

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

"At the end of his term of office, the President has chosen to say to Europe (and to Yugoslavia) that Yugoslavia is possible within Europe or that it will not exist." (*Danas*, Zagreb, 15 May 1990.)

In this context, I saw Yugoslav membership of the Council of Europe as vitally important. Membership of the European Community was obviously a possibility and the next aim, but further off in view of the need to transform the economic and political system in Yugoslavia. But membership of the Council of Europe became that much closer with the fulfilment of the criteria of democratisation, protection of human rights and the functioning of the rule of law. These were my goals. Towards the end of my one-year term, after all the great dramas, things began to move forward in a positive direction. Finally we managed to have the state of emergency in Kosovo lifted. After numerous attempts and many sessions, the Presidency passed a resolution granting amnesty to all political prisoners in Yugoslavia, including the Albanians, most prominent among whom was Adem Demaçi, after 28 years behind bars the world's longest-

serving prisoner. I had invested an enormous amount of energy and persuasion in this. Towards the end of my term I managed to achieve a majority in the Presidency. Tupurkovski, Šušvar, Sapundžija and Bogičević all voted to grant amnesty to political prisoners, to amend the penal code and to introduce political pluralism. By then we had already held the first multiparty elections in Slovenia and Croatia. In these spring months Yugoslavia achieved good results in the halting of inflation and accomplished much in the way of market changes. It looked as if we had managed to make the breakthrough after all, and on all fronts; that things were changing for the better in spite of everything. This was a good basis for further involvement in European integration, and by applying constant pressure within the Presidency and in public I had managed to formulate policies which allowed me to work towards the incorporation of Yugoslavia in the Council of Europe. It began with a visit to Belgrade by the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Anders Bjorck, and continued with a visit by the Council's secretary-general, Catherine Lalumiere, together with the presiding minister, Joao de Deus Pinheiro. We arranged for me to visit Strasbourg on 8 May 1990, which was just before my term as President expired. At that time I was also supposed to present Yugoslavia's application for full membership of the Council of Europe. I was very well prepared for my appearance before the Council of Europe on 8 May. As usual, I wrote the speech myself. It was the first time a Yugoslav President had delivered a speech to the Council of Europe in its 40-year history. Yugoslavia had always looked upon this institution as a Western, "bourgeois", "aligned" association, which was no business of Yugoslavia's, with its more just, socialist, non-aligned system. My speech to the Council of Europe brought together all my efforts, my entire year as President, all the trials. In a way it was a summary and the realisation of my election programme. The speech was a condensed review of Yugoslav reality, its history and the threat contained in the current situation; a review of the efforts to achieve democracy, economic consolidation, a strengthening of the rule of law, the implementation of human rights and the establishment of a democratic dialogue among the peoples of Yugoslavia in a dramatic race against the increasingly menacing ethnic tensions, threats, possible break-up of the country and war. This was set against the context of Europe-wide changes brought on

by the collapse of the Eastern bloc. It offered a way out of the situation. It offered European criteria of democracy and a market economy, plus participation in European integration. I made the offer to Europe and to Yugoslavia even more specific – immediate full membership of the Council of Europe, and entry into the European Community after two to three years. I described to them the problems that existed – the struggle for Kosovo, for peace, the fight against nationalism – in realistic terms. "What we are trying to do in Yugoslavia today is establish a new equilibrium between the nationalities in the changed political and economic circumstances, within the framework of a parliamentary, multiparty democracy and an efficient market economy, without an immutable political authority which would consider and deal with ethnic conflicts in an authoritarian manner." The response from the parliamentary delegates was quite extraordinary. They greeted the end of the speech with long and spontaneous applause and later I received many congratulations that were clearly genuine and enthusiastic. The speech was followed by questions from the European parliamentarians, who know how to be very direct and very awkward. Protocol dictates that a president is not required to answer questions but I agreed to. I answered around twenty questions – openly, clearly and frankly. My answers, too, were very well received. What made a further impression was the fact that I gave the speech in French and then replied to the questions in all the major European languages. The events of that day were a pure pleasure, a real European triumph and something which a year earlier I would not have imagined in my wildest dreams. After my speech the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Anders Bjorck, told a gathering of reporters that "in a masterful account" I had given "a very good explanation of the situation in Yugoslavia and answered all the questions brilliantly". The main result of this would be, as Bjorck told the Belgrade newspaper *Borba*, the "acceleration of Yugoslavia's entry into the Council of Europe". Catherine Lalumiere told reporters that the Parliamentary Assembly had been "struck by the direct, open and frank performance of President Drnovšek, who made an excellent impression".

The agenda that day was packed full. I met with the leaders of the Council of Europe. In a direct and open statement of opinions an extremely positive atmosphere was created, as if a genuine breakthrough

had been achieved in relations with Yugoslavia. We all believed that if events were to develop as we, at the time, optimistically expected them to, then in six months, by January 1991 at the latest, Yugoslavia could become a full member of the Council of Europe. They gave assurances of their full support. With multiparty elections already having been held in Slovenia and Croatia, elections announced in some of the other republics and with the expectation that this would be followed by a transformation of the federal bodies to run on multiparty lines, all the criteria for entry into the Council of Europe looked set to be fulfilled. And at that time I really did have something to offer, something to show. The results of the Yugoslav economic programme were impressive: zero inflation and a convertible dinar. Market and property reforms were under way and multiparty elections were in progress. Political prisoners had been released; the controversial articles of the penal code which had so angered the Yugoslav and democratic public had been removed; and political trials had been stopped, for example against Azem Vlasi. The emergency measures in Kosovo had been lifted; the Kosovo Serbs and Albanians had been called to dialogue. We had established a clear policy direction in favour of participating in European integration. It was a picture that anyone could applaud. On the basis of the results achieved and the policy directions put in place, it would really have been a way out and a great step forward on the path of civilised development – in contrast to the dark and dismal alternative, which was violent disintegration. Much of the Yugoslav media latched onto a line in my speech where I stressed that we could only solve all the problems "through political means, without force and without violence, and that not one of the problems could be solved without the consent of all or by harming anyone". Following my speech to the Parliamentary Assembly and the questions from the parliamentary delegates I gave a press conference. Over 40 reporters attended. They asked numerous questions, which someone else may have found awkward but I was able to answer each of them comfortably. The press conference made a very strong impression and was widely reported in many European newspapers and on television. I gave several interviews for European stations, including French, Spanish, German and Danish. And once again great attention was paid to the fact that I was able to answer in all the major European languages. I was also involved in a special hour-long broadcast for European television channels in which

three prominent European commentators asked me questions. There was also a strong presence from the Yugoslav media. In the various republics of Yugoslavia these events in Strasbourg were given extensive coverage. It was particularly positive and enthusiastic in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In Slovenia, too, the trip was widely reported and even in Serbia the response was relatively good, although there was a clear tendency to play down its influence – especially in the government media such as *Politika* and the Belgrade television station, while the more independent newspaper *Borba* placed far greater emphasis on the event. Although my speech was very clear and frank, I was nevertheless always careful not to challenge anyone in particular, so as not to provoke new conflicts. I still wanted to settle things by consent, as I said in Strasbourg – to take positive steps forward, to offer a constructive option even to those who were currently in confrontation, to show them a way which would ultimately turn out to be the best for all. To some of the direct questions from reporters I did express implicit criticism of the Serbian regime but I always put it in the context of an expected positive move, and that was what I emphasised, although without glossing over the real state of affairs. And to a question concerning the role of the Yugoslav Army in these processes I expressed the expectation and the belief that the JNA would join in the processes of democratisation in a positive fashion and that I was counting on it playing a constructive role. I wanted to get the Army behind this process, to support the democratisation, because ultimately the Army could put the brakes on this development, or at least pose a temporary obstacle. I managed to do a lot of things during this time: from visiting the Mayor of Strasbourg, with all the necessary protocol, to hosting an evening reception in the Strasbourg Hilton, to which I invited all the European parliamentarians, diplomats and representatives of the press and where the day was informally crowned with numerous friendly chats, and expressions of praise and support. I have had friends in Strasbourg for a long time, more than 15 years. They are perhaps a typical French family; I met them back in 1972 camping on the Istrian coast. They remembered that I had driven a dreadfully old car, a Fiat 500, which by some miracle was still on the road. After that we met many times and I often stayed with them in Strasbourg. But we had not seen each other for a few years before I came

to Strasbourg to give this speech, and then suddenly I turn up there as President of Yugoslavia. I invited them to hear my speech to the Council of Europe and to attend the evening reception. It was a really nice occasion. After the reception I went late in the evening with them to a typical Alsatian pub for *tarte flambee*. The following morning I went jogging in a park in Strasbourg.

In Strasbourg I met Finnish President Koivisto, and Vaclav Havel, the new president of Czechoslovakia. The Finnish president and I spoke mostly about European integration, and I asked him to support Yugoslavia joining EFTA, of which Finland was then one of the principal members. My meeting with President Havel was the first of what was to prove a series of meetings. At that time Vaclav Havel personified the democratic changes sweeping across Eastern Europe and our meeting in Strasbourg was especially symbolic, receiving a great deal of attention. We shared very similar views and represented two countries which, while they were quite different, had much in common. Although Czechoslovakia, like Yugoslavia, was also to break up, it must be said that it was a much less complicated country, with less internal contradictions, and this allowed it to accomplish democratic transformation and the split into two new states without violence. Ironically, Havel and I were to meet again two years later in Strasbourg after coming to put our respective cases for membership of the Council of Europe. But for two new countries. In my case for Slovenia, and in Havel's for the Czech Republic.

“The President meets the conditions for Europe; does the country he has headed this past year do so too?” (*Danas*, Zagreb, 15 May 1990.)

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"The future will undoubtedly serve Drnovšek better than the current Yugoreality." (*Borba*, 15 May 1990.)

My one-year term of office as President of the Presidency of Yugoslavia formally expired on 15 May. I had stayed the course. That was my main feeling. Even though I tried to judge things critically, I had the feeling that I had done as much as could be done in this year. Circumstances had been complicated in the extreme. Enduring as Federal President of a country in such crisis, when all manner of dangers threatened, while many changes were under way, from political and economic to changes in the character of the state, in relations between the country's various nationalities and with changing foreign-policy orientations, at the same time as chairing the Non-Aligned Movement, was no simple matter. Yet I was pleased. I had systematically carried out the programme of measures that I had promised and which the Slovene electorate had voted for. Major steps forward were made in all the main aspects of the programme. A lot had been accomplished in one year, although it was clear that the

processes remained unfinished. More time would be needed. A one-year term was too short. It was complicated enough as it was to head such a diverse state Presidency – an individual president would have greater opportunity, far more room for manoeuvre. But it was all limited by the one-year term of office. Of course I wondered whether these positive movements would mean a continuation of the same processes in the future. Or whether now that I was no longer President of the Presidency and the Serbian representative Borisav Jović, known for his hardline views and approach, was taking over the reins, everything would be turned around.

After having summarised the changes and the positive movements that had taken place recently in Yugoslavia in the best possible fashion with my speech to the Council of Europe, and gaining a good deal of attention and international public support for it, in the last few days, as my term was nearing its end, I made a number of concluding television appearances in Yugoslavia. I gave an hour-long interview to the well-known television reporter Dobrosav Silobrić for Zagreb Television, which was supposed to be broadcast by all the Yugoslav television stations. The interview covered the achievements of my time in office. Once again I was able to sum up all my views, the whole concept, my policies, and explain in a comprehensible manner what it was all about, what was at stake. The interview was given much attention almost throughout Yugoslavia, but in Serbia something happened which demonstrated both the nature of the situation as well as my limited possibilities in Yugoslavia at that time. Belgrade Television did not broadcast the interview. The excuse they gave after coming in for extensive and immediate criticism – in place of my interview they had broadcast some minor music show – was that in Belgrade they had not known in advance what I was going to talk about. They even admitted that they were worried what I was going to say. They were afraid it would not be suitable for their audience. After my high profile performance in the Council of Europe, this was just too much. The Serbian public had been indoctrinated otherwise. My ideas, my concepts, which slowly but surely were beginning to gain acceptance almost throughout Yugoslavia, ran directly counter to the policies and the concept of the Serbian leadership. They were protecting their citizens from having to listen to any more of it. But it was not easy for them.

There were considerable protests even in Serbia, in Belgrade. And even the Belgrade journalists' union spoke up in sharp protest at such practice. It was also significant that in his introductory address upon his appointment as the new President of the Presidency, Borisav Jović did not make one word of mention about my term in office; he did not even have the courtesy to offer formal thanks or anything of that nature. He left that particular task to the new Vice-President of the Presidency, the Croat Stipe Šušteršič.

The conclusion of my one-year term in presidential office triggered much assessment and analysis everywhere in the country. Virtually all the major newspapers, in their own way, gave an appraisal, and commented on the changeover and on my "results". The great majority of these assessments were very positive, even in those areas where they had systematically worked against me. In Serbia and Montenegro, despite the criticisms, they did manage to find a few positive words to say. A short cross-section of these commentaries tells a great deal.

"While Drnovšek, as President, struck a wise balance between the various options in internal Yugoslav affairs, thus preserving the legitimacy of the Presidency as a whole, Borisav Jović, even before his appointment, has taken a strong federalist line, which, to put it mildly, is not exactly tactical." (*Delo*, Ljubljana, 15 May 1990.)

"Janez Drnovšek has remained true to himself and has done everything he promised he would when he took up office. These have been the most revolutionary changes in the peacetime history of the country. When we look back on these events with the benefit of hindsight it will be clear what a huge job was done in one year by Mr Drnovšek, a quiet man from whom the European parliamentarians admitted that they had learned a great deal." (*Ljubljanski Dnevnik*, Ljubljana, 13 May 1990.)

"Dr Drnovšek was the first in many things. He was the first directly elected politician in Yugoslavia; he was the youngest Yugoslav President; he was the first President to give more than merely formal interviews to

the Yugoslav media; and he was the first Yugoslav President against whom a 'coup' had twice been plotted and whom they tried to replace or depose in line with the Serbian recipe of anti-bureaucratic revolution." [*Večer*, Maribor, 14 May 1990.)

"Dr Drnovšek did not sway from his convictions. He took the stance, even when he was in a minority, that all economic, political and ethnic problems must be solved through moderate, civilised and civil methods, by nurturing dialogue and cooperation, by expanding the rule of law, and extending human and political freedoms and an economic system based as much as possible on the market." (*Borba*, Belgrade, 15 May 1990.)

"Accused, accused mostly because he was a Slovene, worthy mainly for his humanity, Drnovšek managed to keep his head above water this past year primarily thanks to his political origins. Drnovšek was able to lead the collective body and neutralise all the traumas, conflicts and false splendour of doctorate titles within it with the peace of a politician who takes his obligations seriously without making a big deal of this seriousness." [*Vjesnik*, Zagreb, 17 May 1990.)

"After a mass of collective leaders who were real mental paraplegics, Janez personified the period of the rehabilitation of intelligence. Now it is almost certain that he was the first European to head what was left of the country, thereby earning himself the title of leader of the alternative movement for the reanimation of reason in a country which, to judge by everything that was going on, never had any." [*Mladina*, Ljubljana, 16 May 1990.)

"Drnovšek did not react to attacks, standing principled above it all and not allowing himself to be drawn into any kind of settling of scores or controversy. Although a polyglot, Drnovšek showed that he "does not understand" the language of personal intolerance and the friction between the republics into which he was supposed to be drawn like media cannon fodder." (*Nova Makedonija*, Skopje, 15 May 1990.)

"Janez Drnovšek, the first person to reach the position of head of state via free and direct elections, managed, with his personal style, to stamp his mark on the politics which he guided without fuss but with results." (*Rilindja*, Priština, 15 May 1990.)

"Slowly but surely Drnovšek began to gather sympathy from a large proportion of Yugoslavs. He began with the employees in various offices of the state Presidency – secretaries, chauffeurs, officials and advisers surprised by the unobtrusive and cultured behaviour of the President; he never made any special demands, neither did he behave as if he was the be all and end all, as if the whole world should revolve around him... Because the power of politicians in Belgrade, following the primitive Balkan mentality, was often measured by the power of their voice, by their arrogant pride, Drnovšek seemed to many to be vulnerable and unprotected, which was why he was the target of the most primitive attacks from those who are far removed from the democratic processes taking place in our society and the new culture of political conduct. Drnovšek maintained a dignity towards all of this, focusing on the important things. What was important was to carry out the promises of his political programme. Drnovšek had a lot of success. In the space of one year we have made great strides towards economic reform, and the government of Ante Marković has made great use of the support of the Presidency, headed by Drnovšek. Fundamental political reforms have been put in place; much has been accomplished in terms of human rights protection; convergence with Europe is no longer merely empty rhetoric but is already producing tangible results." (*Večernji list*, Belgrade, 15 May 1990.)

"Janez's credo is dialogue. Tolerant, reasoned, professional, concise. Without declarations or declarativeness – without emotions or improvisation." (*Borba*, 15 May 1990.)

"We asked some of the people who had worked close to President Drnovšek on an almost daily basis over the last year for their impressions of him as a person – worlds apart from the previous presidents, they replied. Reserved, hard-working, quiet. He never raised his voice to any

of his colleagues over the whole year. The only problem we had with him was having to watch him to make sure he didn't escape to go jogging during an official lunch, although he bore that particular "burden" with great discipline." (*Borba*, Belgrade, 15 May 1990.)

"When he sat in the chair of the President of the Presidency of Yugoslavia, Dr Janez Drnovšek became the youngest post-war head of state and smashed the monopoly regime of the Party gerontocracy. No need to say how many trials there have been over the past 365 days in this general madness for the Yugoslav leader. Let us just remember Kosovo, the constitutional amendment, the euphoria of the political rallies, political and economic chaos..." (*Nedelja*, Sarajevo, 13 May 1990.)

"In the year since Drnovšek became President, things really have changed rapidly in Yugoslavia, despite the resistance of neo-Stalinist and other forces. And not only in the economy, with economic market reform and the introduction of a multiparty, parliamentary democracy. Among the changes that will transform our little Balkan country, is the new policy on Europe." (*Večer*, Maribor, 12 May 1990.)

"As the first among equals Drnovšek was more the first and less equal, thus destroying one of the greatest achievements in the history of administrative absurdity which Yugoslavia accomplished with the establishment of collective responsibility, according to which no one was responsible because everyone took part." [*Pobjeda*, Titograd, 10 May 1990.)

"Jović's address was in complete contrast to that which Janez Drnovšek gave a year ago on taking up office. Whereas Drnovšek's priorities were human rights and the Kosovo problem, Jović stuck to the territorial integrity and unity of Yugoslavia." (*AFP*, Paris, 15 May 1990.)

And so concluded my term as President. I remained a member of the Yugoslav Presidency, as the representative of Slovenia in this collective

body. In the days surrounding this I gave very serious consideration to standing down as a member of the Presidency. How would I be able to bear Jović's term as President? I spoke about it with people in Slovenia, too, and decided to stay on for the time being, a decision I was to make several times again. If I stayed on, despite the difficulties and the unpleasantness of the situation, then there would be a greater chance of preventing some of the more negative things and also of defending Slovenia against the various aggressive acts that had been predicted, or against those that had already been carried out and could be expected to recur in the future. The fundamental goals at any rate were to continue the reform processes, establish a firm position for Slovenia – i.e. its necessary political autonomy – and urgently secure the peaceful development of events by preventing the intervention of the Army and continuing the dialogue between the Yugoslav nationalities and republics. Irrespective of what the final outcome might be, what form the state might develop into – federation, confederation, the forming of new independent countries, an independent Slovenia – the essential thing was to ensure a peaceful transition and to avoid war. This was the focus of all my subsequent efforts. At its first session the newly-elected multiparty Slovene parliament acknowledged, to great applause, the work I had done in my year-long term as President of the Yugoslav Presidency.

Two days after my term expired, on my 40th birthday, the people in my home town of Izlake threw a party to celebrate. In the evening, when I got back to Ljubljana, I was told that my dog, Lord, had died that day. Whenever I was away they looked after him for me at the police station in Ljubljana where they trained the police dogs. Exactly the same thing happened on that very day to Bogić Bogičević, the member of the Presidency for Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was his birthday too, 17 May; he also had his dog looked after at the police station, in Sarajevo, and on that same day his dog died there.