

# Slovenia prospers while war looms for federation

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Yugoslavia's breakaway republic could spell disaster for neighbouring Croatia, reports Steve Crawshaw in London and Edward Lucas in Washington

IT IS a doubly historical moment. Effectively, Slovenia has now been allowed to break free from Yugoslavia — thus paving the way for the creation of a new European country for the first time since the Second World War.

It has been agreed that the army will now be withdrawn from Slovenia within the next three months, after the short war that Belgrade waged against Slovenia earlier this month. Once the army has gone, there is nothing left to stop Slovenia from joining up with the outside world.

That, in itself, is dramatic news: it means that Slovenia may leapfrog the Baltic republics — invaded by Stalin 50 years ago — in the race to be recognised by the world as a separate European state. But the implications, though half-rosy for Slovenia, could hardly be more disastrous for the rest of Yugoslavia, where some kind of war now seems more likely than ever.

Slovenia — small, but efficient — has been allowed to go, but not because of a new mood of compromise in Belgrade. On the contrary: Slovenia has merely been jettisoned in order to give Serbia greater energy for the still remaining fight, with independence-minded Croatia.

In Croatia, the continuing skirmishes in areas with a Serb minority could break into full-scale war at any time. The departure of Slovenia makes such a possibility more likely, not less. In parts of eastern and southern Croatia, there are two or three deaths a day. Already, the number of fatalities is much higher than in Slovenia's short war.

Serb nationalists have been saying for weeks that they are prepared to let Slovenia go — Slovenia has no Serb minority. But Serbia has also insisted that it is not prepared to let go of those areas of Croatia which have a Serb population, or let go of people who "wish to stay in Yugoslavia" — in

other words, Serbs. There has been talk, too, of a Serb-Croat carve-up of Bosnia, ethnically the most mixed republic — a politically tangled carve-up which the Bosnian government does not want, and which would certainly be violent.

Slovenia, however, seems keen to stand aside from the implications, now that it believes it may have slipped under the wire.

In Washington, Slovenia's Foreign Minister, Dimitri Rupel, welcomed the breakthrough, while stressing that it did not apply to Croatia. "Croatia has missed its historical opportunity," he said. Slovenia would help the rest of Yugoslavia with its process of "modernisation and democratisation . . . but we have no intention to help in the disintegration of this Balkan area."

He declined to draw any parallel between Slovenia's escape from Yugoslavia and the pro-independence movements anywhere else, describing such comparisons as "philosophical". And he discounted what many observers believe to be the most frightening aspect of the Yugoslav crisis, the possible involvement of neighbouring countries in the break-up. The actions of these countries were "symbolic". Mr Rupel's confidence seemed to have been boosted by an apparently successful meeting with the acting Secretary of State, Lawrence Eagleburger. He said that Mr Eagleburger had accepted that US policy (which had strongly favoured unity) "was not correct, needed change and had changed".

In what may be a quid pro quo for United States support for independence, Mr Rupel said that Slovenia could accept association with Yugoslavia on the model of the Benelux countries, including monetary and customs union. But he insisted that Serbian "robbery" of Slovene and federal funds and assets must first cease.