

CONCLUSION

So why in fact was there a war in Slovenia?

For months we negotiated in the Yugoslav Presidency with the presidents of all the republics. At times it seemed that we were getting close to some political agreement and to resolving the entire Yugoslav crisis. But it was extremely difficult to come up with one formula for the whole Yugoslav situation, for all the republics and all the different peoples. If Slovenia wanted to become independent, then so did Croatia. But Slovenia is an ethnically homogeneous country, without any significant numbers of other nationalities, while in Croatia there is a sizeable Serbian minority. So if the Croats wanted to break away, the Serbs wanted to guarantee for themselves a Greater Serbia, and therefore the separation of the Krajina from Croatia and its annexation to Serbia. The situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina was yet more complicated, since it incorporated communities of Serbs, Croats and Muslim Bosnians. It was therefore understandable that for a long time the Bosnian leadership had very much a federal orientation, and that it wanted to preserve Yugoslavia, for it was otherwise not hard to imagine the course of events that

would ensue so tragically right there in Bosnia-Herzegovina. We played around with every possible permutation, from confederation to various forms of federation. In the end, just before Slovenia gained independence, Izetbegović and Gligorov made their proposal of a kind of loose community of Yugoslav republics, with various concentric circles of connection and with a high degree of flexibility. Given its specific position and national homogeneity, Slovenia would have been able to become completely independent. At the time some people in Slovenia criticised me for supporting this proposal. My assessment was that here was perhaps our last desperate attempt at a political agreement which might prevent an uncontrolled collapse, chaos and war.

Slovene policy was at this time very much tied in to that of Croatia, and all activities up to independence were coordinated with the Croats. The strong connection with Croatia had the advantage of the two republics being able to present a united front, and therefore greater weight, both by Yugoslav and international criteria. On the other hand the link with Croatia dragged Slovenia back into the Yugoslav cauldron, and into the possibility of a war involving the whole of Yugoslavia. For this reason, too, the generals said that Slovenia could go, but that if Croatia left, the whole state would collapse and civil war would ensue. Meanwhile the Serbs were playing their own game. On the one hand they were strongly committed to the federation and to the territorial integrity of the state, and stressed the role of the JNA. On the other hand they rejected every realistic concept of reorganisation for the Yugoslav federation. They were pursuing something for which it must have been very clear to them that Croatia and Slovenia would never accept – a closer federation through the mechanism of voting everyone else down. Serbia declined all proposals for a confederation, and for greater political independence of the Yugoslav republics within a common economic area. From the background there emerged an increasingly clear picture of a different, reserve concept, if the Serbs could not succeed in securing their first, federal concept with them in the driving seat. I doubt whether they seriously believed in the possibility of consolidating the federation by peaceful means. For this reason Serbia was trying to play more and more on the JNA. This scenario was formally a scenario for consolidating the Yugoslav federation and ensuring its territorial integrity. If this ended with the separation of Slovenia and Croatia, Serbia would persevere in

maintaining the continuity of the former common state and in guaranteeing the borders of Greater Serbia – and therefore the JNA would cover the Serbian ethnic borders – in part of Croatia and in the largest area possible of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In this context it is possible to understand their policy of rejecting other forms of political agreement. At the precise moment when it would no longer have guaranteed domination of federal bodies, Serbia was ready to immediately block their functioning. The declaration of Slovene and Croatian independence on 25 June 1991 came during a political vacuum, when due to the veto on Mesić's election the Presidency was no longer functioning. The resolution which served as the formal warrant for the JNA to intervene in Slovenia, was passed by the Yugoslav government, although constitutionally it was not the commander-in-chief of the JNA. This was done in a situation when the Presidency was not functioning. The question arises why the Yugoslav government did this and why the generals decided on a move which up to that time they had avoided, and when in various crises prior to this the JNA had not dared to undertake military intervention. In his efforts as prime minister of the federal government, Ante Marković had clearly formed some erroneous assessments - particularly on the attitude of the international community and foreign leaders to the Yugoslav question. It is true that foreign powers did not want the collapse of Yugoslavia, and that for them the preservation of the Yugoslav federation posed much less of a problem, even though they were duty bound to recognise the democratic changes in Slovenia and Croatia and also our right of self-determination. Marković interpreted this more as unconditional support of the Yugoslav government and the federation. Marković's government had been able to secure some very favourable financial packages. Outside Yugoslavia Marković elicited much more confidence and trust than inside the country. It looked as though the international community wished through support of Marković's government to buy peace in Yugoslavia. Even the visit to Belgrade in June by American Secretary of State James Baker was interpreted by some as support for the federal government and the federal option, and as a signal that the international community would turn a blind eye if the federal authorities wanted to settle the situation in Yugoslavia and ensure the continued functioning of the federation. The JNA generals probably made a similar assessment.

The Army was clearly aware that a military confrontation with the entire Slovene nation could be highly problematic, and that it would be difficult to obtain support from the international community. For this reason the military intervention was directed in such a way that the JNA was supposed to secure all the border crossings, and control the borders and the major communication links in Slovenia. It tried to avoid direct confrontation with the inhabitants, with the Slovenes. If this intervention had succeeded, it would have meant in practice that Slovenia's communications would have been closed, since the JNA would have controlled the main strategic positions and Slovenia's independence would have vanished into thin air. It could have been months or even years before a political agreement or some other change came about. If such a situation arose, the international community would have had little else to do but appeal for political dialogue. International recognition of Slovenia in such circumstances would have been virtually impossible.

So Slovenia reacted with great determination. The Slovene Territorial Defence and the police were well organised, and blocked the JNA units in their barracks or in their positions in the field. It soon became clear that all of Slovenia was ready to defend itself, and that all the people backed independence. A very important part was played by the successful information war, which Slovenia immediately put into effect in the international community, playing on the support of international public opinion. This support was immediately forthcoming, and undoubtedly influenced the decisions of Western politicians. We could say that Slovenia won the media war against the JNA. Another factor was very important in this conflict. At that time the Yugoslav National Army was still a multinational force. It comprised Slovenes, Croats, Macedonians, Albanians, Bosnians, Montenegrins and Serbs. Men from all these different ethnic groups felt very uncomfortable in the Yugoslav Army which was fighting against one of the Yugoslav nations. How could Croats fight against Slovenes, when they could guess that after Slovenia, Croatia would itself be in the firing line? Or the Macedonians, and especially the Albanians, who had already lived for some time under Serbian repression. The JNA was not motivated for a war against the Slovenes. It soon faltered and then began to disintegrate. Young servicemen from different ethnic groups started to give themselves up in

droves to the Slovene army and police. The fact is that in the ten days of conflict in Slovenia, the Yugoslav Army experienced a debacle. This fact was of decisive importance in helping Slovenia to establish its real independence. What happened was exactly what the Yugoslav generals had feared earlier, and they were hesitant to use military intervention, especially without any legal backing to do so. But this does not mean that everything was bound to end so quickly and successfully for Slovenia. The JNA had an enormous arsenal of weaponry at its disposal, and it wielded nevertheless an extensive structure. Since Slovenia was not immediately brought to its knees, but defended itself resolutely, a fundamental question was raised, and the generals had to answer it: should they continue this war, bring in reinforcements and have a proper showdown with Slovenia, or should they agree to a ceasefire and then quietly withdraw from Slovenia? The answer to this was not clear initially. It was a result of various factors and various pressures. There were also powerful emotions at play, with anger and even fury at the humiliation the JNA had received in Slovenia. Several times we came very close to a situation where the JNA might give in to emotional impulses and just start wreaking mass destruction and death. I saw my role in that conflict as being to search for possibilities for the earliest end to hostilities and to conclude the Slovene process of secession and independence through negotiation. When I found out that the JNA had intervened in Slovenia, I was furious. After all the months of negotiation and political activity I was still convinced that everything could be resolved in a peaceful manner. I was angry at the federal government and the generals for deciding on such a course of action. Even if I had shown anger here and there at certain individual aspects of Slovene policies, this was immediately forgotten with the Serbo-federal decision to send the Army into Slovenia. This was a decision that had no justification. It appeared to me that we had moved from the sphere of peace and negotiation to the sphere of war, that in some way we had crossed the Rubicon. This was indeed the fact of the matter, and the war moved on from Slovenia to Croatia, and then down into Bosnia-Herzegovina.

I therefore directed all my efforts towards preparing for a halt to the conflict, and for the withdrawal of the JNA from Slovenia. At times I asked myself what exactly my role was – especially in the extraordinary

circumstances where General Kadijević told me that they were ready to bomb Slovenia, but then called it off following our phone conversation. The essential component which I was able to provide in that unusual war was an open communication channel. We could talk. We did not come into that situation with such impossible personal relations that we could not communicate. And since it was possible to communicate at certain decisive moments, it was also possible to prevent some critical situations. If all contacts had been cut off, and if our relations had been such that we could not talk at all, we could not have done this. The same is true of the JNA's withdrawal from Slovenia. This was a big surprise for the international community as well as for Slovenia and Yugoslavia. The ceasefire was still quite shaky, and could have fallen apart. The generals were angry. There could easily have been incidents between members of the JNA still in Slovenia and the Slovene army, or involving Slovenes who were still in the JNA in other parts of Yugoslavia. There was a whole range of potential dangers which could have led to renewed clashes and to their spreading. For this reason time was a very important factor, it being necessary to act quickly, since perpetuating the situation would have meant greater risk of new clashes. At that time I was able to judge when the situation was favourable to make an agreement and how the other side was thinking, and again I had to be in the right place at the right time and to find the right person to talk to. I was the only player in this situation who could communicate with everyone – the Serbs, the JNA generals, the Slovene leadership, with others in Yugoslavia and also with the international community. Of course if there had been no material support, in particular from the efficient Slovene defence forces, then such diplomacy and interceding on my part would not have produced results. But in that situation it was effective, and probably prevented further unnecessary sacrifice and continuation of the war. In the end the result would have probably been the same, except that it would have claimed considerably more casualties, damage and time.

At that time there were still certain elements of fair play being observed. Throughout my time in the Federal Presidency, I invested considerable effort in maintaining proper relations with everyone, including the JNA generals. In the end, before the Presidency session of 18 July 1991, Kadijević and I talked about the withdrawal of the JNA. I had the feeling

that General Kadijević was pleased that this agreement had been reached with me and that it would be me who would be responsible for the agreement on the Slovene side. He asked me to give him my word that the JNA would be able to leave Slovenia in a proper way, and I asked him for his word that Slovenes would be able to return home unhindered from the JNA in other parts of Yugoslavia. We then both tried to keep our word, and even intervened when a number of complications arose. It seems to me that this kind of fair play was rather thin on the ground in the later episodes of the Yugoslav war. Sadly at that time we were only able to rescue Slovenia from the chaos and the abyss. My role in all this was not given much public attention in Slovenia. There were plenty of other candidates for the part of national hero, and as a member of the then Yugoslav Presidency I was not in the running in the Slovene liberation hero stakes. All the same, I was personally pleased at the way my part in the Yugoslav crisis was concluded. It began with the extraordinary election result of April 1989, and ended with the agreement on the JNA withdrawal from Slovenia, the end of the war in Slovenia and with Slovenia's full independence.

In August 1991 the Presidency held a series of sessions. The sessions were presided over by Mesić, who called us together over every minor conflict, and every clash between the Serbs and Croats. The sessions were endless, even running through the night, and with a permanent impasse of four votes to four. Relations were very tense. When I flew to Belgrade there was already shooting, and it was quite dangerous. I remember landing at Zagreb airport, where there was no traffic, no aircraft, in fact it was a ghost airport. On either side there was an army – the JNA and the Croatian army. They all had their fingers on the trigger. I also flew a few times to Belgrade from Pula. The airport there was already in full battle readiness, and everywhere there were helmets, troops, dug-outs and warplanes groaning under the weight of rockets and bombs. These were my last days of participation in the Yugoslav Presidency.

This was followed by two conferences in The Hague, to which the entire Yugoslav Presidency was invited together with the presidents of all the republics. We tried to agree on stopping the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. We sought solutions to the Yugoslav crisis. Here, however,

the mediation of the European Community, and the international community in general, was markedly less successful. It was only Slovenia that managed to extricate itself from the cauldron of war, while Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were swallowed up by it. The withdrawal of the JNA, carried out within the appointed three months, marked the fulfilment of the conditions for Slovenia's independence. International recognition came at the beginning of 1992. Slovenia is now an established and successful country with a developed and stable democracy and an efficient market economy, which has been able to survive transition through the years of the Yugoslav crisis as well as the loss of the Yugoslav markets.