

THE WEST SEES THE LIGHT

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Until the shooting started politicians found it hard to focus on Slovenian independence. Martin Kettle traces the progress European leaders have made as they tried to see their way through the smoke, and, below, Danilo Slivnik gives the view from Ljubljana

MLADINA is one of the liveliest and most iconoclastic magazines in Europe. For five years it has jauntily — and often scurrilously — reflected the emerging open society in Slovenia. When it comes on sale on the streets of Ljubljana, queues form quickly and groups of young Slovenes cluster round the week's new issue. It typifies the attractive city of Ljubljana and the liberal culture of Slovenia.

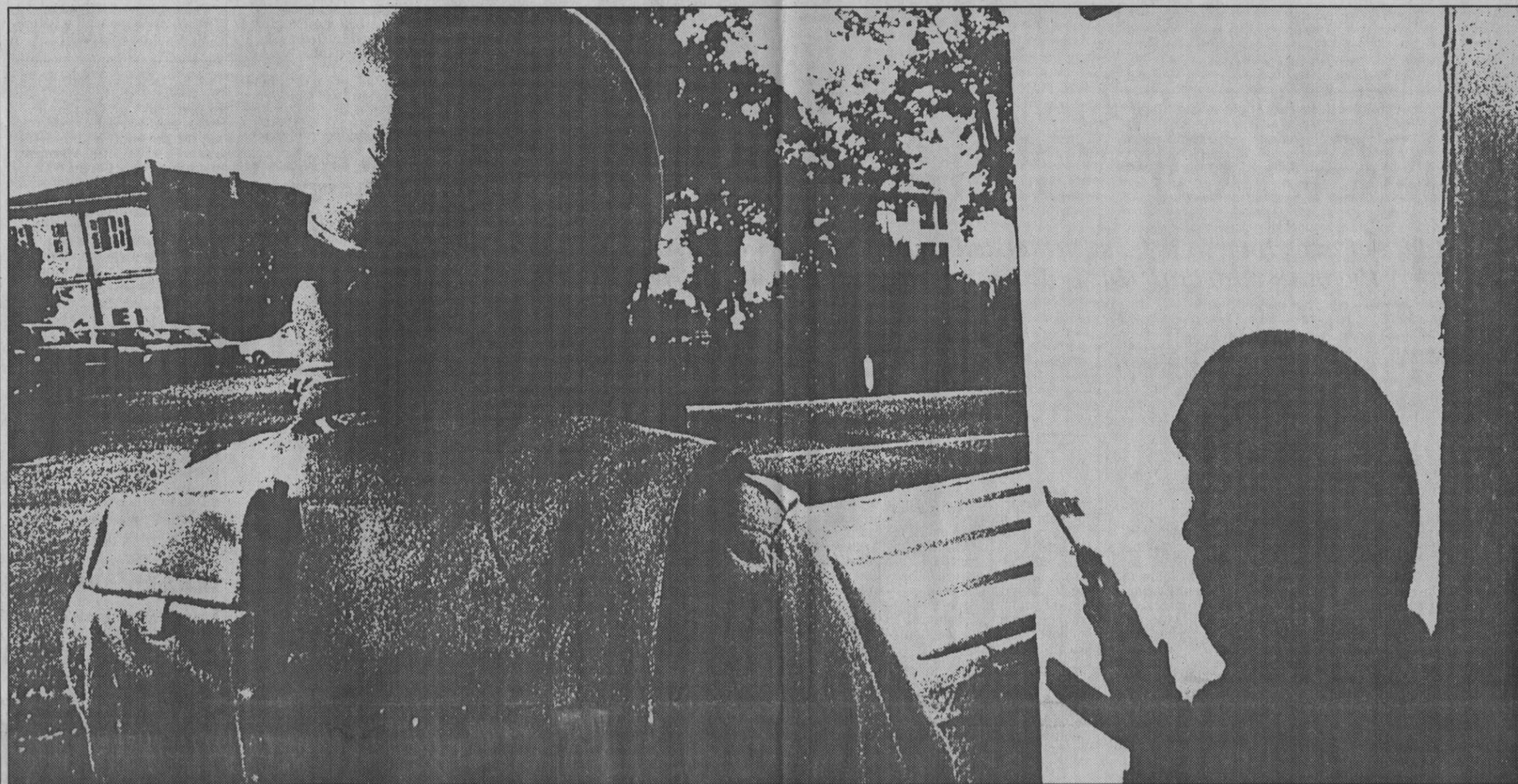
This week, as the world now knows, the jauntiness turned deadly serious. On Tuesday, the Mladina journalist, Roman Brilej, wrote for the Guardian from his Ljubljana air raid shelter. He said: "If Europe and the world do not do everything in their power to prevent the worst, then they will live through the rest of history with a constant feeling of guilt. At this moment we experience the horrendous knowledge that we are alone. Dreadfully alone."

Brilej's sense of isolation and bitterness is typical of Slovene opinion. For who outside Slovenia knows about Mladina? And who, despite the thousands of western tourists who have flocked to Bled and Postojna, even knows about Slovenia? Not many people, and certainly not enough of them, to judge by the exceptional complacency with which European governments refused to understand the seriousness of the mounting crisis in Yugoslavia's semi-detached northern republic this spring, and the basic issue — self-determination — that is at stake.

The two million Slovenes believed that they were doing it by the book. They took the professed principles of the post-communist New World Order at face value. They created a democratic system. They established the rule of law. They introduced economic reform. They voted overwhelmingly for independence from a Serbian-controlled and, above all, a communist-controlled system which continued to drain their economy and make them unwilling accessories to repression in Kosovo.

The Slovenes offered to negotiate with Yugoslavia. At all stages they proceeded peacefully. Until last week, not a shot was fired in anger.

The Slovenes gave Belgrade and Europe a deadline — June 26 — after which they would declare themselves independent. The Serbs and communists in Belgrade took it seriously — but played a waiting game, daring the Slovenes to defy them. Europe (with the exception of Austria) waited too, but without taking it seriously, since Europe did not want to be bothered with anything except the false possibility of a renewed federal Yugoslavia. By acting thus, Europe signalled to the Yugoslav army that Slovenia was expendable.



In the shadow of the gun . . . as the ceasefire looks increasingly fragile a Yugoslav army soldier waits

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER MORRIS/COLORIFIC

calculations (or worse) have come home to roost. The military attack which followed the Slovene declaration of independence has accelerated rather than reduced the probable break-up of Yugoslavia, at least in its present form. The enormously important fact that the federal military is out of political control has been re-emphasised. The impotence of the unelected federal government under western Europe's so admired Ante Marković has been underlined. The will for independence, in Slovenia and perhaps also in Croatia, has been proved under fire. All these things were obvious months ago. Today they can no longer be ignored.

As a result, Europe's attitudes towards the Yugoslav crisis are now an instructive shambles. It has been another humiliating week for the diplomats and their acolytes. Portentous-sounding bodies, set up to invigilate the so-called New World Order, are meeting almost daily, scrambling to get abreast of events and to get

their simplistic theories into gear with the facts.

The implications of the failure go beyond Yugoslavia and lead inevitably to the Baltic states. It will be surprising if people in Vilnius and Riga ignore the lesson that those who take arms will win greater sympathy from the world than those who do not. We may live under a new order, but these are old truths.

PUBLIC opinion, which knows less but sees more clearly, seems increasingly to be speaking for Europe. The charges levelled against François Mitterrand by Paul Fabra in Le Monde this week (see Guardian Europe, page 25) are echoed across the continent. The public mood has moved inexorably ahead of governments and statesmen. In some countries, Germany for example, the politicians are beginning to catch up. In others, like Britain, the process is only beginning.

France remains the most re-

sistant: it was one of three countries in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe this week (the others were the Soviet Union and Romania) which took an unbendingly pro-Belgrade stance.

Governmental rigidity was echoed at first in the French press, much of which was very slow to editorialise on the crisis. Le Monde sounded approval of Europe's early unanimity, cynically explaining that only Austria was "making eyes at its Slovene neighbours" in an attempt to carve out a new role in central Europe.

"It is understandable," announced the paper from on high "that the chancelleries of Europe are preoccupied with preparing for the 21st century and are disturbed by what appears like a return to the 19th century."

Yet by this week, even this Gallic *hauteur* had begun to sag. The appeal for support by Slovene writers, published in the Guardian and Le Monde on Tuesday, was met yesterday by the powerful call of the Czech

writer, Milan Kundera, that "Slovenia must be saved". Le Monde's editorials became increasingly despairing as the crisis continued.

In Libération, Pierre Haski complained that France's defiant defence of the new international status quo "is a doctrine which easily risks appearing conservative in its attachment to an indefensible old order".

The contrast with German feeling is very striking. Unlike Britain, where pressure for a pro-Slovene response has come mainly from the Right, both Germany's political wings are aroused by the new state's predicament. On the left, die tageszeitung charged that: "The blame for conflict lies not least with the Euro-bureaucracy of Santer and Delors and with United States Secretary of State James Baker. With their hard attitude towards Slovenia and Croatia and their support for the federal government the reactionary forces within the army feel themselves encouraged."

If anything, German conser-

vatives have been even more outraged by what the Frankfurter Allgemeine this week called "the cold-shouldering of the Slovenes and Croats in their struggle for independence". One of the most outspoken critics — remarkably so in view of the German government's early caution — was Volker Rühe, the influential general secretary of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's CDU, who told a radio interviewer: "If we Germans think everything else in Europe can stay just as it was, if we follow a status quo policy and do not recognise the right to self-determination in Slovenia and Croatia, then we have no moral or political credibility."

There was unease even in Italy, where politicians worry about refugees in their backyard and where the Socialist MP Guido Gerosa sees the Yugoslav crisis, D'Annunzio-like, as an opportunity to reassert Italian claims to Istria. "The EC insists on basing its policy on the mummification of Yugoslavia," wrote Enzo Bettisa in Sun-

day's La Stampa, rather than "daring to look to the new European horizons emerging from the collapse of the communist epoch."

HIS colleague, Sergio Romano, reflected ruefully that whichever way Italian policy changed towards Yugoslavia, Italy always seemed to get it wrong: "There was a time when we committed the error of desiring the dissolution of the Yugoslav state so that we could advance our Adriatic imperial ambitions. We must now avoid committing the opposite error of proclaiming the need for a state which has already ceased to exist."

Elsewhere in Europe, the self-criticism was even more emphatic. "As so often before, stability is the West's only concern. But it is the very attempt to maintain the status quo that creates instability," said Denmark's Politiken. "It is depressing that the Yugoslav tragedy has been reduced to a form of entertainment as our parties

mark time over the summer months," it added.

Some of the most impassioned comments have come from Spain's regions, which identify with Slovenia. An editorial in the Basque newspaper, El Correo Español-El Pueblo Vasco, traditionally sympathetic to Madrid, said "defence of the principle that the frontiers which emerged from the second world war should not be touched does not rule out that same territorial order being legitimised by freely negotiated and agreed means".

Perhaps the most appropriate answer to Mladina's question came in the Brussels newspaper Le Soir. At the end of another denunciation of international complacency, the columnist Edouard van Velthem asked the stark question, "the problem that haunts the democratic mind is this: can we leave Ljubljana to die?"

● Additional research by Desmond Christy, Alexandra Duval Smith, Dan Glaister, John Hooper, Jay Sivell