

THE FIRST EVENTS

My first important public appearance was on 7 June in Dubrovnik. It was the opening speech at the 3rd World Scientific Banking Congress, a highly prestigious international event with a host of respected names from the world of finance and politics, such as the former Japanese finance minister Dr Saburo Ukita, the president of the Southern Nations Development Commission Julius Nyerere, the former Mexican President Luis Echevarria Alvarez, and Professor Robert Triffin. I was pleased to be able to make my first public appearance speaking on the subject I was most familiar with. Banking and finance had been my areas of priority over the past decade. I had a lot of practical experience and had written quite a few articles. It was also the field in which I had gained my doctorate. What happened to me when I moved into politics was what happens to a lot of people when they change the field they are working in. I wanted to talk as much as possible about the things I was familiar with, the things I knew about from before, and in this way make up for the uncertainty and caution in the other areas that had now come to the fore. As with all my more important speeches, I wrote this one myself. It was

not a formal, protocol address as might be expected from the President on such an occasion, but a substantive speech containing a whole string of guidelines and proposals for economic policy and the development of the economic system in Yugoslavia, as well as possible solutions for international financial and particularly debt relations. I was given a very warm reception in Dubrovnik, by the locals as well as the participants at the conference. I had separate discussions with the most eminent of the participants, and I met a succession of acquaintances I knew from banking and financial circles. The speech went down very well at the conference itself in Dubrovnik, and met with widespread approval in the media. Even the foreign media paid significant attention to me. AFP, for example, reported: "The new Yugoslav head of state, Janez Drnovšek, called on foreign banks to invest in Yugoslavia in the spirit of reforms whose goals are the establishment of a market economy and the integration of Yugoslavia into the international economic and financial system." They even called me an expert in global finance. AFP went on to say that I had announced measures which would mark a "definitive break from the concept of a socialist economy". I announced the complete independence of companies and banks plus the introduction of shares and a stock exchange in Yugoslavia. I invited foreign investors, stating that the new law on foreign investments would be very favourable. I was pleased to have the opportunity to set out the economic aspects of my election programme so quickly and with such a positive response. Then came the first foreign visitors, and I began to understand the mechanisms of the state visit. The first to come (on 24 May 1989) was the Hungarian foreign minister, Gyula Horn. The Hungarians, too, were preparing changes. Horn was one of the first reformers in the Eastern bloc. Then Polish Prime Minister Rakowsky came to visit. I spoke with him about the anticipated changes in Poland; he explained to me their efforts to modernise the existing system in some way while retaining power. And I learned that the preparations for such talks are very formal. The relevant office of the Presidency prepared the material before the talks began. A great deal of extensive material was written, but when it came to the discussion itself this was for the most part quite unusable. I immediately began to do things my way, and often chose the subjects for discussion myself.

Then followed a visit from Guinean President Lansana Conte (31 May 1989). It was an official state visit and this was when I learned exactly what that meant, as opposed to a working visit. There was a huge amount of ceremony involved, and of course reviewing the guard of honour at the airport and listening to the national anthems – the head of protocol drew me a sketch of the ceremony and the review of the guard of honour before the first visit – plus the official lunches and dinners and official talks. At the end of an official lunch or dinner I had to propose a toast - at lunches this was just improvised but at dinners it was read out. I found reading the toasts an arduous and quite unpleasant task. They were written in a very formal style, in Serbo-Croat, and the text was long and dull. On this particular occasion up to a hundred people were invited to the official dinner, a military band played and the whole ceremony was very stuffy and boring. The most interesting part was when I had a few minutes to talk personally to the President. We spoke in French and I discovered that he was actually a perfectly normal and interesting person and that he, too, was clearly suffering from the formality of the ceremonies. We began to relax a little once we had the chance for an informal chat, without the protocol. I was already worrying about the Non-Aligned Conference, when I would have to meet so many leading political figures. This first visit seemed to me to be a sort of protocol training for what lay ahead. I remember how strange I felt travelling back with my guest in "Tito's" enormous stretch Mercedes from the airport at Surčin towards Belgrade's exclusive residential area of Dedinje, with motorcycle outriders, the roads closed to traffic and people waving from the side of the road. I had a feeling of unreality, as if it were not really happening. As a child I had watched Tito travelling around like this. I never really enjoyed the protocol ceremonies. Even later, when I was more accustomed to them, they were always an ordeal. I remember how Silva Bauman-Čenčič, my chief of bureau, would often cheer me up by saying, just get through this ceremony and then things will be quiet.