YUGOSLAVIA: THE THIRD CROSSROAD AND THE ROLE OF EUROPE

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Recent developments in Yugoslavia clearly show the magnitude and complexity of its political crisis. It is obvious that the South Slavs are at a crossroad for the third time in this century. How long will the Yugoslav Federation survive? Is a democratic Yugoslav state which respects human rights still possible? What role can international organisations, like the Council of Europe and the EC, play in this process?

On December 1, 1918, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was founded. Before the First World war, only Serbia and Montenegro were independent states which acquired international recognition at the Berlin Congress in 1878. King Alexandar Karadjordjevic (the Serbian dynasty originated from the beginning of the 19th century), the first ruler of Yugoslavia, organized the country on a unitaristic basis. This led to nationalistic clashes, especially between Serbs and Croats. The tragic outcome of the internal conflicts occurred in April 1941, when after a war, which lasted only ten days, the country capitulated to the fascist forces. Most of the country was seized by Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria. A fascist puppet state, the Independent State of Croatia, was founded on the territory of today's Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina.

Post-war Yugoslavia

Since the communists were the decisive factor in the uprising and its subsequent success, they were authorized to shape the post-war, second, Yugoslavia. Because of its significant war achievements in the anti-Hitler coalition, Yugoslavia had obtained an independent international legitimacy. Tito firmly resisted Stalin in 1948 and after an open and well known clash, Yugoslav communists introduced an alternative model of socialism, primarily by introducing self-management in factories, and took an independent international position. The Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia became an independent international subject and one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement. However, the one-party system ruled out the chances for alternative political options that emerged (Djilas in 1950s, student movement in 1968 or nationalistic tendencies in the early 1970s).

The changes in Eastern Europe have given a strong impetus to the forces supporting reforms in Yugoslavia. However, under the circumstances of deep economic crisis and as a result of the strong rebirth of nationalism, some parts of the country started to discuss the option of walking out of Yugoslavia. So, parallel negotiations about possible options for a future Yugoslavia (federation, confederation, two or more sovereign and independent states) have started - in the existing constitutional institutions (federal Presidency and federal Parliament) and between the newly elected republican leaders. This is a clear sign of the third crossroad which is mentioned above.

Foreign policy objectives

Despite all centrifugal tendencies, Yugoslavia is still a single subject of international law. Through her Federal Government, Prime Minister Markovic and the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Yugoslavia tries to achieve some foreign policy objectives, which are, interestingly enough, almost unanimously accepted by the conflicting Yugoslav nations and their respective leaders. Those objectives are embodied in the important Declaration of the
Federal Assembly on the further integration of Yugoslavia in the European processes:

1. Yugoslavia should strive for the closest possible linkage with the European Community and the European Parliament or, more precisely, for the evolution of the existing forms of cooperation, the establishment of a free trade area and the conclusion of an association agreement between Yugoslavia and the EEC.

2. Yugoslavia should become a full-fledged member of the EFTA.

3. Yugoslavia should become a member of the Council of Europe.

4. Yugoslavia is ready to accede to the OECD.

5. Yugoslavia should cooperate with the former CMEA member countries on the principles of a market economy.

6. The already initiated processes of regional cooperation such as among Balkan countries, within the Adriatic working community, the Assembly of European Regions, among the Danubian states and other forms of regional linkage, should be developed.

This declaration specifically mentions that Yugoslavia is determined to carry out changes at the internal level along the lines of a market economy and to achieve political democracy. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is particularly emphasised as a prerequisite for the State's comprehensive transformation. This respect seems to be of an essential importance for pursuing every single objective of the proposed foreign policy orientation.

Despite the fact that the EEC is, still, first and foremost, an economic community, it has also developed the basic premises of its human rights policy in the external relations with third countries, particularly through the views and activities of the European Parliament and through the institutional framework of the European Political Cooperation. The Common values of the EU countries are not just market-economy and pluralistic democracy but also full respect for human rights.

Unconditional devotion to the genuine human rights protection is the very basis of the Council of Europe, the most important regional organization for the protection of human rights in Europe. Even the chairmanship in the non-aligned movement poses special requirements for Yugoslavia as far as observance, promotion and protection of internationally recognized human rights are concerned. The international "image" in terms of human rights is very important for every single country, anyway. It could easily be materialized, positively or negatively, through attitudes and actions of third states. Therefore, it is extremely important to scrutinize the question of human rights in Yugoslavia and carefully estimate the content of the country's democratization.

Free elections
For more than 15 years, article 156 of the country's last constitution (1974) was criticized by lawyers and experts in Yugoslavia and abroad for reducing the right to vote and for having elections only at the lowest levels of government. New election laws in all republics, which have created completely different "rules of the game" in the political struggles, changed this situation considerably.

Slovenia and Croatia were the first ones in organizing multi-party elections. In both republics, nationalistic, anti-communist parties (Croatian Democratic Union - CDU in Croatia and DEMOS in Slovenia) won so overwhelmingly that, actually, no room for opposition is left in the republican Parliaments. Both parties placed a strong emphasis on the sovereignty, independence and self-determination of their nations. Owing to his personal role in the process of democratization, Milan Kucan, the former Communist leader, became Slovenia's president. In Croatia, the communists disappeared from political life. Croatia's new president Franjo Tudjman however, is a former communist, and a General of the Yugoslav People's Army. The triumph of the national parties was complete in Bosnia-Hercegovina as well. The election results resembled a census.