

REACTIONS IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA TO THE KOSOVO CRISIS, 14 MARCH-31 MAY 1999

SERBIA

Rambouillet/ Paris talks

Belgrade maintains that it favoured autonomy for Kosovo based on the Contact Group's ten principles while preserving the multi-ethnic essence of the province within the context of Serbia's preserved sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, as Serbian Deputy PM Markovic pointed out, "There were no direct talks in either Rambouillet or Paris....The [original Albanian separatist-US] proposal was unilaterally promoted to an agreement was treated as the final agreement and the talks in Paris focussed exclusively on its implementation For us the agreement would have meant the political loss of Kosovo-Metohija, the separation of territorial integrity from state sovereignty, the negation of Kosmet's complexity and giving absolute power to the Albanian majority." (Serbian Radio, 22 March) The province would be run by foreigners and policed exclusively by their armed forces, which would enjoy almost unlimited rights throughout Yugoslavia. "We should have no illusions as to what this is all about," said Serbian PM Milutinovic. "It is not only Kosovo that is at stake. This is a demand to destroy the entire state of Serbia." (Serbian Radio, 23 March) The West has no desire for a reasonable agreement, reasonably reached. It views Kosovo as an entrée through which the entire country will be fragmented, occupied and/or ruled by a foreign hand in foreign interests.(Tanjug, 23 March)

Comment. Although Kosovo is an emotive issue for Serbs, there is a negative attitude to Kosovar Serbs ("half-black Muslimani") in much of the country. To persuade a conflict-weary population that it must be prepared to endure more suffering, the leadership would like to sell the message that more is at stake than merely Kosovo. This is not to say that some political heavy-weights do not believe this message themselves, however paranoid it sounds.

Response to aggression and negotiating stances

Illegality of NATO action. Yugoslav ambassador to the UN Jovanovic encapsulated Belgrade's reaction to NATO's attack on 24 March. "If the aggression is not stopped, the precedent set....will sooner or later lead to aggression against other small or medium sized countries. The real question is, which country will be next? NATO has committed a unilateral act of brutal and unprovoked aggression against the FRY, a sovereign and independent state and founder member of the UN. The FRY has not threatened any country or peace and security in the region. It has been attacked because it sought to solve an internal problem and used its sovereign right to fight terrorism and prevent secession of part of its territory. NATO was unmasked today: it ceased to be [defensive] and became instead an aggressive military alliance disregarding its own statute, the UN Charter, the Paris OSCE Charter as well as the system of international relations based on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. By bombing massively and indiscriminately the towns and cities in the FRY, NATO has become the air force and the mercenary of the terrorist KLA." (Tanjug, 25 March) These themes, Belgrade's dedication to the rule of law contrasted with NATO's favouring the rule of force and the implications for others and the future, are ongoing: so too is the unpreparedness of the UN, dominated as it is by the USA, to protect a sovereign member. [Only Russia, China and Namibia out

of 15 members of the Security Council supported a resolution sponsored by Russia, Belarus and India which condemned NATO's attack and called for talks.]

Legal action. Yugoslavia intends to sue those countries taking part in aggression. It has also appealed to the International Court of Justice to impose interim measures: a ban on the use of force against states; a ban on interference in states' internal affairs; a ban on violations of state sovereignty; protection for civilians and civilian property and the environment; a ban on the use of prohibited weapons; the assertion of freedom of navigation on international waterways and freedom for air traffic.

Need for a political solution. The Belgrade position, often repeated, is that it wants a political solution to the crisis. It is prepared to accept the G-8 proposals as the basis for negotiations.

- The NATO air campaign must cease as a prelude to negotiation and Yugoslav troop withdrawals. While Belgrade says it is prepared to reduce its forces to peacetime levels, even possibly to remove all forces save those covering the state borders, that will be dependent on withdrawal of NATO forces threatening invasion from Macedonia and Albania and the effective disarmament of the "terrorist" organization, the KLA.
 - There can be no NATO diktat. The UN and Yugoslavia must negotiate as equals on the basis of the G-8 foreign ministers proposals of 6 May (seen as essentially the Contact Group proposals rewritten): Russia and China agree on this. The KLA, as a separatist-terrorist organization cannot be a party to negotiations. Indeed, it must be disarmed.
 - The retention of Serbian sovereignty over Kosovo as a province of Serbia (and not a federal republic) is non-negotiable. However, the fullest possible autonomy will be granted which satisfies the needs and aspirations of Kosovars of all nationalities in a multi-ethnic/religious province: an elective dictatorship of the majority Albanians is unacceptable.
 - Refugees of all ethnic and religious origins must be allowed to return to Kosovo, provided they are Yugoslav citizens.
 - An international peacekeeping force can be admitted to Kosovo provided it does so under a UN mandate and command. The composition, mandate, powers and responsibilities and duration of stay must be clearly defined on the basis of negotiation with Belgrade. Ultra-nationalists such as Vojislav Seselj bar the presence of NATO troops and want a civilian, or at least police-like, force only. Others would tolerate NATO contingents from countries not involved in the bombing. Non-NATO troops, especially Russians, must be included; other acceptable providers would be Belarus, Ukraine, Sweden and Finland. There are hints from government sources (but not at the highest level) that all NATO states could contribute.
 - Belgrade maintains that a compensation package must accompany any deal on Kosovo.

The indictment of Milosevic and others for war crimes is seen, even by opposition leaders, as a political provocation/form of pressure by the US, using its political tool, Louise Arbour, to manipulate World opinion through the illusion of justice. It is a continuation and intensification of the policy of

demonizing the entire Serb nation, a cynical attempt to portray the victims of aggression as the culprits and conceal NATO's responsibility for genocidal attacks. The indictment is being used to prevent further erosion of support for NATO's aggression and to prevent mass demands by the World community for an end to the bombing. It is no coincidence that it has been issued at precisely the time when a diplomatic offensive is gathering pace to find a peaceful solution. The leaders that should be put on trial are Clinton, Blair, Chirac and others in the west.

Comment. There are various ways in which Milosevic can try to manipulate the proposed terms in negotiation: the devil will be in the detail and the vaguer the text, the happier he will be. He will expect Russian support in this.

- While it is reasonable to argue that Yugoslav troops cannot withdraw while to do so would be to risk destruction from the air, Milosevic may hope that even a temporary halt to the bombing would, in practice, become permanent. He may question whether the NATO doubters could be persuaded to start again without UN authorisation (which Russia and China would veto) and while UN-sponsored negotiations were taking place.
- Milosevic would like negotiations within a UN context as he is likely to be able to block or spin them out in that forum. He wishes to exclude the totally intransigent KLA from the process while professing readiness to talk to the "legitimate" (and more moderate) Albanian representatives of the LDK, Rugova and Bukoshi. He will not approach any negotiation with a shared agenda. He sees the process as a zero-sum game in which tactical concessions are seized on but not reciprocated. He is adept at playing for time, and he possibly still sees time as being on his side: he may doubt that NATO's perceived fragile unity could withstand a proposal to renew military pressure; some war-weary countries may be inclined towards a face-saving fudge; and the longer negotiations drag on the more difficult it will be to persuade ethnic Albanian refugees to return (note that in five months, winter will arrive and that many refugees will have only ruins to return to).
- The demand that Serbia retain sovereignty over Kosovo accords with the principle of the Helsinki Final Act and with both western and regional desires that borders be not altered by force (particularly by such an organization as the KLA, which Milosevic knows is regarded with deep suspicion by some western governments). However, any agreement holding out less prospects for independence than Rambouillet will discourage substantial numbers of Albanian refugees from returning. Moreover, if the Serbs have a say in the policing of those borders, they will try to thwart NATO's good intentions, or at least spin out proceedings endlessly. Security against KLA incursions will be an issue. So, too, will be the return of refugees: only those who can prove their Yugoslav citizenship are to be allowed back, though many (most?) ethnic Albanians have lost, or been deprived of, their papers. In this context, some recent statements are of note. Seselj maintains that, over the last 50 years, Kosovo received 300k illegal Albanian immigrants (Beta news agency, 23 May) and Milosevic maintains that the pre-war balance of population was: 250k

Serbs/Montenegrins; 200k Muslims; 159k Egyptians/Romanies; 50k Turks; and only 800-900k Albanians.(RTS SAT TV, 22April & Houston TV KHOU)

- Belgrade envisages no role for the KLA in any implementation deal, it being merely a terrorist-separatist organization which is not representative of all Albanian opinion, let alone of other Kosovars. The "normal" peacetime strength of the security forces is said to be 15k soldiers and 10k police.(Seselj, Beta news agency, 23 May and Tanjug 30 May; the Russians are reported as agreeing that these strengths are acceptable and that the presence of troops from aggressor countries is not). It is highly unlikely that Albanian refugees could be persuaded to return with a strong remaining Serb presence and no KLA involvement, especially if the UN implementation force did not inspire confidence. Milosevic will demand an abrogation of the sweeping powers proposed for the implementation force in Annex B of the Rambouillet agreement and he will also seek a zonal deployment of implementation forces with the Russians policing predominantly Serb and economically important areas, probably with a view to *de facto* partition.

Yugoslav and Serbian governments and selected other states

Foreign support. Condemnation of NATO aggression and messages of moral support were received from Presidents Yeltsin, Kuchma of Ukraine and Lukashenka of Belarus and from parliamentary groups from those countries and Greece. Zimbabwe and Cuba have also voiced support.

Yugoslav-Russian-Belorussian union. The Yugoslav parliament voted overwhelmingly for a scheme mooted for Yugoslavia to join the Russia-Belarus union. The idea is, however, strongly opposed by Montenegro – and by the Bosniak National Council of the Sandzak. The last government in Moscow was cool towards the idea, but Stepashin is said to have made it a priority task. (Seselj, Beta news agency, 30 May)

Disillusionment with Russia has increased as time passes, the bombing continues and nothing but words are received from Moscow. Serious help had been expected from the Serbs' "big brother" but Russia has failed to block NATO action and no material aid has been received."The Russian people and Church are with us, but not the leadership".... which is pro-western and "sees everything through the dollar." (Arkan, Beta news agency, 16 May)

Albania is seen as irredeemably hostile. It has become "the biggest terrorist centre in Europe" where the KLA is trained and equipped by the US, German and French militaries and Islamic fundamentalists. (Tanjug, 18 May) According to plans hatched between the KLA and its sponsors, attacks are mounted into Kosovo, aided by NATO and Albanian firepower and advisers.

Macedonia is regarded as "occupied" by NATO forces. Slav protests against those troops and against the alliance's attempts to involve the country in the

war by providing a *place d'armes* for a NATO invasion are frequently reported, approvingly and probably exaggeratedly. Like Albania, Macedonia is seen to provide bases in which NATO trains terrorists and from which it prepares to send them into action. The substantial Albanian minority in the country is believed not only to encourage and support the KLA but to be ready to support the creation of a greater Albania at the expense of Macedonia. On the other hand, Macedonia's oft-reiterated refusal to permit an attack on Yugoslavia from its territory is quoted with approval.

Comment.

- There was undoubtedly a perception, shared in political circles as well as by the man in the street, that much more could be expected in way of support from other countries, particularly Russia. Disappointment, however, will not be a morale breaker. For centuries, the Serbs have seen themselves (and almost revelled in the perception) as history's victims. They are used to being let down and accustomed to the idea that they will triumph through their own efforts or go down in glorious defeat in the process. The unsuccessful wars in Bosnia, Croatia and now Kosovo are but the latest generation's experience of this old truth.
- The Yugoslav military would undoubtedly like to see the destabilization of Albania and Macedonia so that they do not provide a secure base from which NATO could mount ground operations into Kosovo. Little can be done to accomplish this in the former, apart from burdening the country with an intolerable refugee problem: even this is mitigated by relatively generous support from outside. Macedonia, potentially a more important base for a NATO invasion, is another matter. There is a Serb minority of at least 50k, loyal to Milosevic or Seselj and increasingly organized on paramilitary lines, concentrated largely in the sensitive border area with Serbia and in Skopje. There is considerable inter-ethnic friction between Slavs and Albanians (25-20% of the population) which is bound to be increased by the influx of Kosovar Albanian refugees (many of whom have close cross-border family ties). Some Slavs would favour union with Bulgaria. Many Albanians would like to join a greater Albania, while the others would like a greater say in the running of the country. The army is more or less ineffective. Macedonia provides troubled waters for Belgrade to fish in, assuming (as is likely) that Milosevic distrusts Skopje's ability to prevent it from being used as an assembly area for invasion.

Propaganda and perceptions in Serbia

The Media. Even more than in most countries, the electronic media dominate perceptions, with the print media being of limited influence. The state-run media ensure that ordinary Serbs see only a very one-sided picture. There was an independent media, notably Radio B92, but Belgrade has exploited patriotic feelings to reduce it to impotence. Even before this, opposition voices tended to be anti-Milosevic rather than anti-patriotic. The only major source of alternative views on war and policy now available to most Serbs

comes from the Montenegrin media (suspect to many as anti-patriotic), from Croatia and Bosnia (enemies) and, for the few Hungarian speakers, from Hungary (another traditional Serb enemy).

CNN, the BBC, Sky and other foreign sources of news are constantly portrayed as the tools of the aggressors, with often apparently convincing evidence being adduced to "prove" that they are mendacious, one-sided manufacturers of propaganda. For instance, Tanjug (15 March) accused the BBC and CNN of reporting on 300k Albanian refugees from Kosovo, omitting any reference to Serb refugees (just as, in recent wars, they failed to deal with Bosniak and Croat crimes against the Serbs). Both stations support the KLA, whom they now describe as rebels though the US State Department called them terrorists until last year's change of policy. They accept uncritically terrorist claims and give credence to incidents staged by them to pin the blame on Serb forces. The fact that the KLA attacks Serb civilians and murders or drives out ethnic Albanians to force others into compliance goes unreported. This is done to paint a picture of a humanitarian disaster, solely of Serb making, to excuse western intervention to seize Kosovo. The reports of humanitarian NGOs and some official organizations such as UNHCR are represented as being similarly tainted (see, for instance, the denunciation of UNHCR spokesman del Mundo in Tanjug, 23 March).

Events in Kosovo.

- There are repeated denials that there is any official policy of ethnically cleansing the province – quite the contrary, in fact, according to Information Minister Milan Komnenic: "We have never carried out atrocities against civilians. Instead we tried to solve the crisis. Three days ago we asked Serbs, Moslems and, first and foremost, Albanian civilians not to leave....Kosovo." The Yugoslav forces are there purely to fight the terrorists. (La Chaine Information, Paris, 5April) The wholesale flight of Kosovars is attributed solely to NATO bombing and KLA terrorism. This, and appeals to refugees to return, is a frequent government and media theme.
- By mid April, the authorities were claiming to have defeated the KLA, continuing operations being merely the pursuit of terrorist bands. Belgrade expressed a readiness to reduce its forces in Kosovo – once the suspension of bombing and the withdrawal of NATO forces from neighbouring states made it safe to do so. However, fresh onslaughts could be expected as the KLA was recruiting gullible and conscripted Albanians and Muslim fundamentalists and mercenaries and being trained and equipped by NATO militaries.

NATO's aims and methods. NATO is accused of seeking to impose a solution purely in the interests of the Albanian separatists, perhaps creating a greater Albania at the expense of Macedonia as well as Serbia. At other times it is seen to be trying to destroy "the last oasis of freedom, independence and sovereignty in this part of Europe. Suffice it to say that the FRY is the only country in which foreign troops are not deployed and which is not under foreign domination."(Serbian Radio, 26 March) This is in accordance with a US congressional commission's scheme of 1992 which worked out a phased plan for the destruction of Yugoslavia. (Vecernje Novosti web site, 28 March) Sometimes, NATO is accused of wishing to

acquire Yugoslav territory. The one certain aim of the alliance is to establish its (principally US) hegemony in SE Europe.

In pursuing its aims, NATO is said to be using a four-pronged approach.

- A media campaign of disinformation is being mounted to demonise the Serbs and whip up hysteria against them as a cover for aggression.
- Bombing and KLA pressure are being used to force Kosovars to flee their homes and to prevent them from responding to Belgrade's appeals to them to return. In this way, and through the creation of bogus refugee camps (actually peopled by Macedonian Albanians), the aggressors create the appearance of a humanitarian catastrophe which is blamed on ethnic cleansing and justifies the aggression.
- NATO is acting as the ally of the separatists, providing them with weapons, training and an air force. Of course, the Albanians who join the KLA are dupes. They are being used as imperialist cannon-fodder, softening up Yugoslavia for invasion (for which they will also form a human shield).
- Bombing of the rest of Yugoslavia is being used partly to break morale and drive a wedge between different ethnic groups and the people and their government, partly to ease the path of the would-be invaders and also to accomplish hate-inspired genocidal aims against the population as a whole.

Effects of the NATO air campaign. From the outset, the aerial bombardment has been presented primarily as a barbaric, criminal attack on primarily civilian targets. With the exception of the attacks to stampede refugees from Kosovo and prevent their return, it was sometimes tacitly acknowledged that the main targets were economic, with considerable collateral damage that was not, in itself, unwelcome. Towards the end of May, however, a shift in tactics was perceived as the campaign was failing to bring the country to heel. Attacks became more indiscriminate, or deliberately mounted against helpless civilians, with, for instance, hospitals becoming legitimate military targets and not just the victims of collateral damage. (Tanjug, 21 May, after the bombing of the Dragisa Misovic hospital) "The NATO aggressor has entered the stage of collective reprisals against all the citizens of Serbia" (Beta news agency, 23 May) The picture of its results, as painted by the media, is as follows.

- Damage to the armed forces is reported as very slight, thanks to cunning dispersal, concealment and use of air defences. Casualty figures are not given, however. The Army claims to have achieved significant successes. It says that it is winning the war with the KLA. It asserts that it has downed over 70 NATO aircraft and 200 cruise missiles; "even western sources admit" these losses (10%) and the ejection mechanisms have been deactivated in Dutch, German, Spanish and Italian aircraft to prevent aircrew from abandoning their machines. (Radio Belgrade, 7 May and Tanjug, 11 May) Morale is said to be high and the commander of 3rd Army (in Kosovo) promises that his 150k men will inflict heavy casualties on a NATO invasion.

The alliance's reluctance to mount a ground attack is attributed to fear of defeat.

- The cost to the economy and the population is admitted to be considerable. In late April, over 1k civilians were said to have been killed, over 4k injured and 500k (with 1.5m dependants) left jobless. Several thousand industrial facilities had been damaged or destroyed, as had 16 hospitals, over 190 schools, 16 medieval monasteries/churches and 8 cultural/historic sites. Damage to power and water supplies and communications was exerting severe effects. Total costs were estimated at \$10bn. ("Blic" newspaper, 22 April)
- The bombing is held responsible for severe ecological damage, much of which will affect other countries in the region. Clouds of toxic gasses have been released. An oil slick 15-20km long has been created in the Danube. Attacks on national parks threaten the ecosystem. The use of depleted uranium munitions will give rise to leukaemia in children and Gulf War syndrome. (Tanjug, 23 April) "Kosovo is literally a nuclear wasteland" where life expectancy will not exceed 30 years. (SRNA 26 May)
- NATO is accused of using illegal/inhumane weapons against civilians: cluster bombs, DU ammunition and touch-sensitive booby traps disguised as toys, cigarette lighters and pens.
- Far from creating divisions in the country, NATO's "barbaric and criminal acts" have united the people.

Comment. From a distance, it is not possible to tell how effective the government is in selling its line to the Serbian public.

- Its version of developments in Kosovo may be treated with some scepticism. History, both recent and not so recent, stories from refugees and soldiers, police and paramilitaries home on leave and reports from outside (especially from Montenegro) must at least create doubt about denials of any ethnic cleansing or atrocities. On the other hand, such a policy would be unlikely to bother many. The Albanians are a traditional enemy and ethnic cleansing is a time-dishonoured way of solving Balkan problems. There will be much more concern about the substantial number of refugees who have fled north, said to number 50k Serbs and 20k Romanies, (not least because people do not want to be burdened with them on top of those from Bosnia and Croatia). Claims that the army is defeating the KLA will possibly be discounted in part, not least because the government itself harps on about the huge numbers ready to attack from Albania and Macedonia.
- The accusations levelled against NATO are probably accepted generally. They accord with the historical perception that Serbia is a perennial victim of malign forces and the Serbs do not see themselves as being in the wrong. Rather, they are subject to illegal, unprovoked aggression. NATO's insistence that the Serb people is not its enemy, only Milosevic, is treated with contempt. As is usual with people who are being bombed, the tendency is to blame those who drop the bombs and not their own government. Even those most fervently opposed to Milosevic make no excuse for NATO's actions.

- Claims that military combat effectiveness and morale remain high must be treated with caution. Much will depend on the real (as opposed to NATO's asserted) damage done by aerial bombardment: even quite heavy casualties can be borne without significant loss of morale if suffered over an extended period. The only visible sign of loss of morale has been the refusal of about 2k reservists who "left Kosovo on their own initiative" in mid-May to return to the front and reports of about 1k others hiding in the woods in south Serbia. Even this may not signify too much as their complaint was not that the war was unjust or lost but that the burden of conscription falls on the poor while the better-off are able to avoid their patriotic duty. (TV Crna Gora, 21-23 May) On the other hand, the army's core of professional officers (the only possible threat to Milosevic's hold on power) has been systematically weakened and demoralized over a period of many years. The soldiers are ill-paid and fed. It may be questioned whether patriotism will be enough to hold it together when the going gets tough (as it is, increasingly, in the struggle against a KLA that is growing and acquiring more sophisticated arms.) See also next section.

Popular reactions to the war and political developments

Civilian reactions to the war. At the outset, NATO's aggression was greeted with outrage and an upsurge of patriotic fervour which united the Serbs behind their government. Thousands of people defied the bombers in sit-ins in likely targets such as factories and bridges (many wearing shirts with "target" printed on them). As time wore on, casualties were suffered and lives disrupted, the mood changed to a mixture of fear and apathy. Then even fear was forced into the background as the population struggled to survive without electricity, water and other amenities. "People do not make a fuss any more....We have got used to it. We are resigned to it." (Duna satellite TV, 22 May). In mid-May, however, the first signs of cracks in morale appeared. A meeting of 5k citizens in Krusevac demanded an end to the war, the return of the troops from Kosovo and persuaded the mayor to stop the return of reservists to the front. Similar rallies started in Aleksandrovac, and in Cacak, a "civic parliament" was formed to press for the end of the war and economic reconstruction. The authorities are endeavouring to limit and contain these protests but, while limited pressure is being applied to the leadership, there has been no heavy-handed crack-down as yet. However, war weariness does not imply growing pro-western sentiment. Loathing of the aggressors is as strong as ever. Nor does it necessarily imply growing sympathy for the opposition, of which there is little evidence.

In Vojvodina, there have been some complaints about harassment of the Hungarian minority (about 300-350k strong) and claims that the bombing will undermine ethnic tolerance. The minority leaders have appealed to Hungary to keep a low profile in this mistaken war in order not to exacerbate its situation. There are no signs of restiveness but there is fear of a Serbian

backlash if things go badly in Kosovo. Laszlo Jozsa, deputy chairman of the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians, summed up the situation. With over 60% of the population now being Serbian, Vojvodina cannot become independent. That solution would not be economically viable and would not resolve ethnic tensions. The best solution would be the restoration of provincial autonomy, but that must wait until the war ends and the Serbs stop "feeling aversion and fear on hearing the word autonomy." The issue should be raised as part of a general settlement. (Magyar Hirlap, 13 May)

In the Sandzak, the army presence has increased and there have been complaints of bad behaviour, and the provocation and intimidation of Muslims. The Muslim population is generally perceived as being hostile to Serbian interests and desirous of joining its co-religionists in Bosnia. It is also fearful about Serb intentions.

Entrenching Milosevic's dictatorship. Milosevic's position was crumbling before the war. However, Yugoslavia's president has now done much to consolidate his hold on power. He controls the army and the security forces. Martial law, emergency powers, the ability to conscript the politically troublesome have all been used to silence or drive into exile many political rivals. The independent media has been shut down or intimidated (including by the murder of Slavko Curuvija, the founder-editor of "Dnevni Telegraph" and "Evropljanin"). All this has made possible, according to Zoran Djindjic, leader of the opposition Democratic Party, by NATO's aggression, which has both created patriotic unity and distracted the population from normal political concerns. (Frankfurter Rundschau, 9 April) To speak out against government policy is to be branded as a traitor. The only effective resistance to Milosevic now comes from Djukanovic's government in Montenegro, which stubbornly refuses to recognize the legitimacy of the federal government and to toe its line.

Prospects for Milosevic's overthrow are not bright according to opposition leaders, at least as long as the war drags on. Neither popular rejection nor a military coup are at all likely while Serbia is under attack. Indeed, Djindjic maintains that it will be even more difficult to get rid of Milosevic after the war than it was before, at least in the short term. (Die Tageszeitung web site, 25 May) The growing reaction against the war, he says, may be the beginning of the end for Milosevic, but the end will be some time in coming. He notes the dictator's reaction to the events in Krusevac, Aleksandrovac and Cacak: first silence, then toleration, then isolation to prevent the spread of contagion, and now repression. Repression is the only means left for him now. The opposition, however, is still weak and divided, and with no access to the media it has been unable to gain from Milosevic's policy disasters. Getting rid of Milosevic will require a long haul. ("La Liberation", 26 May)

Comment.

- Milosevic would dearly love to bring the Montenegrin government to heel as Djukanovic challenges his monopoly of power and his grip on information flow. He is deterred from attempting a coup using the 2nd Army by the knowledge that the Montenegrin police are strong – there would be no walk-over but a civil war – and by the fear that, with

nothing more to lose, Djukanovic would declare independence and appeal to NATO for help.

- NATO's action is not understood by the Serb population. It is seen as illegal, unjustified aggression, an unwarranted attempt to dictate the country's internal policies. Anti-western feeling will take a long time to dissipate, though generous help in reconstruction (which will be portrayed as an attempt to make amends and right the wrongs done to Serbia) will surely help. If the international community continues to treat Serbia as a pariah state and refuses to include the country in regional regeneration projects as long as Milosevic remains in power, the siege mentality may be prolonged, and with it, the dictator's hold on power.
- Whether the war will do anything to improve the prospects of a democratic transformation of Serbia is a moot point. On the one hand, Milosevic's grip on power has been tightened and lectures from the western aggressors on the desirability of political change are unlikely to be well received. On the other hand, Kosovo may well come to be seen as the latest and worst of a series of policy failures extending over ten long, hard years. That would leave Milosevic with only repression as his sole means of retaining power (assuming that he cannot, as in the past, generate a new problem to cover up and divert attention from the last one). Much will depend on whether he will be able plausibly to claim victory, on how much more mileage he can get out of western unreasonableness in implementing any peace deal, and on whether the opposition can unite (a recreation of the loose, easily fragmented Zajedno coalition of 1996-7 will not suffice) and then get its message across.
- It may well be that the main threat to Milosevic's position comes from extreme nationalists under the psychopathic Seselj, a man who makes Milosevic look moderate and reasonable. He leads the country's second largest party and is making inroads into Milosevic's power base, especially the all-important, 100k strong police. It is quite possible that the president's cronies will desert him for Seselj if they believe that, by doing so, they will preserve the gains they made under Milosevic from corruption and criminal enterprise. (Such people have little to hope for under a democratic regime.)
- Without a democratic transformation and a reform of Yugoslavia along genuinely federal or confederal lines, future peace and stability within the state and within the region as a whole will be at risk. The task of creating democracy and a civil society in Serbia (these have never truly existed before) will be immense and will probably take generations. In their tens of thousands, educated, decent young people, the future of any nation, have emigrated to escape a corrupt, criminal, repressive regime that has destroyed such social harmony as existed, the economy and the reputation of their former country. They have left a society that has become pauperized, criminalized, brutalized, cynical and/or apathetic and helpless. The foundations on which a functioning democracy and market economy must rest hardly exist.

MONTENEGRO

Attitudes towards the west and the war

Hostility to Milosevic. Even before the war, President Djukanovic maintained that Milosevic was responsible for the Kosovo crisis and should have accepted the terms of the Rambouillet agreement in return for Yugoslavia's readmission to the UN and the OSCE. However, Milosevic preferred to provoke "bombing raids because he believes this scenario is more favourable to him. He believes that FRY citizens are more likely to forgive him the bombing than the reaching the compromise necessary to reach a political agreement with the Kosovar Albanians." (TV Crna Gora, 16 March) He realized that compromise would threaten his grip on power, signalling as it would the bankruptcy of policies he has pursued for 10 years: better to lose Kosovo through war than to sign an agreement. "Neither national nor state interests exist for him. All his ideology is reduced to his own position and his absolute grip on power." Djukanovic deplored the prospect of aerial bombardment as it would punish the innocent, actually strengthen Milosevic and "limit further the already limited space for the survival of democratic forces in the FRY, particularly in Serbia." He suggested that Montenegro should be spared as it "has never played games with the international community." (TV Crna Gora, 19 March)

After NATO started its campaign, Djukanovic placed the blame firmly on Milosevic's shoulders and demanded that the latter abandon his policy of confrontation with the whole world. He refused to recognize Belgrade's actions – the severing of diplomatic relations with aggressor states, the declaration of a state of emergency and the proposed union with Russia and Belarus – and disassociated Montenegro from them. He, in effect, declared his country's neutrality and its determination to continue to seek better relations with the west.

Criticism of the west. At the same time, Djukanovic has been critical of the west on two grounds. In the past, it only took an interest in the Balkans when a crisis surfaced. Then, instead of recognizing that Milosevic was the cause of the region's problems, it did deals with him, thinking that he was the right man to put out the smouldering fires. This made him, and others, think that he was a true World leader and this perception strengthened his domestic position. The air campaign, while well-intentioned, is inflicting suffering on the innocent (including those it is supposed to save) and helping Milosevic to suppress political opposition and consolidate his hold on power. NATO should cease its bombing before Montenegro falls victim to Milosevic and all democratic political alternatives in Serbia are eliminated: only peace will allow political activity to revive. The west must recognize that Kosovo is not the central problem in the Balkans: Milosevic is the problem, and not part of the solution, and only the democratization of the whole of Yugoslavia will bring peace to the region. (Djukanovic: L'Espresso, 29 April; TV Crna Gora, 8 and 14 May; Le Monde, 10 May)

Need for a regional solution. Montenegro accepts the G-8 foreign ministers proposals as the basis for a deal over Kosovo. The refugees must return, the

province should have autonomy, international forces should guarantee the settlement and the UN and Russia must be involved. However, when it wins, as it surely will, the international community must not content itself with merely solving the Kosovo problem. The problems of southeast Europe as a whole need to be addressed and a range of actions, such as aid for democratization and the implementation of preventative measures are required to bring stability and peace to the region. Djukanovic is actively involved diplomatically to try and ensure that this happens.

War crimes. Djukanovic has described the call for war criminals to be prosecuted as right in principle, though he believes that it would be better for them to be tried by their own people, the victims, rather than at the Hague. He has refrained from mentioning Milosevic by name in this context.

Patriotic opposition. The country is not entirely united behind its leader. Many Serbs and Yugoslav patriots regard the president as a traitor who should be supporting the war effort instead of cozying up to their country's enemies. They are supported/exploited by some of Djukanovic's enemies, who see the possibility of political advantage through supporting Milosevic and his Montenegrin puppet, Momir Bulatovic.

Comment.

- Djukanovic's analysis of Milosevic's motivation and of the Yugoslav problem is sound. Arguably, however, there is an inconsistency between identifying Milosevic's power as the central problem and his call for NATO to cease its attacks. The war may have enabled the dictator to strengthen his position (which had been eroding before hostilities), but victory over Kosovo would certainly strengthen it yet further.
- Montenegro's government and president are trying hard to distinguish between the Yugoslav/Serbian governments and their people. They wish to be seen as patriotic supporters of the federal union, but not of its illegitimate leaders who are destroying the country through selfishly inspired and criminally mistaken policies. Evidently, Montenegrin separatists do not feel strong enough to not only reject the policies but also the very concept of the union. (See below)
- Indubitably, Djukanovic is hoping to act as a rallying figure for Serbs who are anti-war and anti-Milosevic. The Montenegrin media gives support to the likes of the Krusevac, Aleksandrovac and Cucak protesters and the government shelters so-called Serb traitors such as Zoran Djindjic and gives them a public platform. Djukanovic may hope that he can help speed Milosevic's political demise. Perhaps he has ambitions to be Yugoslavia's next leader; tiny Montenegro is a small stage for a young man with ambition.

Relations between the governments of Montenegro and the FRY

Disputes over legitimacy. President Djukanovic likes to contrast Montenegro's democratic, harmoniously multi-ethnic/religious, outward and pro-European looking credentials with Serbia's ethnically and religiously strife-riven, pariah dictatorship. The Montenegrin government refuses to recognize the legitimacy of the federal Yugoslav government and assembly,

which, it maintains, have become the puppets of Milosevic. Accordingly, it refuses to subscribe to Belgrade's dictates. It accuses Milosevic of trying, ever since the Montenegrin presidential election of October 1998, to overthrow Djukanovic and the government democratically elected in May 1999 and to install a puppet regime there too.

Growing hostility. Milosevic's need to impose his will on Montenegro has been accentuated by the war. The tiny republic refuses to acknowledge that it is involved, maintaining instead a precarious neutrality which undermines Yugoslav unity in the face of aggression (see next section). Its democratic government and stress on the need for economic reform, for multi-ethnic coexistence and for cooperation with the west are an affront to Milosevic and a challenge to his dictatorial ambitions. It is a haven for dissidents and its free media is a dangerous source of true information and dissident and alien views (including western ones) which pose a potential threat to the regime in Belgrade. An independent Montenegro is a political ulcer which could all too easily spread to infect the rest of the federation.

The threat of a coup. Milosevic and federal PM Momir Bulatovic are accused of having tried to topple the Podgorica government on 13 January 1999. (Montenegrin PM Vujanovic, TV Bosnia-Herzegovina, 5 April) They failed, but now they are trying to execute a "creeping coup", attempting simultaneously to impose Milosevic's interpretation of federal law on the republic, to alter the balance of power within it and to undermine popular support for the government. The pressures used by Belgrade and its Montenegrin supporters include the following.

- Claiming superior powers, the federal courts and authorities are trying to bring Montenegro into line according to the emergency legislation which Milosevic has had enacted. There has been a series of politically motivated bureaucratic and legal assaults from Belgrade on Podgorica's decisions and conduct of affairs. Warrants have been issued for the arrest of Deputy PM Killibarda and various media figures on grounds of treason. Montenegro's order to its citizens to ignore mobilization notices and stay at work has been condemned as illegal and the military police endeavour to enforce the call-up. There are demands that the independent media and foreign journalists be controlled and that the army be given air time to remind people of their patriotic duties. Attempts are made to use customs, tax and even health and safety as well as wartime regulations to apply economic pressure and interfere with much needed humanitarian aid.
- The pro-Milosevic opposition launches virulent attacks on the government through its press and the Serbian media. It has also mounted several demonstrations, one in early April being interpreted as testing the water for a violent coup.
- The 2nd Army in Montenegro has been augmented to double the size of the 12k strong government-controlled police and many Montenegrin officers have been replaced by Serbs. There have been several confrontations between the army and navy on the one hand and the police and civil authorities on the other. Djukanovic has condemned the way that the military are acting less and less like the Army of all Yugoslavia and more and more as Milosevic's armed force acting

against Montenegro's interests. He has firmly rejected federal calls for the police to be subordinated to military command in this time of war ("or they will not exist any more" – Bulatovic) and the army's pretensions to be superior to civil institutions.

In this on-going political conflict, the Montenegrin government seems to be winning, or at least drawing most rounds, but the struggle is wearing and fears are repeatedly expressed that Milosevic may try at any time to launch a violent coup to settle the issue once and for all. Djukanovic and his supporters admit that the population is divided, but they believe that the majority is with them, that the well-trained and motivated police are reliable and that a coup would not change the regime but instead would plunge the country into civil war. To avoid this fate, the government is trying to be as accommodating and non-confrontational as is consistent with maintaining its autonomy, its inter-ethnic harmony and its neutrality in the war.

Montenegro's possible secession from the union. Milosevic is prepared for unending conflict with the whole World, but Montenegro seeks integration with European civilization and its economy, maintains Djukanovic. Montenegro wants an open, democratic, multi-ethnic society. If that is possible within a federal Yugoslavia, that is all to the good. There is still a possibility that the federation will survive, but only on the condition that the Serbs too reject Milosevic and choose peace and democracy. Failing that, there might be another referendum, as in 1992, on Montenegro leaving the union. (La Repubblica web site, 8 April) Djukanovic professes to believe that the majority would favour independence, but does not believe the time is yet ripe to hold a referendum. He is, however, insistent that, after the war, there must be a redefinition of state relations with Serbia if the union is to survive. Only a voluntary union of equal, democratic states which observes international standards on human and minority rights and the rule of law, and pursues European integration, will have any prospects of success. (Radio Montenegro, 26 May)

Comment.

- When the Montenegrin government expresses fear of a coup, it is not being paranoid or seeking mere political effect. Milosevic and Bulatovic have been trying hard to topple it since the day it was formed. The reasons that they have used all available pressure but stopped short of employing the military are probably twofold. There may well be doubts about the reliability of the troops in 2nd Army if called upon to fight their Montenegrin brothers – and the police would resist. Instead of a quick seizure of power there would almost certainly be a civil war. In the event of Milosevic taking the gamble, Djukanovic would have no reason for restraint and nothing more to lose and would therefore declare independence and seek NATO support. As NATO's SecGen Solana has already warned off Belgrade (Montenegrin MinInfo web site, 3 April), Milosevic must take the threat of outside intervention seriously. Currently, he would seem to accept that the risks of action outweigh the potential gains.
- In 1991, Montenegro's population was 61.7% Montenegrin, 9.3% Serb, 6.6% Albanian, 14.6% Muslim and 7.8% other. Since then, there has been an influx of 120k refugees from the Bosnian and

Kosovar wars, the equivalent of 18.5% of the indigenous population. Even before the war, there were 65k unemployed, about 10%, with another 25k likely to join them. The social, economic and political strains which these statistics imply for a poor, backward and famously politically unstable country are obvious. In the May 1999 elections, Bulatovic's SNP and the Serb Peoples' Party together gained 36.4% of the vote and many of those who supported the victorious coalition doubtless wanted internal reform but not the end of the union. Probably no more than a third or so of Montenegrins really want independence. Plainly Djukanovic cannot risk going for it, even if that is his true desire, without precipitating civil war. There is an uneasy stand-off between Podgorica and Belgrade.