

# Democracy or unity: Yugoslavia may be forced to make a choice

From Dr Mislav Jezic and  
Dr Borna Bebek-Pelsöcz

Sir: On 25 June, the Croatian parliament issued four documents that give the legal basis to the proclamation of independence of the Republic of Croatia. These documents rely upon the will expressed by more than 90 per cent of citizens of Croatia at the national referendum on 19 May.

The Croatian people, just as the Slovenes, do not want to be hostages of politics and desires that are not theirs. International bodies should not mediate with the intention to bind the Croatian state forcibly with the communist regimes under the pretext of "preserving the democratic Yugoslavia". Democracy and unity in Yugoslavia do not go hand in hand. It may be necessary to make an honest choice between the two.

In spite of the Yugoslav federal declarations that swear allegiance to democracy, it is not certain that all the republics on the territory of Yugoslavia, especially those where the Communist Party with a changed name continues ruling, want or can, in a foreseeable period, comply with European criteria concerning the economy or human rights. It seems, however, that Croatia and Slovenia, for inherent reasons, tend to adopt all the European standards.

If Europe wants to be the continent of freedom and human rights, but poses the question whether some historical and cultural European nations have rights to self-determination or not, or to what extent they may have it, or whether some European nations that cast off totalitarian communism with enormous sacrifices and bravery are ready to become members of Europe or had better not, then Europe has lost the sense of freedom. Those newly liberated nations, and those still paying a high price for reaching free-

dom, have the cultural task to teach Europe the invaluable worth of the spirit of freedom.

The only means to save innumerable possible victims and enormous material losses on the territory of Yugoslavia seems to be earnest recognition of the will and self-determination of the peoples of Croatia and Slovenia. That can certainly serve the purpose of saving democracy in those and, most probably, some neighbouring republics, and it can most probably contribute also to create the necessary pre-conditions for negotiations about a future possible free and democratic alliance of states on the territory of Yugoslavia.

Yours faithfully,  
MISLAV JEZIC  
President  
BORNA BEBEK-PELSOCZ  
Secretary-General  
Croatian PanEuropean Union  
Zagreb  
28 June

From Mr Y. Kovach

Sir: Your cocksure pronouncements concerning Yugoslavia bring a wry smile to Serbs. The last time they heeded the advice of the UK was the 27 March 1941 coup against the Prince Regent, an act much lauded at the time. Unfortunately for the Serbian people, it brought in its train untold wartime misery, especially for those outside Serbia proper. Another wartime recollection is King Peter II bullied by the British into urging the peoples of Yugoslavia to back Tito and his partisans.

A more constructive role for you this time would be to urge a loose federal system but one with a directly elected federal assembly plus an upper house, so constructed as to safeguard constitutionally the position of the non-Serbian republics and peoples. In other words, something not dissimilar to the Swiss "confederal"

system. You may then be able to test the Serbs and see just how many are itching for a Great(er) Serbia.

This is not to deny that Kosovo, Serbia's Wailing Wall, is a problem that will have to be addressed. As for your bogey man Slobodan Milosevic, he at least has to contend with a vocal opposition within Serbia, something notably missing from the westward-leaning, "fragile" democracy of Croatia.

Alas, (con)federalism with constitutional safeguards may not be acceptable to the Croatians, which brings us to the crux of the matter, namely the boundaries among Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Hercegovina and Montenegro. These were imposed on the Serbs by Tito in 1943 but at least they were within the context of an overarching (con)federal system which was a safeguard for the internal Serbian diaspora. Anything less than this overarching dimension and the legitimacy of the boundaries disappears. In this unhappy case, Serbdom will strive to minimise the number of Serbs exposed to the threat of "CSCE-protected" second-class citizenship.

Yours faithfully,  
Y. KOVACH  
Twickenham  
1 July

From Dr Glen Plant

Sir: In his front page article (28 June) "West must face up to change before it is too late", Steve Crawshaw suggests that Slovenia and Croatia are different from the Baltic states because they were not incorporated into Yugoslavia by force nor kept in place by force. Regardless of the legal and other merits of their present claims to independence, the correct distinction to have in mind is that they, unlike the Baltic states, did not exist as independent states immediately before their incorporation.

The Slavic Austro-Hungarian province of Croatia-Slovenia was handed over by the victorious Allies in 1918 to form part of the new state of Yugoslavia as a reward to Serbia for its successful campaign against the Dual Monarchy during the Great War. That war was, of course, initially triggered by the assassination in Sarajevo in 1914 of Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. Serbia then, as now, was fiercely nationalistic and fiercely Slavic, having wrested its independence in 1878, after many years of misrule, from the Ottoman Empire. A Serbian schoolboy threw the bomb out of nationalistic motives connected with a desire to increase Serbian influence within Austria's Slavic provinces. Serbia's desires were not reciprocated. A rebellion in 1918 against incorporation in what was generally seen as a "Greater Serbia" was put down by force by Allied troops and a self-declared Croatian Republic was similarly dealt with in 1921.

Yours sincerely,  
GLEN PLANT  
Law Department  
The London School of Economics  
and Political Science  
London, WC2  
29 June

From Ms Penelope Jackson

Sir: Sometimes a silly example illustrates a valid point. If it is possible to judge the state of a country's technology by the quality of the disposable nappies it produces, then I suggest Slovenia should be slower to cut trading links with Yugoslavia than it has been to cut its political ones. In Serbia, these leaky, badly designed products are the best available. Who will buy them now?

Yours faithfully  
PENELOPE JACKSON  
London, SW16  
1 July