasefire. Following this conclusion Marković wanted another meeting with Van den Broek, and wanted to change the agreement again. Van den Broek called me and Kučan, and together we went over the whole business once again. We had another altercation with Marković. In the end Van den Broek himself very sharply rejected Marković's demands for a revision of the agreement and a more precise definition of the federation's jurisdiction. Marković had obviously realised that things were slipping through his fingers. With the Brioni agreement Slovenia had in fact gained more than just a ceasefire. When it was over I was extremely tired, but pleased, since we had actually confirmed the ceasefire and obtained a guarantee for it from the European Community. Now the greatest danger was really over. The only serious question outstanding was the continued presence of the JNA in Slovenia. The Brioni agreement was the first success of the European Community in resolving the Yugoslav crisis. Sadly it was, for a long time, also its last.