

FRANKIE AND BADGER GO TO WAR

'There'll be war, by God,' said Slobodan Milošević. Borisav Jović, Milošević's ally, confidant and Serbia's representative on the Yugoslav federal presidency, begged to differ: 'We won't allow it, by God. We have had enough war and death in two World Wars. Now we shall avoid war by all means!' General Veljko Kadijević, Yugoslavia's defence minister, added his own view: 'There will not be the kind of war which they want . . . but it will be the kind of war which it must be, and that is that we shall not allow them to beat us.'¹

It was 13 February 1990. The alleged conversation took place during an informal chat after a meeting of the federal presidency and is recorded in Jović's diary. Four days later the SDS was born in Knin, later to become the capital of the Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK), the Serbian breakaway state in Croatia.

There may not be a direct connection between the two events, but they showed which way the political wind was blowing. Alarmed by the rising tide of Croatian nationalism and seeing a need for a party to represent Serbian interests in Croatia, psychiatrist Dr Jovan Rašković and others had formed the SDS in time to take part in Croatia's first multi-party elections in May. The party did well in Knin and some other areas of compact Serbian settlement, but overall it did not do particularly well among the republic's Serbian population. However, the election result, the triumph of the HDZ, shocked many Serbs. Rašković was a moderate compared to those leaders who were to follow him. He wanted to assure Serbian rights, not found a separatist state, but then he did not want Croatia to become independent either; he said, 'If the Croatian people want their own state, then the Serbs will decide their own fate.'² Even after the elections he declared, 'This is an uprising of the Serb people . . . but it is an uprising without weapons.'³

As the situation became ever more embittered, Rašković was sidelined. He was discredited after Tudjman leaked a recording of him to the press in which he described the Serbs of Croatia as 'crazy people'. He

was pushed aside by Milan Babić, a power-hungry young politician who before 1990 had been a Knin dentist. It was under his direction that the party began to take action, shifting from talk about Serbian cultural and personal autonomy to territorial demands. The first steps towards implementing this policy was the formation of a league of Serbian municipal councils. This began to give a physical definition to the land claimed by the SDS within Croatia.

Framing the Serbs

Jović's diaries disclose that on 28 June 1990 (the fateful Vidovdan–Kosovo anniversary again) he was already discussing with Milošević not just the 'ejection' of Croatia and Slovenia from Yugoslavia but the ways in which predominantly Serbian-inhabited areas could be carved out of Croatia. He says that Milošević put forward two ideas, the first of which shows that he was already thinking of doing what King Alexander had not done in 1928: that is, effecting the 'amputation' of Croatia while keeping the rest of Yugoslavia, minus Slovenia, but including the Serbian-populated areas of Croatia. Milošević suggested to Jović that the:

'cutting off' of Croatia be carried out in such a way that the municipalities of Lika, Banija and Kordun, which have created an association, should decide in a referendum whether they wanted to stay or leave; second, that the members of the SFRY [Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia] presidency from Slovenia and Croatia be excluded from the vote on this issue, because they do not represent that part of Yugoslavia taking the decision.⁴

Likewise General Kadijević has written that some time after April 1990 the JNA was already considering 'how to defend the right of the peoples which want to live in the mutual state of Yugoslavia'.⁵ Only later were the Serbs and Montenegrins specifically identified as those peoples, because it was not yet clear that both the Bosnian Muslims and the Macedonians would feel compelled to follow the Croatian and Slovene example.

It may be that even at this stage Milošević did not really intend to carry out his plan, perhaps believing that the Croats, as in 1928, could be frightened into staying in a Yugoslavia dominated by himself. What he did know for sure, though, was that arming the Serbs outside Serbia was a good idea. It was, at the very least, a contingency plan. For this the SDS was a suitable vehicle, first in Croatia and then in Bosnia. The reason for this was the military structure of the Territorial Defence (TO)

organisation that had been evolved over the years in Yugoslavia. Based on the Partisan experience, the Yugoslav military had developed the concept of Total National Defence. This meant that, apart from the regular army, each republic had reserve forces to call upon in the event of war. These were to be local forces which, in the event of a breakdown in communications, would be able to continue functioning on their own. For political guidance they would work closely with the leadership of the local Communist Party. By substituting the Communist Party with the SDS, the Serbian leadership was able to make use of the TO system for mass mobilisations of Serbs in what was to become Krajina and then in Bosnia.

Milošević gave the task of laying the groundwork to his most trusted lieutenants. They were Radmilo Bogdanović, Jovica Stanišić and Mihalj Kertes. Until 1991 Bogdanović was Serbia's minister of the interior, after which he remained a powerful figure, mostly behind the scenes. Kertes was a former Yugoslav deputy interior minister who became a Serbian minister without portfolio. Despite some ethnic Hungarian antecedents, he was an SPS deputy and an agent of Serbia's secret police, the SDB, which had played a key role in organising the rallies which had secured the Serbian president's power in Vojvodina. Stanišić was the head of the SDB. Below them were the SDB's two top men, Frano Simatović, known as Frenki, and Radovan Stojičić, known as Badža, a deputy interior minister of Serbia. (Badža, pronounced Badger, is the Serbo-Croatian name for the bully in the Popeye cartoons.)

The SDB could not prepare a Serbian insurrection alone, however. It needed help from within the military. Because of the communist and Yugoslav orientation of many of the top brass, the high command could still not be trusted, so selected generals had to be recruited. They included General Andrija Biorčević, the commander of the Novi Sad Corps, and Colonel Ratko Mladić, the commander of the Knin garrison. A clandestine network was developed. It was not a formal group but rather a small number of people who met over dinner to discuss their plans. It became known as the Vojna Linija – the Military Line – and its main idea was simple. In the words of one source it was: 'Let's arm our people first in Croatia, then Bosnia. So if Croatia and Slovenia want to get out we won't let them take what we take before them.' The plan they evolved over 1990 was called RAM, an acronym which spells out the word frame. It is not known exactly what the letters stand for, but the purpose of the plan was the organisation of the Serbs outside Serbia, taking control of the fledgling SDS parties and the prepositioning of arms and ammunition.

During 1990 Frenki and Badža were frequent visitors to Knin and other areas with predominantly Serbian populations. Their job was to

help organise the SDS, to enhance its emerging police-cum-military capability and to distribute arms. While the driving force behind this organisation was the SDB, there were many other individuals, usually already with a secret police track record, who could be called upon to help. There were many Serbs for example within Croatia's own SDB. There were also individuals within the Yugoslav (hence less trustworthy) SDB, and there was KOS, Yugoslav military counter-intelligence, too.

Goran Hadžić was a typical product of their work. He was a classic man from nowhere who became the leader of the Serbs in eastern Slavonia and for a time Krajina's president. He was often mocked because, in his past life, he had been a warehouse manager. In fact, in the former Yugoslavia, this job was rather powerful because of the opportunities for corruption that it presented. The payoff, though, was that it often went hand in hand with being an SDB informer, which is what Hadžić was. He proved to be a pliant political tool for Milošević's men. Another example of how the preparatory work was done was the despatch to Knin of Brana Crnčević, a poet and columnist for the magazine *Duga*. If, in this capacity, he was not a paid-up SDB agent then he certainly played his role as though he were. His function was to write rousing pieces to help prepare the Serbs for war. Even more important though was Crnčević's role as head of Matica Iseljenika Srbije. This venerable but more or less moribund cultural organisation and publishing house was revived under Slobodan Milošević. It did not however seek out up and coming young poets. Its humanitarian aid department was widely believed to be a cover for dispensing money and arms in preparation for events to come.

This was also the period when Serbian television played its part by the constant screening of documentaries about the Ustashas and Jasenovac, implying all along that President Tudjman was the heir of Ante Pavelić. The effect of all of this was profound and did much to terrify and soften up the Serbs, especially those in the rural Krajina regions. These programmes made them susceptible to the suggestion that their only course of action was to take up arms and so to be prepared – unlike 1941.

Frenki and Badža's first weapons came from police stocks in Serbia and then from the TO and JNA. On the early convoys were Thompson sub-machine guns probably from stocks provided by the US government to Yugoslavia in the 1950s and stored away ever since. They did their job well. By July 1990, only two months after the Croatian elections, Milan Martić, Knin's police chief and the man who built the so-called Krajina Militia, boasted that he could call upon the services of some 12,000 men. The core of this army was Serb policemen in Serbian majority areas, but they were supplemented by TO reservists and

volunteers. By the middle of August, areas around Knin had slipped away from Croatian control. Serbian militias built road-blocks with logs, hence the name of their insurrection – the log revolution. A Croatian attempt to fly police into Knin by helicopter was thwarted when the Yugoslav Air Force was scrambled and the jets warned the policemen to turn back or die.

In March 1991, before fighting had begun in earnest, Milošević outlined his strategy to a gathering of Serbian municipal leaders in Belgrade. His assessment was, first, that although Yugoslavia was doomed the Bosnian Muslims would opt to stay within the new state. He reasoned that, just as the Serbs should stay together in one state, Yugoslavia's Muslims would opt for the same solution. Like the Serbs they were scattered across the republics: not just in Bosnia, but in Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia too. Milošević thus believed that it was in their interests to side with the Serbs in the coming conflict. Logical as this may have been, it proved to be one of the most fundamental errors of his political life. He then told the assembled group that unity was essential because if the Serbs wanted to 'dictate the outcome of events', and that meant frontiers, they had to be powerful. 'And it is always the powerful and never the weak who dictate frontiers.' To this end he explained that reserve police forces had been mobilised and that new forces were being created, that is to say units which 'will give us the capability to defend the interests of our republic and, as well, the interests of the Serbian people outside Serbia. . . . I have been in contact with our people from Knin, from Bosnia, the pressures are enormous.' He then said, 'Are we going to announce on the radio everything that we intend to do? I don't think we could do that. And if we have to fight, well, we'll fight! But, I hope that they will not be so stupid as to fight us. Because if we don't know how to work well and manage the economy at least we know how to fight well.'⁶

During this period neither the Croats nor the Slovenes had been idle. After the elections in Slovenia and Croatia, the JNA had confiscated most of their TO weapons, so they had had to begin clandestine rearming operations. General Martin Špegelj, the former head of the JNA's Fifth Military Region, was put in charge of building Croatian forces. He began with the police in June 1990 and at the end of the year formed the National Guard Corps, which was to become the nucleus of the Croatian Army. At the beginning of 1991, he also began to organise civil defence units. Arms were bought in five different countries, including Hungary, which delivered a large consignment of Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifles. The Croats also came into possession of considerable quantities of arms after they laid siege to JNA barracks, particularly in Zagreb, Varaždin and Djakovo, in mid-September. But

these preparations and military successes were not enough to counter the work already done by Serbia's SDB, the JNA and the SDS. They had access to the arms and ammunition of one of the best-armed states in Europe, and these would stand them in good stead.

In an attempt to disarm the Croats completely before any fighting began, General Kadijević demanded in January 1991 that the JNA be given the authorisation to disarm 'illegal paramilitaries'. As the collective presidency still functioned, this had to be debated and the Croats argued that their units were legal while the only illegal paramilitaries were those of the Serbs in Krajina. In a singularly spectacular coup, Milošević then had shown on television a tape of General Špegelj that had been made by KOS in which he discussed arms and a supposed plan to murder Serbian army officers. Its effect was to terrify. Many Yugoslavs, who had up until now dismissed the possibility of war, realised for the first time that conflict was inevitable.

Over the months that followed public wrangling continued between the republics. We now know, however, that a tacit secret deal was struck in January 1991 between Serbia and Slovenia. Milošević signalled to Kučan that the Slovenes were free to leave Yugoslavia so long as they did not oppose Serbia's plans for the rest of the country. According to Kučan:

It was obvious at that meeting that the Serbs would not insist on keeping Slovenia within Yugoslavia. . . . We Slovenes said that we wanted the right to have our own state. Milošević said the Serbs wanted the recognition of this right for themselves, too – that is all Serbs in Yugoslavia in one state. My reply, of course, was that the Serbs also had this right, but in the same way as the Slovenes, without hurting the rights of other nations. Milošević replied 'Yes of course, this is clear' and with that we flew home to Ljubljana.⁷

This was the rub, of course. The Yugoslav constitution was, as we have seen, unclear on the question of secession. Although the *republics* were the declared subjects of the 1974 constitution, the constitution itself provided that 'The nations of Yugoslavia, proceeding from the right of every nation to self-determination, including the right to secession . . . have . . . united in a federal republic of free and equal nations and nationalities and founded a socialist federal community.'⁸ As Slovenia had no native-born minorities and there were no pockets of Slovenes outside the republic, the issue was clear-cut: republic and nation were the same thing. By contrast, Milošević argued that the Croats had a right to self-determination, but that they could not take Serbs out of Yugoslavia against their will. The problem, as Kučan implied, was that Serbian self-determination was not possible without

hurting the other nations, mainly the Croats and Muslims among whom they lived. Likewise Croatian and Muslim self-determination without hurting others was also impossible. Determined to ignore this, however, Milošević and Tudjman pressed on with their preparations for conflict. Indeed, they went further. In March 1991 they met in Karadjordjevo, the old royal hunting lodge in Vojvodina, to discuss the partition of Bosnia. They agreed in principle but failed to reach any firm decisions.⁹

Milošević's attention was now momentarily distracted by events at home. On 9 March riots rocked central Belgrade as student demonstrators took to the streets demanding his removal. Milošević was shaken, but he put tanks on to the streets and quickly restored order. At the time the large demonstrations, in which the opposition leader Vuk Drašković played a major role, appeared to signal that Serbia was unstable and that anger against the regime was welling up beneath the surface. In fact it proved just the opposite. Demonstrations in the years that followed always proved ineffectual and rallied mostly the same metropolitan Belgrade middle classes who saw Milošević not as a nationalist or even as a political opportunist but rather as an unrepentant communist.

With very few exceptions these demonstrations were not directed against the war and most opposition leaders such as Drašković could never make up their mind whether Milošević's greatest crime was starting the war or losing it, or whether to oppose him from an anti-nationalist standpoint or from a hyper-nationalist one. Drašković, who eventually came to oppose the war, originally garnered support with his public espousal of the old Chetnik cause, the adulation of Draža Mihailović and the drawing of lines on maps designed to show how big Serbia really should be.

With events moving quickly now, a fateful meeting of the presidency was held between 12 and 15 March. General Kadijević, together with Serbia, demanded that the JNA effectively be allowed to take power. The presidency failed to agree, but on 16 March Milošević declared:

Yugoslavia has entered into the final phase of its agony. The Presidency . . . has not functioned for a long time, and the illusion of the functioning of the Presidency of Yugoslavia and its powers, which in reality do not exist, has since last night finally expired.

The Republic of Serbia will no longer recognize a single decision of the Presidency under the existing circumstances because it would be illegal.¹⁰

Simultaneously the by now self-proclaimed SAO – Serbian Autonomous Region – of Krajina declared its independence from

Croatia, although stating that it remained within Yugoslavia. In this fashion its emerging armed forces could claim to remain under the control of the authorities in Belgrade.

After the meeting on 15 March the JNA declared that it would consider what measures to take after its recommendations aimed at preventing inter-ethnic armed conflict and civil war were voted down by the presidency with a majority of votes'.¹¹ General Kadijević later revealed that that meant organising the 'protection and defence of the Serbian people outside Croatia and the gathering of the JNA within the borders of the future Yugoslavia'.¹² More specifically it meant the 'intensive organisation and preparation of Serbian rebels in Croatia' and the preparation of a unified operation 'to defeat the Croatian Army'.¹³

In his memoirs, *My View of the Break-Up: Army without a State*, Kadijević is unclear about when exactly the army ceased to be a Yugoslav one and became a Serbian one, but in an interview he said, 'There were no precise dates, because decisions were ripening with events.' However, he added that, after the fateful March presidency meeting, 'it was definitely clear' that from then on 'it would be hard to preserve Yugoslavia in her existing borders, and those who wanted Yugoslavia in those borders were not making the decisions'.¹⁴ In other words, Milošević, was making the decisions and Kadijević was going to follow them. After this meeting there was no question that the Serbian-dominated top brass still believed a Yugoslavia from Ljubljana to Skopje could survive. A political and psychological Rubicon had been crossed.

The descent into all-out war was gradual. Already in February armed Serbs had taken over the police station in Pakrac, a town in western Slavonia, in which the Serbs were the largest community. They were ejected by Croatian police. That same month men from Milan Martić's Krajina Militia took over the Plitvice National Park, a region of massive tumbling waterfalls which, in 1990, had attracted 800,000 tourists. On 31 March the Croatian police attempted to reassert their authority. In the ensuing fire-fight one Croat and one Serb died, the first casualties of war. Most ominously, though, the Battle of Plitvice was to establish a precedent for the months to come. In the name of separating the belligerent ethnic groups, the JNA moved in, in force, to Plitvice. The plan was simple and was followed throughout Croatia. It was that Serbian rebels, or even better Croatian police, would begin a fight and then the JNA would move in to separate the parties. In what was to become a typical explanation of what was happening, General Andrija Rašeta, the JNA commander of the Plitvice operation, said that his men were 'protecting neither side', that they were there to prevent 'ethnic confrontations' and that they intended only to remain 'as long as

necessary'. In fact they were moving in to establish a western Serb frontier. It was not only the army which was adept at lying. The SDB's Goran Hadžić was caught by the Croats in Plitvice and beaten up. In his home village of Pačetin in eastern Slavonia his sister Goranka Hadžić told anyone who would listen that innocent Goran had just happened to be 'passing through Plitvice' when he was caught. But it helped to frighten eastern Slavonia's Serbs. Barricades were thrown up around Pačetin and Goranka declared, 'the Ustashas are all around us . . . but we're ready for action, we'll fight'.

Milan Martić said, 'We've done our bit, now it's up to Milošević to keep his promise and supply us with arms.' He should have said 'more arms'.

The fighting in Plitvice also set the pattern of misery. The Serb who died was called Rajko Vukadinović and he came from the nearby town of Titova Korenica. A butcher, he had been brought up in the shadow of the genocide of the Second World War. Ten minutes' walk from his little shop were the walls of the old Serbian Orthodox church destroyed during the war but never rebuilt. Standing opposite the cemetery, they were a mute reminder to Serbs that they could not remain passive in the event of a new Croatian threat. Or so it seemed to them. What was not clear to them was how intransigent politicians were pushing people into war. The SDB's involvement was clandestine, the arming of Croatia likewise. But the increasingly hate-filled rhetoric was encouraging a climate of fear and violence which was taking on a life of its own. This was exactly what the SDB had envisaged.

In the rain a black flag of mourning and a Serbian flag hung limply over Vukadinović's shop while memorial candles spluttered in the damp. Across the road the town's hotel was already full of frightened and angry Serbian refugees who had been chased from their homes in outlying villages by local Croats working, the newcomers claimed, together with the police. One woman said, 'We are almost more afraid of the people we used to call our neighbours than their special police units.' Another woman, Koviljka Mirić, said, 'In 1941 it was almost the same. We all fled the village and from the age of six I spent three years living in the woods with my family. It seems as though it is going to happen again.'

And of course it was not just Serbs who were beginning to flee. The Croats too had their memories of the Chetniks, and so they too were either chased from their homes or ran in terror as Serbian militias backed by the JNA moved to consolidate power in the areas they wanted. This was a planned Serbian attempt to seize control of areas, mostly but not all of which had a predominantly Serbian population frightened by the prospect of Croatian independence. This led directly to

war as the Croats mobilised to defend their frontiers. It was the logical conclusion of the unresolved debate about whether nations or republics had the right to self-determination.

A week after Vukadinović's death, Croatian civilians were being invited to enroll in 'Voluntary Units of National Protection', whose slogan was 'Everything for Croatia! All for Croatia!'

After Plitvice the action soon moved to eastern Croatia, where conflict began around Serbian villages along the Serbian-Croatian border. Barricades were thrown up, most notably around the village of Borovo Selo, close to the Danube town of Vukovar. The Serbs of Borovo Selo, who apart from their own hunting rifles had been armed by the SDB, had set up formidable defences. These included barricades of lorries, felled trees, rubble and oil on the road, which armed village guards said they would set alight if the Croatian police attempted to enter the village. The events in the village were also to introduce a new element into the conflict. It was at Borovo Selo that paramilitary forces armed, organised and sent by the Serbian authorities themselves made their first appearance. The most prominent was that of the radical nationalist Vojislav Šešelj.

Dr Mladen Jović, a leader of the Borovo uprising, waved his pistol about as he explained that the barricades would stay up until either 'we are incorporated into Serbia or we die . . . it's Serbia or death'. He also expounded what was becoming, in the minds of the Croatian Serbs, the *raison d'être* of their rebellion: 'It seems as though Croatian leaders are just the same as the fascists who murdered the Serbs here during the war . . . we don't want to be ruled by such men.'

In the middle of April, Gojko Sušak, later to be the Croatian defence minister, led a group of men who fired three missiles at Borovo Selo.¹⁵ Four Croatian policemen tried to get in on the night of 1 May and were shot at. The next day a group of Croatian policemen drove into an ambush. Twelve of them died in the centre of Borovo Selo along with five Serbs. It was a watershed. In the subsequent propaganda war, the Croats claimed that the Serbs had gouged the eyes out of a young Croatian policeman. The Serbs denied it. However, the story of the eyes had its effect. The JNA moved into the village. Peaceful pigs snouted around the tanks, but there was no disguising that something was changing. The links that bound ordinary people together were cracking under pressure. One villager said that his best friend was a Croat: 'A few days ago he called me and said that if a political settlement was not found all Serbs would be killed. I cannot consider him a friend any more. Friendship between Croats and Serbs is now impossible. As a people we must separate.'

It was the type of conversation that was to be repeated a million times over the next year. But, importantly, some friendships were

nonetheless maintained in the most difficult of circumstances, even if people had to be discreet about them.

Goodbye Slovenia, Hello Croatia

Fed up with the eternal wrangling and desperate to desert the sinking ship, Slovenia declared independence on 25 June. The celebrations were muted. Within forty-eight hours the JNA moved to reassert control over the country's international border. Some believe that this was a charade, that for some reason it seemed to be necessary to be seen to be 'doing something'. In fact, as Milošević and Kučan had already agreed that Slovenia should leave the old federation, it now looks as if it was some form of blunder: if Milošević did not oppose Slovene secession, why send in the army? The answer appears to be that, although he had acted to take control of as many of the structures of the state as he possibly could, he still did not have complete power. It was Ante Marković, the Yugoslav prime minister, a Croat who still believed that Yugoslavia could survive, who ordered the troops to move. While the borders were successfully retaken hundreds of confused and weeping conscripts found themselves blocked on the roads by the Slovene TO. Forty-four JNA troops died in this ten-day 'war' plus a handful of Slovenes. Marković then tried to distance himself from the army's actions. On 30 June General Kadijević explained to Serbian leaders the options that lay before them. Later he wrote: 'The Army did not want to stay in Slovenia and be insulted. The only solution was to leave . . . the question was how to do that.'¹⁶

According to Kadijević, the army top brass wanted to defeat the Slovene 'armed formations' before leaving. However, Borisav Jović pointed out that, as the Serbs saw no reason to oppose Slovene secession, it might as well pull out without further ado. This solution was opposed by the Croats because they knew that the retreat of the JNA would really be tantamount to a redeployment in Croatia and Bosnia. Over the next few weeks and months there was much coming and going as European Community foreign ministers attempted to secure a diplomatic solution. What they did not know was that Milošević had everything planned in advance. He made fools of them, using them as messengers. The army was going to leave Slovenia anyway and carry on the job that it had already begun, which was the carving out of a Greater Serbian border.

The meeting of 30 June was simply the last nail in Yugoslavia's coffin. The fact that the army had got involved in fighting in Slovenia was at the time seen by some as proof that nostalgic communist generals were desperate to preserve the old country. In fact it was

nothing of the kind. Many people were of course deeply confused and loyalties were divided, but in the end men like Kadijević had already made the decision that as Yugoslavia was dying they had little choice but to seize as much of it as they could for the Serbs. The Slovene fighting, then, was not a charade or a last-ditch gamble, but simply part of the idiotic chaos in which the state died. It was avoidable because Milošević and Kučan had already decided on the secession of Slovenia, but as is the nature with such tacit deals nothing is written down, few people know and so confusion results. In Kadijević's version of events the JNA did 'not attack Slovenia':

we just wanted to re-establish control of the borders, and we did that. What happened was that all Slovenia attacked us, not just the Slovene Army. Then the Supreme Command did not suggest keeping Slovenia under conditions of terror. They said why should Serbia and Montenegro send troops to keep Slovenia only to leave it later – then it was clear to me that this was the definitive end of Yugoslavia. From that point on we moved to the second concept of creating the new Yugoslavia. When the Croats started to attack the Serbian people in Croatia we co-operated with the TO in those areas and gave the people weapons and so on . . . as for borders there was a clear idea, that is that they should be where there was a majority of Serbian people. If Croatia wanted to go that was okay but they could not take the Serbs with them.¹⁷

As more and more incidents were deliberately created in Croatia by Serbian militias, the JNA took up position to solidify the new frontier. Meanwhile with Croatian, Slovenian, Muslim and Macedonian officers and men streaming out of the army, many believed it would collapse. Far from it. In fact the JNA encouraged them to go. In this way the Serbs inherited a Serbian Army in all but name.

As Croatia slipped towards war, there were many events and dates that, at the time, seemed tremendously significant. There was for example the quarrel over whether Stipe Mesić, the Croatian delegate on the collective federal presidency, should be allowed to become its president, a post which should have been his thanks to Yugoslavia's system of automatically rotating jobs among the republics. In retrospect it seems incredible that such a lot of media and foreign diplomatic interest should have been generated by what was, by then, an irrelevant question. Given that Milošević had decided to carve out a Serbian territory from Croatia, that Croatia and Slovenia had decided on full independence and that there was no will to find an equitable solution or compromise, war was inevitable. It is easy to say this with hindsight, but at the time there still remained a hope that Yugoslavia

was run by responsible people who knew what they were doing and who had the best interests of their people at heart. Unfortunately this was not the case.

In public the presidents of the six republics were still arguing about whether some form of Yugoslavia could be preserved. Milošević wanted a 'modern federation', which was code for Serbian domination. Kučan and Tudjman wanted 'an asymmetric federation', which was code for independence while still enjoying the benefits of Yugoslavia without paying for them. Alija Izetbegović of Bosnia and Kiro Gligorov of Macedonia argued for a compromise, but having little political clout they were ignored. The reality was the RAM plan, the arming of Croatia, the firebombing of Serbian shops and houses in Split and other Croatian towns and the same treatment meted out to Croats remaining in Knin and other areas now under the authority of the Krajina Militia.

You Must Have Bloodshed to Make a Country

On 12 May 1991 Serbs in Krajina were invited to vote on whether they wanted to become part of the Republic of Serbia 'and thus remain in Yugoslavia with Serbia, Montenegro and others that want to preserve Yugoslavia'. It was one of many Serbian referendums that were to punctuate the political landscape over the next few years. It was a farce dressed up as democracy, by which people who had been bombarded by a single media message were herded to the polls to turn in the requisite popular mandate for the authorities. There was never any public debate on the question and it could be assumed that if you were not going to vote as the authorities wanted then you were not a Serb and hence had no right still to be living where you were.

Forming the backdrop to the Krajina poll were the two types of shop in Knin. There were those which were festooned with Yugoslav and Serbian flags and those, owned by Croats, which had recently been smashed and looted. The names of towns on sign-posts under Croatian government control had been spray-painted out. At polling station number four the niceties of democracy, such as private polling booths, had been dispensed with and replaced by a cosy atmosphere of fresh garlic and biscuits served to voters under the Serbian flag. Not so cosy for everyone of course. Jelena, for example, a girl about to finish high school, talked of her discomfort and fear. According to Radio Knin, Croatian doctors and nurses had been 'planning to kill Serbian patients'. Her friend Valentina said that local Croats had not been fleeing town because they were being bombed out but because 'they are organised. Many of them had guns.' Passing a looted watch shop, she

said of its owner, 'He had a radio with which to interfere with the broadcasts of Radio Knin.' In such times it seems that people are simply willing to surrender all critical faculties and be led by the mad simply because it is the easy option.

During this period, Krajina's all-important propaganda chief was Lazar Macura. He was deputy mayor of Knin, an English teacher and director of Knin's radio station. He was in ebullient mood and clearly believed everything he said. With Milošević, the SDB and the JNA underpinning Krajina's rebellion, however, this was not so naive at the time. It only seems so in retrospect, as it becomes clear that Macura and the 600,000 Serbs who made up 12 per cent of Croatia's population were, to use Lenin's phrase, 'useful idiots' who could be discarded when they were no longer useful to Milošević. On the day of the referendum Macura opened up a map to show off the vast areas of Croatia he claimed for the Serbs, saying, 'I don't expect war because the Croats would have no chance of winning. . . . You must have bloodshed to make a country.' In these last words he encapsulated the arrogance of the entire Serbian leadership, who assumed that after a knock-out blow neither the Croats nor Bosnia's Muslims would fight. How they could have miscalculated so badly about the people with whom they had lived for so long remains a mystery.

A week later, under leaden skies, the rest of Croatia went to the polls to vote for a 'sovereign and independent' state. It was a surprisingly sombre affair, contrasting with the festive mood in Knin. Like Krajina's poll a vast majority voted as requested by the authorities. There was something unsettling about the affair; it was not just that war was coming, it was a deeper sense of unease. Irena Tomić, a Croatian student, said, 'The people from Krajina are making Croats hate their ordinary Serbian neighbours and friends. This morning, very early, I was woken up by shouting in the street. People were going past my window shouting "NDH! NDH!" It made my flesh creep.'

We've Been Here Before!

Until 2 January 1992, when a ceasefire was signed in Sarajevo, the war raged in Croatia. It was a dirty war in the republic which almost incidentally had declared independence a few hours before Slovenia. Using their overwhelming firepower, the Serbs managed to carve out between a quarter and one-third of Croatia's landmass and hold it until, abandoned by Serbia, it was reconquered by Croats in 1995.

Incidents such as the ones at Plitvice and Borovo Selo multiplied, and soon the army gave up any pretence of being a neutral force. The JNA was deployed massively in the east, where it bombarded and eventually

flattened the town of Vukovar. It also blundered into a siege of Dubrovnik, the magnificent medieval and renaissance port known to millions of westerners who had holidayed there over the years. It was to be the worst public relations disaster for the Serbs during the entire war with Croatia.

Following a plan devised by General Špegelj, the still lightly armed Croatian forces besieged JNA barracks in Zagreb and other towns well away from areas that the Serbs intended to capture for themselves. Maddened by this impudence the JNA responded massively in vulnerable areas such as the tapering southern tip of Croatia. Here troops were wheeled in from Montenegro to capture the strategic Prevlaka Peninsula commanding the mouth of the magnificent Kotor Bay in Montenegro, which was to become the new home of the Yugoslav Navy. It was the first week of October 1991. The troops were mature reservists, not young conscripts, who had been drafted into the Sava Kovačević Fifth Proletarian Brigade. They came from the hard industrial town of Nikšić and the war they fought came to typify the arrogance of their commanders and the way in which the Serbian leadership believed that by fighting a war just as you had always done you would win. Although General Kadijević later claimed that regional military commanders had disobeyed his orders and crossed a line on the map that he had expressly told them not to, it only goes to show that the Serbian leadership were so incompetent that they could not have done a better job for Croatia's image if they had been paid to do so.

The Montenegrins went to war in the firm belief that this was something that you did once a generation and that as soon as the fighting was done you went on a looting spree and then returned home. Under the benign gaze of their officers, this was exactly what they proceeded to do. They were happy to remind visitors that they had been this way before. 'You don't understand,' they clamoured, 'our fathers fought the Italians, the Germans and the Croats. Our grandfathers fought the Turks and the Albanians.' And in 1806, in exactly the same place, some of their ancestors had fought the French too. In alliance with the Russians they had besieged the then French-occupied Dubrovnik, failed to take it, plundered its surroundings and stomped off home. 'All the houses round town were razed to the ground,' wrote Luigi Villari in a history of Dubrovnik published in 1914, 'the villas of the rich nobles were plundered, the more valuable contents being seized by the Russian officers, and the rest left to the Montenegrins . . . Bosnians and even Turks, who had swarmed down in the hope of loot. The inhabitants who did not get away in time were murdered and even tortured.'¹⁸

Jabbing the air, the new generation shouted that it was thanks to Britain that the Montenegrin Army had been forced to abandon

Shkodër, the northern Albanian port, in 1913. Having sacrificed thousands of men during their seven-month siege of the town, the statesmen of Europe ordered the 'Serbian Sparta' to withdraw. It refused and so an international naval blockade was ordered. Reluctantly the Montenegrins turned Shkodër over to the British Royal Navy in mid-May 1913. What the angry Montenegrins of 1991 forgot to mention was another factor which had helped prise their army out of Shkodër – a six-million-franc loan-cum-bribe to King Nikola.

Seven months after the beginning of the 1991 siege of Dubrovnik, the UN imposed sanctions on Serbia and Montenegro. The combination of this and the policing of the UN arms embargo on former Yugoslavia meant that history, at least in part, began to repeat itself. A latter-day naval blockade, again involving the Royal Navy, was duly installed.

While goats and cattle may have been the prize pillage after the 1806 siege, this was no longer the case in 1991. On the day of a ceasefire, troops drew back their tanks and some men settled down to roast lamb on the spit in the traditional fashion. Meanwhile, down the road from Dubrovnik airport, their friends gingerly trundled baggage trolleys marked 'Donated by Thomson Holidays'. With their AK-47s balancing on the top basket, their loot consisted of duty-free cigarettes, whisky, brandy, chocolate, soft drinks, perfume, toys and, in one case, a Barbie doll. Despite this, a valiant effort was still made to try and convince sceptical visitors that what they were really doing was fighting the just reunited German 'Fourth Reich' and the Croatian fascist phoenix. 'And what do you think of this then?' demanded a soldier presenting a crinkled brown NDH-era banknote he had found, presumably while looting. 'What can we conclude about a man who kept this hidden for fifty years?'

In another scene from the beginning of the siege, a group of soldiers clustered around a rocket unit whooping with joy as houses exploded into dust. A soldier wiggled a joy-stick, pressed a button and the lethal 'wire-guided' rocket shot off, dancing down over the rocky hillside contours like a demented firework. They were aiming at houses on a bay just south of the ancient city. As each home exploded they would all point at different buildings yelling, 'Hit that one!' or 'Take that one out!' as if this was the greatest video game ever invented.

On the same day the mood turned sombre and angry after a soldier was killed. Five Croats were captured and dragged up the hill, bloodied and frightened. One was barefoot, one grey haired and all in civilian clothes. Jostling them, the soldiers demanded their immediate execution. Simultaneously, and as if in a different world, three trembling pensioners were escorted away from danger. With one hand and the utmost care a soldier helped guide an old lady wearing a little straw hat. In his other hand he carried a modest prize. It was a picture of Franjo Tudjman.

Afterwards it was burned by a girl soldier. The fate of the five Croats was not revealed to outsiders, but the omens did not look good.

After the bay was taken, the soldiers closed in on Dubrovnik itself. It was hard to know how to explain the sheer lack of Croatian defenders: was it because the republic was so poorly prepared for war or because the authorities were luring the JNA into the trap that it proved to be. Young Croatian guardsmen set up mortar positions just outside the walls of the old city and hard Hercegovinian warriors fought rocket duels with the Montenegrins over the ancient walls. The world, watching on television, was transfixed. Here it seemed as though the JNA had stooped to the lowest depths, that it was about to destroy the 'pearl of the Adriatic', one of the greatest architectural and historical jewels of the Mediterranean. Several shells fell on the old city, but the damage here, as opposed to the modern outskirts of town, was never as bad as the Croats made it out to be. Spectacular film was made one sunset of columns of smoke appearing to rise from within the walls. 'They are destroying it stone by stone!' shrieked the Croats. 'The Croats are lighting tyres!' cried the JNA. Neither was true. The JNA had hit a car park by the walls which burned with an abundance of black smoke.

Strangely the Serbian leadership never seemed to realise that they had fallen into a trap and that with every shot they were turning the Serbs into international pariahs. It was too late anyway. They could not pull back while there was fighting because this would be celebrated by the Croats as a morale-boosting military victory. Next came Vukovar and then Sarajevo. The JNA and then the Krajina and Bosnian Serb armies believed that they were fighting a traditional Balkan war. They consistently failed to understand that since 1941 an extra dimension had been added to war – international opinion as guided by television and the media.

Rusty Sholehorns

It was not only the Serbs who made mistakes. One of the greatest mistakes the Croats ever made was to let Željko Ražnatović, also known as Arkan, slip through their fingers. The leader of one of the most feared, brutal and efficient paramilitaries to emerge during the war, Arkan was arrested by the Croatian police in November 1990. He had been in Croatia, allegedly discussing the logistics of Serbia's clandestine arming of the Krajina rebellion. Caught by the police with a car full of arms and ammunition he was tried, convicted and released pending an appeal. He told the Croatian court that he had been in the area out of 'pure curiosity'. Having fled back to the safety of Belgrade, Arkan taunted the Croats, 'You will never catch me alive!'

Goran Vuković, an infamous gangster later to be gunned down on a Belgrade street corner, reminisced about the good old days when he and Arkan and a number of others had spent their youth touring western Europe:

Of all of us Arkan robbed the most banks: He walked into them almost like they were self-service stores. No one can quarrel with that fact about him. I don't know about politics, but as far as robbery is concerned, he was really unsurpassed. That is all he has done his entire life. Banks were his speciality, as well as escapes from prison. He managed to escape from the same prison two or three times. He even escaped from the Germans.¹⁹

In 1994 a UN report identified eighty-three paramilitary groups fighting in Bosnia and Croatia, of which fifty-six were Serb, thirteen Croat and fourteen Bosnian Muslim.²⁰ On the Serbian side, most were small and, although murderous, not particularly significant. Two, however, deserve special mention. They are Arkan's Tigers and the Chetniks of extreme nationalist politician Vojislav Šešelj. These groups played major roles as shock troops of 'ethnic cleansing' both in the autumn and winter of 1991 in eastern Slavonia and at the beginning of the war in Bosnia. The reason they became a necessity was twofold. First, Arkan's men especially were used as a form of brutal commando force whose incentive to venture where others feared to tread was the promise of loot. Šešelj's men were also fighting for pillage but, less specialised than Arkan's troops, they were used to make up dwindling numbers in the JNA. This was because, as the war in Croatia ground on, the number of desertions and failures to report for duty rose dramatically. Tens of thousands of young men, especially from Belgrade, began to escape abroad rather than go to the front. As the military police hunted for those that remained, they slept in different places every night until such time as the authorities began to lose interest in them. In eastern Serbia, reserve units began to mutiny in protest against going to Vukovar, and General Kadijević complained that many of those units which reached the front soon 'abandoned it'. In the most famous desertion, a man drove his armoured personnel carrier away from the front and down the motorway, and refused to come to a stop until he reached the federal parliament building in the centre of Belgrade. Serbian nationalism had lost its appeal in the mud and gore of eastern Slavonia.

That Arkan had been arrested by the Croats in November 1990 proves that Milošević's various secret services not only foresaw a role for the former bank-robber but knew him well. His record was, as Vuković noted, absolutely spectacular. He had robbed banks in Sweden and been

convicted of armed robbery in Belgium, Holland and Germany, but had always managed to escape from prison. The Italian police still want him for an alleged murder in 1974. Clearly Arkan was no ordinary thief. Born in 1950, he was the son of an air force officer. A teenage delinquent, he devoted himself early to a life of crime. It is believed that his father, despairing of his son, asked contacts inside the Yugoslav Federal Secretariat for Internal Affairs (SSUP) if they could sort the boy out. Apparently they could. The SSUP ran an espionage network for which Ražnatović, when not robbing banks, is widely reputed to have worked as a hitman carrying out political assassinations abroad. It was during this time that Arkan picked up his nickname which was derived from one of his early forged foreign passports. He also came to the attention of Stane Dolanc, the head of the SSUP. With a powerful patron like this, Arkan's multiple prison escapes begin to look less remarkable.

Arkan returned to Belgrade in the 1980s, where he kept up his criminal activities and his work for the SSUP. While officially a simple pastry-shop owner, he suddenly emerged at the end of 1990 as the head of Delije, the official fan club of Belgrade's Red Star football team. Until Arkan was put in charge, the fans had become increasingly prone to uncontrolled outbursts of nationalist chanting. Milošević's men needed to control this. They did not want any surplus energy being harnessed by Vuk Drašković's nationalist and opposition Serbian Renewal Party. Simultaneously, but rather more discreetly, Arkan founded the Serbian Volunteer Guard, known as the Tigers. The core of this new militia was none other than a select group of young men from Delije. 'We fans . . . trained without weapons,' said Arkan, which may or may not be true. 'I insisted on discipline from the beginning. You know our fans, they are noisy, they like to drink, to joke about. I stopped all that in one go, I made them cut their hair, shave regularly, not drink – and so it began the way it should be.'²¹

Arkan's contacts were Radmilo Bogdanović, Frenki and Badža. The Tigers set up a training camp in Erdut in Serb-held eastern Slavonia from which they fought and co-ordinated their pillage. (All the best Belgrade restaurants suddenly began serving Erdut wine.) Later, Arkan was to enter politics and he served a term as a Kosovo deputy, elected on a hardline Serbian nationalist ticket. Many voters believed that he would carry out his threats and be as efficient at driving out Albanians from the province as he had been at expelling Croats from eastern Slavonia. No such luck. They were disappointed to find that Arkan's main interest in Kosovo was grabbing a slice of the black market which the local Albanian mafias were forced to share with him. After the Croatian ceasefire, Arkan's thousand-odd troops seemed at a loose end, but with the outbreak of fighting in Bosnia they were to play a vitally important role on the Serbian side in the first few weeks of the war.

Vojislav Šešelj's background could not have been more different. Born in 1950, he had been a brilliant Bosnian Serb student, the youngest PhD in Yugoslavia (his thesis was on Marxism and guerrilla warfare), and in the early 1980s he was a teacher at Sarajevo University. In 1984 he was arrested and, convicted of counter-revolutionary activities on the basis of an unpublished manuscript found in his desk drawer, sentenced to eight years in prison. According to Šešelj the manuscript advocated not just a multi-party system for Yugoslavia but the country's complete reorganisation. Instead of six republics he proposed a large and dominating Serbian republic plus Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia. Thus Bosnia, dominated he believed by closet Islamic fundamentalists and the home of the 'bogus' Bosnian Muslim nation, was to be abolished. So was Montenegro, home of another 'invented' nation. He served twenty-two months in Zenica jail, where he was reputed to have been tortured. In Belgrade he became a *cause célèbre* among the small group of human rights activists clustered around Dobrica Ćosić. After his release many began to believe that his treatment in jail had left him less than sane. He became extremely close to Vuk Drašković and in 1990, in the run-up to the first multi-party elections in December, they formed a political party together. They fell out, however, and Šešelj then organised the Serbian Chetnik Movement. He came fourth in the presidential poll.

Although at first on the fringes of politics, Šešelj, with his brand of extreme nationalism, began to attract more and more support. Milošević's men noticed him and concluded that he could be used to mop up the hardline nationalist vote. Thus they 'parachuted' him into parliament at a by-election in Rakovica, an industrial suburb of Belgrade, in June 1991. The Chetnik Movement, now renamed the Serbian Radical Party, was given a huge amount of prime-time television coverage and in this way Milošević boosted Šešelj from relative obscurity. In return Šešelj supported Milošević. But it was not just political support that was required. The men from the Military Line also had plans for Šešelj and his wild men of the extreme right.

After the fatal shootings in Borovo Selo at the beginning of May 1991, Šešelj boasted that his men had been present. Not only that but he helped fan the fires of hatred by joining the gruesome debate about the gouged-out eyes. He claimed that the eyes of the Croatian policeman, which he said were hanging from the sockets by their stalks, had been forced out by the pressure exerted by a bullet from a Thompson sub-machine gun penetrating the brain. Asked on a popular Serbian television show if his Chetniks, like their Second World War namesakes, still killed with the knife he replied no, they had graduated to rusty shoehorns which they intended to use on Croatian eyeballs. 'It was black humour,' he protested afterwards.

Later Radmilo Bogdanović was to boast of the connection between the Serbian secret services and the seminal events in Borovo. 'If we had not equipped our Serbs, who knows how they would have fared in the attack by the Croatian National Guard?'²²

Unlike Arkan's disciplined, clean-shaven 'kill 'n' loot' shock troops, Šešelj's men were often drunk and shabby. Nevertheless, Šešelj was frequently seen on television and this, combined with Milošević's patronage, meant that his party began to grow powerful. The result was that he started to believe that he could command power in his own right and that he was even strong enough to challenge Milošević. He was wrong. In September 1993 Milošević's SPS turned on him. With the Serbs vilified the world over as war criminals, it was decided that Šešelj would make the perfect scapegoat. A party statement called him 'the personification of violence and primitivity' and accused him of 'war crimes, abetting war profiteers and criminals'. It also said that he was involved in 'crimes committed by paramilitary groups against Muslim, Croat and Serb civilians'. Šešelj then became a non-person, hardly ever seen again on state television or quoted in the pro-government press. Consequently his support began to wither.

There is little doubt that all the charges levelled against Šešelj are true. He was frequently arrested and charged with minor infractions such as causing an affray and spitting at the speaker of parliament. However, it is clear why Šešelj was never formally charged with the crimes he was accused of by the SPS. The reason was simple and Šešelj is willing to tell anyone prepared to listen:

Milošević organised everything. We gathered the volunteers and he gave us a special barracks, Bujanj Potok, all our uniforms, arms, military technology and buses. All our units were always under the command of the Krajina or [Bosnian Serb] Republika Srpska Army or the JNA. Of course I don't believe he signed anything, these were verbal orders. None of our talks was taped and I never took a paper and pencil when I talked with him. His key people were the commanders. Nothing could happen on the Serbian side without Milošević's order or his knowledge.

While Arkan's men came under the command of the Ministry of the Interior, Šešelj's lot, by his own admission, were under the wing of the JNA, along with a cluster of smaller paramilitaries. By the end of 1993 veterans of the Croatian campaign were complaining that the authorities were trying to duck their responsibilities when it came to invalid pensions, orphans, widows and so on. Colonel Milan Milivojević, president of the War Veterans Association, told the magazine *Vreme* that his organisation was:

a non-party association which rallies all soldiers equally – JNA . . . the Territorial Defence, as well as all sorts of volunteers. All volunteers were armed and sent to the front by the JNA and the State Security of the Serbian Interior Ministry; they all served in formations under the direct command of the JNA, the Republic of Serbian Krajina and the Serb Republic in Bosnia, or received orders from officers of these armies in the field. We now meet resistance in spite of these facts. The state of Serbia is now trying to prove that the Serbs have never been at war because of the phrase of one man, Slobodan Milošević, which reads *Serbia is not at war*. All other officials, who are nothing but executioners of his policies, seem to fear talking to us. . . . We've sent three letters to Slobodan Milošević, but he didn't find it necessary to see us.²³

Half-Time

After Vukovar fell in November 1991, both the Croats and Milošević were willing to listen to the entreaties of foreign statesmen to stop fighting. Tudjman feared that if he did not stop the war he would lose more territory. It was better to call a halt until such time as his army was ready to retake the lost territories. As for Milošević, the JNA was plagued with increasing mutinies and desertions, but the Serbs had managed to secure almost everything they wanted in Croatia. It was better to stop while ahead of the game. The United Nations had appointed Cyrus Vance, a former US secretary of state, to try and secure a peace deal. His plan, the so-called Vance plan, envisaged the withdrawal of the JNA from Croatia, but accepted that it could stay on the borders in case of trouble. The plan anticipated the return of all refugees and the reconstruction of the police forces in what were to become the four UN Protected Areas (UNPAs) in the same proportions as the ethnic make-up of the localities before the war. The Krajina Serbs were to disarm and to put their weapons in store under a 'dual lock' system to be supervised jointly with the UN. Despite these provisions, the Vance plan declared that it did not prejudice the final outcome of any political settlement.²⁴

In Krajina, Milan Babić ferociously opposed Vance's plan. He feared that without the JNA to safeguard Krajina's future it would sooner or later be attacked and overwhelmed. He was to be proved right, but Milošević wanted to end the war and Babić was forced to give way. No Croatian refugees were allowed to return to Krajina, and there was no question of the Serbs conceding any police powers. Indeed the number of policemen soared as soldiers changed from green camouflage uniforms to blue police ones. In many cases they were responsible for terrorising the remaining Croats, and the UN found that instead of

supervising the return of refugees they were helping new ones to flee. Politically the Serbian aim was to freeze the frontlines and create a situation like that in Cyprus. If the creation of a *de jure* Greater Serbia was not yet possible, a *de facto* one would have to do for the moment. Signing the Vance plan was the right thing to do, wrote General Kadijević later, because 'given the international circumstances' it made possible the realisation of the Serbian leadership's goals, albeit 'in a longer term'.²⁵ In a mood for self-congratulation he wrote that:

all Serbian areas in Croatia, except one part of western Slavonia, were liberated in close cooperation with Serbian rebels. That makes approximately one third of the territory of the former Croatia. The future army of the RSK was practically built through combat and the JNA equipped that army with arms and military equipment. . . . With the results of the war in Croatia the JNA completely and under conditions unrecorded by history fulfilled . . . [its] task – to militarily defend the right of the Serbian and Montenegrin people for a united state.²⁶