

**European intervention  
in the Yugoslav conflict. 1991 - 1995**

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## Introduction

Over 100,000 people died in the wars following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, not in some far off place but on European soil whilst the European media looked on and while European diplomatic efforts were being carried out - an extraordinarily tragic event for a modern and developed continent and one that has shaped Europe's identity to this day. It is the worst death toll to occur in Europe since the Second World War and for that reason remains a hugely important part of European history. However not everyone would see it as having been a war that occurred in Europe, but as a 'Balkan' war and thus somehow not a part of modern 'civilized' Europe's history. This complex relationship between Western Europe and the Balkans played itself out in how Europe reacted to the conflict, and still affects the relationship between Western Europe and the former Yugoslav states to this day.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the extent to which European intervention in the breakup of Yugoslavia was a success or a failure. The prevailing historical narrative is that it was a failure, largely due to the fact that the US apparently resolved the conflict. However as this thesis will show the reality was far more complex and without the various European diplomatic and economic interventions, US strategy in the region would have had no basis on which to function. What the US ultimately brought to the resolution of the conflict was something Europe could not, a willingness to use military force. It is in this context that it is important to re-evaluate the process the Europeans created throughout the conflict.

It is also important to revisit this issue given subsequent European involvement in conflict, as Yugoslavia was in many ways a turning point for Western models of intervention – the apparent failure of diplomacy and the subsequent use of military force created a precedent for military intervention in Kosovo and Iraq. However was the war in Yugoslavia really a diplomatic failure? Could diplomacy have prevented the war? Did US interests undermine the Europeans diplomatic efforts? These are some of the questions I will analyse throughout the thesis.

The thesis is also forced to ask the question, did Europe not intervene more wilfully because of a lack of economic interest in the region? Did Germany's recognition of Croatia undermine the whole European diplomatic project? Had European countries had a shared economic interest in maintaining Yugoslavia might things have been very different?

The thesis is divided into 5 chapters which roughly follow the actual development of the conflict. The first outlines the developments that led to the war, specifically the deterioration of Yugoslavia's economic and political status and the consequent rise of nationalism within the republics. The second analyses the European Community's initial response to the crisis. The third deals with the Europe's main peace initiatives and analyses their subsequent failures. The fourth looks at the EU's attempt to use the UN in its mediation efforts and the last chapter looks at how, and why, the EU relinquished its leadership role in dealing with the crisis.

## **Chapter 1: The deterioration in Yugoslavia's economic and political status and the road to war**

### **Yugoslavia descending**

The seeds of the wars that broke out in Yugoslavia in the 1990's partly lie in the change in its European and international status that took place in the 1980's. It was these international and domestic developments in the 1980s that dictated Yugoslavia's future. The first of them was Tito's death in 1980. Tito's death on its own was not and should not be considered the most tragic event in Yugoslavia's history and definitely not the reason why Yugoslavia fell. Tito was without doubt a very charismatic leader; however he did less than little to secure that the country would have a capable leader to rule Yugoslavia after him. On the contrary, during all the years that he was in power he tried, and managed, to sweep all opposition, smother any attempt of reform and destroy, or at the least marginalize, any potential future leader. By depriving Yugoslavia of almost all the liberal communist reformers, Tito enabled the rise of mediocre but ambitious political figures.

The second event was the end of the period of economic prosperity that the country had been enjoying. By the beginning of the 1980s the Yugoslav economy started facing some serious economic problems. During the early 1970s, after the quadrupling of world oil prices, Western banks, awash with funds, were avid to find borrowers (Gallagher, 2001: 234). Yugoslavia, like many other Eastern European countries borrowed heavily on the international money markets. However the money was not spent on investing and promoting sustainable and strong growth, but was used to cover domestic consumption. By the early 1980s, due to the oil crisis in 1973 and the energy crisis of 1979, the Western world was troubled by a serious economic downturn and entered a period of recession. During that period the interest rates increased rapidly. At the same time Yugoslavia's debt soared from \$4 billion in 1972 to \$20 billion in 1982. To make matters worse, Yugoslavia's exports reduced dramatically as there was limited Western demand for Yugoslav products. Thus, Yugoslavia found itself unable to meet its debt repayments. In 1983, as a condition for new credits, the Yugoslav republics were obliged to give supervisory back to the federal bank, but still retained a veto over its transactions (Gallagher, 2001: 235). This of course infuriated the wealthy republics, Croatia and Slovenia, which for years were demanding more autonomy

over their economies and the end to their subsidization of the poorer regions. In 1988 the federal government was compelled to introduce the measures advocated by the IMF almost a decade earlier: dinar devaluation, real interest rates, and the free movement of prices as a precursor to the lifting of all price controls (Gow, 1992: 63). However these measures were unsuccessful, inflation and unemployment continued to accelerate while domestic consumption and living standards decreased dramatically.

That period though provided the Yugoslav political leadership with a unique opportunity; the time was ripe to move towards the democratization of the country and the liberalization of the economy, as Tito was no longer around and it was more than evident that Yugoslav socialism was no longer sustainable. Despite the gravity of the situation, the liberal, reform-oriented communists and the conservative communists could not come to an agreement on how the so necessary economic reform and democratization were to proceed. By 1989, the Titoist system was totally discredited and the republics deadlocked over the issues of constitutional reform, economic policy, and democratization of the political system (Van de Heuvel & Siccama, 1992: 60).

Another event of significant importance was the end of the Cold War because it changed Yugoslavia's international significance; Yugoslavia became simply irrelevant. During the Cold War Yugoslavia was strategically important for the USSR as it was the border between the Western world and the Soviet one. However, the country was even more important for the Western world. Yugoslavia's decision in 1948 to find its own separate 'road to socialism' broke the cohesion of a single Moscow-led communist world and, by offering an alternative, weakened the Soviet hold on Eastern Europe (Gow, 1997: 26). If Yugoslavia managed to break away from the Soviet rule then other socialist countries could do the same. For the West it was important to keep Yugoslavia away from the USSR and this is the main reason why Yugoslavia was a big beneficiary of Western aid. On the other hand, the USSR regarded Yugoslavia as the prodigal son that had to return; otherwise other countries could defy Soviet supremacy and authority. Yugoslavia prospered in this bipolar world. However, in 1989, when the communist regimes started falling one after another and with the demise of the USSR, a new world order emerged and replaced the old one. The aftermath for Yugoslavia was that it lost its importance and consequently, Western economic assistance. If this bipolarity had remained intact, the war in Yugoslavia could not have erupted. The non-

alignment policy that served the Yugoslavs all those years and delivered to them so many economic and diplomatic gains, was simply pointless in a non-bipolar world (Joffe, 1993: 29).

To sum up, by the end of the 80s Tito's death left a power vacuum at Yugoslavia's federal level and opened the way for new ambitious leaders to rise in power at the republican level. All the main principles on which Yugoslavia was built on, self-management, brotherhood and unity, and non-alignment in foreign policy, started to decay after Tito's death. The country's devastating economic situation, the reduction of western economic aid-at a time that it would have been helpful in order to sooth down the inter-republican tensions- and constant decentralization played a significant role in its dissolution. Most importantly of all, with the end of the USSR and the cold war, the West lost its economic interest in supporting Yugoslavia and ultimately its will to intervene in its affairs.

### **National Awakening**

Already by the 1980s Yugoslavia looked more like a confederation than a unitary state. The republics had increased their autonomy and had complete control over their main political and economic decisions. After the fall of the Berlin wall other socialist countries moved towards the restructuring and the liberalization of their economies as well as multi party elections. Yugoslavia once a pioneer of modernity and prosperity was suddenly left behind. The beginning of the 1990s is perhaps the most critical period in Yugoslavia's post cold war history. The fall of communism in the other Eastern and Central European countries, signaled the end of communist rule within Yugoslavia and the beginning of an effort to transform the country into a non-communist state. How was Yugoslavia to reborn from the ashes of communism and become a state that could face a globalized world and a new international order?

For more than forty years communism was for Yugoslavia its 'raison d'être'. It was the force that managed to unite and mobilize all the different nations that existed within the country's territory. Now the national question suddenly resurfaced and without a capable unifying leader around and a common cause, all the inter-community grievances acquired a new dangerous dynamic. The rise of nationalism in the Yugoslav republics proved that the communist solution to the national question in Yugoslavia had only been temporary.

Within Yugoslavia a climate of inter-ethnic antagonism emerged and each republic was continually on guard lest it fall behind the others, especially in respect to benefits to be derived from the economy (Van den Heuvel & Siccama, 1992: 62). Thus the republics, which were defined along ethnic lines, were trapped in a notion of unequal treatment and economic exploitation by the other republics. This perception of economic exploitation and antagonism would be very difficult to eradicate as there were very obvious regional disparities within Yugoslavia. The Western republics, that had access to Western European markets and technology, were indeed more advanced and economically developed than the Eastern. The differences in the income levels led to several disputes among the republics with the poorer demanding more subsidization and the richer being less and less willing to provide them with financial assistance, which led to mistrust between the republics on how the economic benefits were distributed.

The new political figures that emerged within each republic by the end of the 1980s did not hesitate to use all the old disputes of the interwar period and the violent ethnic conflicts of the civil war in order to gain popular support within their republics and push their own political agenda. Never before had the circumstances been so favorable to use nationalism as a means to mobilize the masses; “the economic hardship of the time obviously contributed to people’s willingness to mobilize politically” (Kaufman, 2001: 178).

### **The awakening of Serbian nationalism**

In the case of Serbia, the role of intellectuals in the revival of nationalism was significant. The Memorandum written by members of the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts, which was leaked to the public in 1986, is the fundamental stone on which Milosevic based his future policy. There isn’t another document that expresses more vividly and better Serbian nationalism than the Memorandum. According to its authors the constant decentralization of the state was leading to the economic and political disintegration of Yugoslavia. However, the document focused mostly on the continuously deteriorating position of Serbia within Yugoslavia. Serbian people were not only discriminated against by the Yugoslav constitutional structure but they were also the victims of a large scale “physical, political, legal, and cultural genocide” in Kosovo and Croatia. Thus, Serbian intellectuals in the mid 1980s created a critical mass of prejudice, ethnocentrism and warmongering that made Slobodan Milosevic’s rise to power possible and which created the mass-psychological

preconditions for aggression against Slovenes, Albanians, Croats, and Muslims (Mestrovic, 1996: 102).

The catalyst that could always ignite nationalist sentiments in Serbia was Kosovo as it holds a very significant position in the mythology surrounding Serbian national identity; it represents the 'homeland', the 'cradle of the Serbs'. Kosovo also facilitated Milosevic's rise to power. It was in Kosovo Polje in 1987 that Milosevic started flirting with nationalism. 'No one should dare to beat you' were the words he said to the Serbian crowd protesting outside the city's cultural hall where Milosevic met with Kosovo's leaders. This fateful event transformed Milosevic. He realized then that by appealing to these strong Serbian nationalist sentiments he could easily seize power and eliminate any existing or potential rival. In the following years Milosevic became Serbia's new powerful leader by promoting a nationalist agenda, by inserting supporters of his nationalist line into editorial offices and unleashing through the media an atmosphere of nationalist hysteria and by allowing the public to observe and even judge the deeds of the powerful (Gallagher, 2001: 248-249).

### **The awakening of Slovenian and Croatian nationalism**

Slovenia was by far the most advanced republic of Yugoslavia, with the highest standard of living and less unemployment than the other republics. However, the republic's growth rates decreased dramatically due to the economic crisis and the Slovene political elite soon realized that the best way to revive the Slovene economy was to improve trade relations with neighboring Austria, Italy and Hungary than to respond to Belgrade's call for closer economic integration with the rest of Yugoslavia (Lampe, 2000: 350). Moreover, already by the early 1980s strong democratic and liberal ideas were well-spread among the Slovene population. This is depicted by the emergence of a powerful social movement and the increasing freedom of the Slovenian media.

Slovenian public opinion became more and more suspicious of the Milosevic regime and mistrustful towards the Yugoslav People's Army. In response to the abolishment of Kosovo's autonomy, huge rallies and demonstrations took place in Slovenia with the participation of Slovenia's republican leader Milan Kucan. Another significant event that alienated even further the Slovene population from Yugoslavia was the trial of three journalists of the popular youth magazine Mladina. Mladina was the forum for the expression of the most

radical ideas available in Slovenia and it frequently criticized republican and federal institutions (Gow, 1992: 78).

The magazine was also the means through which Slovene anti-military sentiment could be expressed and the means through which the Yugoslav People's Army and its role were often questioned. This criticism, of course, was perceived by the generals as provocation and defiance of their authority. In 1988, three Mladina journalists were arrested on suspicion of betraying a military secret. Their arrest and their following trial in Serbo-Croatian infuriated the Slovene population. The trial was considered to be an attack on the free liberal Slovene press and an attempt to destabilize the republic and put it under the control of the Serb-dominated YPA. The trial took Slovenia one step further from Yugoslavia and it unified the tiny republic against the YPA (Silber & Little, 1996: 57). It also worked to the benefit of the Slovene leadership who could now gather popular support as they appeared to be the protector of Slovenia from the Serbian expansionism. Another step further from Yugoslavia was taken in 1989, when the Slovenian Assembly passed a series of amendments to the Slovenian constitution: claiming for Slovenia the unilateral right to secede, and the exclusive right to impose a state of emergency in the republic or to authorize the presence or movement of military formations within its borders (Ramet, 1992: 84).

The awakening of Croatian nationalism followed some years after the rise of Serbian nationalism. Since the beginning of the second Yugoslavia, Croatian nationalism was suppressed and any manifestation of it, like the 1971 Maspok nationalist movement, was crushed. However, as Serbian nationalism became more and more vocal and aggressive, Croatian intellectuals started wondering about the future of their republic. In 1989 the Croatian Democratic Union, with Franco Tudjman on its wheel, emerged. In the run-up to elections, Tudjman gave the seething crowds what they wanted: a strong dose of nationalism as an antidote to the fervor coming from the east (Silber & Little, 1996: 83).

### **The beginning of the end**

The end of the League of Communists in Yugoslavia in January 1990 signaled the beginning of the end for Yugoslavia. The last summit of the federal party faced huge obstacles as the gap between the reform oriented and the conservative communists had become unbridgeable. The political elite of each republic had succumbed to the sirens of nationalism and were

mesmerized by its power. None of the parties involved were willing to make any compromise in order to save what was left of Yugoslavia. On the one hand the Slovene representatives proposed the introduction of a framework for a still loser confederation that was little more than an economic union and on the other hand Serbia called for the tightening of the federation and more centralization. However, none of the two parties could win a majority. Then, to everybody's surprise the Slovene delegates walked out of the congress, in that moment the League of communists practically ceased to exist. Due to the fact that the four Milosevic votes now outnumbered the three of the remaining republics, Croatian representatives refused to continue without Slovenia (Lampe, 2000: 355).

Thus, Yugoslavia marched towards its first multi-party and democratic elections, with Slovenia and Croatia leading the way. By the end of 1990 all six republics of Yugoslavia, even Serbia, held elections. The republican elections transformed the political landscape of Yugoslavia and proved that there was no chance to maintain Yugoslavia's unity any more. The countdown had started for the dissolution of the country, as the parties with nationalist agendas won power in all of the republics except Macedonia. The era of naked nationalism and ethnic politics had started.

So, it was not only Serbian nationalism that led to Yugoslavia's violent dissolution. The Tudjman-led Croatian nationalism and Slovene nationalism, which emerged in response to Serbian nationalism, also made Yugoslavia's collapse inevitable. Over time it became clear that none of the republics was committed enough to make the necessary compromises in order to keep Yugoslavia from falling apart. But even so, all of the above cannot provide a sufficient enough reason why such violence was needed in order to tear the country apart. Indeed, the severe economic crisis led to a political crisis and then to a constitutional crisis and ultimately to a regime crisis. However, that was the case in all the ex-socialist countries and all of them managed to achieve a far smoother transition from communism to open market and democracy compared to Yugoslavia's.

## **Chapter 2: ‘The hour of Europe’ - the EC’s initial response to the Yugoslav crisis**

Before violence erupted in Croatia and Slovenia, and as the republics were arming themselves for the subsequent conflicts, the European Community and the United States proclaimed their support to federal Yugoslavia in accordance with the Helsinki Principles of CSCE (Cafruny & Peters, 1998: 135). At the time, both the EC and the US were preoccupied with other issues. The EC was in the middle of very important negotiations over the Treaty of Maastricht, which would set the basis of the European Monetary Union, and the US were engaged in the Persian Gulf. As a result they did little at the time to adopt a more insightful diplomatic approach.

Moreover, the idea of maintaining Yugoslavia as a single entity was spurred by the fear that such secession tendencies could have serious repercussions for the rest of Central and Eastern Europe and could encourage others to follow the same path. This process could possibly endanger European stability and security as fragmentation of the post-communist states, which were moving actively towards democratization, could ‘raise the specter of nationalist rivalries in Europe again’ and could mean the ‘loss of control by new democratizing governments’ (Crawford: 1996: 491-492). Furthermore, separatist movements existed within some EC member states and the EC member states wished not to encourage their own local separatist movements by supporting secessionism in Yugoslavia. Thus, the EC governments reached the agreement to support the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia.

However, the initial halfhearted approach adopted by these two international players left plenty of space for speculation and actually confused the respective Yugoslav parties. More specifically, when the US Secretary of the State at the time, James Baker, met with the republican representatives of Croatia and Slovenia, he told them that America supported their claims for self-determination but would not recognize their unilateral independence. On the other hand, he told Serbia and the federal government that America would not accept the legitimacy of the use of force to resolve the crisis (Terrett, 2000: 71). The same, more or less, was the initial tactic that the EC followed in order to address the Yugoslav problem. President of the Commission Jacques Delors and Luxembourg Prime Minister Jacques Poos traveled to Belgrade in May 1991, offering an association agreement and financial aid for the

maintenance of federal Yugoslavia, declaring that the Community would provide no political or economic support to breakaway republics (Cafruny & Peters, 1998: 135). The message conveyed by the EC and the US confused all the republics as each one thought that they enjoyed a degree of international support and approval of their cause. The support to a unified Yugoslavia was interpreted by the Yugoslav People's Army and by the Milosevic regime as an implicit approval to use all necessary means to stop the rebellious republics from seceding.

Despite the support to federal Yugoslavia and the efforts to discourage the rebellious republics, Slovenia and Croatia declared independence on the 25<sup>th</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1991 respectively. After its first inadequate response, the EC soon bounced back in order to play a more decisive role in the resolution of the Yugoslav problem. The Yugoslav crisis provided a perfect opportunity for EC to test the capabilities of the still embryonic Common Foreign and Security Policy and its potential as a future foreign policy instrument. It was also its chance to prove how strong the political integration between the member states was by adopting a common coherent policy, and to prove that it was a considerable political force in the new world order. Moreover, the EC at the moment was "keen to exorcise the ghost of indecision and inaction during the Gulf Conflict the previous year", and atone themselves for their performance (Gow, 1997: 48). In late June, the EC Foreign Ministers had gathered in Luxembourg for a regular Council meeting, which coincided with Croatia's and Slovenia's declarations of independence and with the JNA's first attack on Slovenia. The EC's response was immediate; it deployed a high-level mediation team in order to bring the conflicting parties to the negotiation table. The "hour of Europe" has dawned.

The EC troika was formed by the foreign ministers of Luxembourg (Jacques Poos), Italy (Gianni de Michelis) and Netherlands (Hans van den Broek). On their first journey to Yugoslavia the EC representatives managed to extract from the conflicting parties an agreement. The agreement called for a ceasefire and the cessation of all hostilities with the immediate return of federal army forces to their barracks, the suspension of the implementation of Slovenia's and Croatia's declaration of independence for three months, as well as the appointment of the Croatian Stipe Mesic as President of the Collective State Presidency, whose appointment had been blocked by Serbia. The agreement was saluted with great enthusiasm and was perceived as the beginning of a new era for Europe; an era of political maturity when, as the Italian foreign minister De Michelis so eloquently put it, the

United States would be only 'informed, not consulted' for European security issues.

This euphoria soon came to an end, a few days afterwards it was clear that nothing actually had changed. The first attempt of EC's Troika did not manage to bring the hostilities to a close in Slovenia, the army was still on Slovenian ground, and Mesic was still not appointed as President. At the end of June the EC Troika was for the second time in Yugoslavia trying to bargain for a ceasefire. In order to persuade the belligerent parties to agree upon the terms of the ceasefire, the EC decided to impose an embargo on armaments and military equipment on the whole of Yugoslavia and to suspend the second and third financial protocols (Kintis, 1997: 150). However, this attempt to achieve a ceasefire through bullying and threats, proved to be another diplomatic shipwreck. The only positive development was the appointment of Mesic to the presidency.

The third visit of EC's Troika to Yugoslavia in early July was crowned with success as finally it managed to bring peace to Slovenia. The Brioni Agreement was signed on the 7th of July between the Serb, Croatian and Slovenian central governments and allowed the deployment of European Community monitors to supervise the withdrawal of the YPA from Slovenia, within the framework of the CSCE emergency mechanism. Slovenia and Croatia agreed to suspend the implementation of their declarations of independence but not the declarations themselves, whereas all parties promised to refrain from unilateral acts (Lucarelli, 2000: 20). The Brioni Agreement ended the ten day war in Slovenia; however it did not stop the conflict in Croatia. More importantly though, it did seal Slovenia's secession from Yugoslavia and preordained the nature of all the following attempts of the international community to bring peace to the region.

From the very first conflicts to the escalation of the civil war and the ethnic cleansing, the international community struggled to understand Yugoslav ethnic politics. A certain amount of prejudice from the side of the international community led to many lost chances of reconciliation between the republics which could have prevented the bloodshed. The old picture that the Western world had for the Balkan region resurfaced as soon as the first signs of violence appeared. The Balkans were considered to be a violent, grim and backward region which had always been the source of problems for the West, the region whose contradictions effectively led to the First World War, and which were always tormented by ethnic conflicts and where ancient hatreds and animosities had never been buried and had managed to survive

throughout the centuries.

Essentially the international community thought that all that needed to be done was to convince the conflicting parties of the 'folly of war', and if persuasion and reason were not enough to persuade them to stop the fighting, then threats and bullying would do the trick. However, to the surprise of the international mediators, neither the financial sanctions nor the threat of future political isolation stopped the quarrelling republics. "International mediators for many months behaved as though the war had no underlining structural causes at all and as the conflict was caused by no more than some ill-defined but frequently Balkan temperament, a south-Slav predisposition- either cultural or genetic-towards fratricide" (Silber & Little, 1996: 159). On the contrary, the resort to war was an extremely rational decision in some cases. The political elites soon realized that war could give them exactly what they wanted. For power-driven Milosevic, war was the only way to control, if not the whole of Yugoslavia, at least an enlarged Serbia. For Tudjman it was the path that had to be followed in order to deliver the old dream of Croatian statehood, and for Kucan it meant independence, autonomy and the end of Belgrade's suffocating hold.

### **Chapter 3: Germany and the struggle for European unity**

As mentioned before, the Brioni Agreement sealed the fate of Slovenia as it formalized its secession from Yugoslavia. Although the agreement was saluted as the EC's diplomatic victory, the reality is that its success should be attributed to Milosevic and Kucan, the only two players who managed to get exactly what they wanted. Slovenia's departure facilitated Milosevic plans, as it was easier for him now to create a Yugoslavia dominated entirely by Serbs and could focus on Croatia and Bosnia. Kucan, on the other hand, managed to break away from Yugoslavia with a war that lasted only ten days and with minimum losses compared to the ones that followed (Silber & Little, 1996: 166). The YPA, without Serbian backing, had no other choice but to withdraw from Slovenia. From the moment that the YPA conceded Slovenia, Yugoslavia ceased to exist effectively and at the same time the YPA evolved from a federal army trying to protect the federal state, into the means through which Serbian expansionism was expressed, and thus a national army.

Although a ceasefire was achieved in Slovenia, hostilities in Croatia intensified. The war in Croatia was far different from the war in Slovenia. First of all, a large segment of the population in Croatia were ethnic Serbs, located mostly in the border areas of Krajina and Eastern Slavonia, which meant that Croatia could not just walk out of Yugoslavia as simply and painlessly as Slovenia did. Moreover, with the rise of Tudjman in the Croatian Presidency, the Serbian population within the republic started feeling increasingly uneasy with his extreme right wing ideas and the adoption of old Ustasha symbols. This uneasiness soon transformed into mass fear as the Serbian leaders managed to convince their followers that a repetition of what happened in WWII was plausible, and so started a race to the bottom over which group would strike first. Naturally, the Milosevic regime provided unlimited support to the Serbian militia in Croatia. All the ingredients for a violent confrontation were there and already by the spring of 1991 unrest and clashes between the Croatian authorities and the Krajina Serbs occurred on a daily schedule, with the army intervening in order to 'separate the two sides'. However, the war in Croatia started approaching its full dimensions soon after the Brioni Agreement.

To their disappointment and frustration, the EC diplomats realized that a solution to the Yugoslav problem remained elusive and a different approach was needed. In that spirit, it was announced by the EC members that a new peace conference was to be convened with the

prerequisite of maintaining a ceasefire in Yugoslavia. However, the conference began regardless of the fact that the fighting never stopped in the region. In fact none of the ceasefire agreements that followed was ever going to be honoured, 'signatures were not enough to stop the combat' (Gow, 1997: 54).

The EC peace conference on Yugoslavia was convened in The Hague in September 1991, under the chairmanship of Lord Carrington, the EC's special envoy to Yugoslavia and a former British Foreign Secretary and Secretary-General of NATO. Its mandate was to accommodate the Yugoslav parties to resolve all their differences peacefully and bring an end to the hostilities on the basis of three preconditions: no unilateral change of borders by force, the protection of the rights of all minorities within Yugoslavia, and full account to be taken of all legitimate concerns and aspirations (Terrett, 2000: 78). Since the conference itself would be the forum where the conflicting parties would meet, an Arbitration Commission was also established, composed of by five experts and chaired by Robert Badinter, which would examine the legal aspects of the disputes and thus supplement the peace negotiations. Moreover, three working groups were set up under the European Commission chairmanship to address human rights and minorities concerns, constitutional issues and economic affairs among the republics.

Despite the fact that no real ceasefire was achieved, Lord Carrington started a series of meetings with all the Yugoslav leaders and carried on with the peace negotiations, naively hoping that the whole process would ultimately inspire a ceasefire. At some point it seemed as if he had finally managed to bring an end to this feud among the republics, when he succeeded to extract Milosevic's consent to the principle of the republics' right to independence within borders. On October 18th Lord Carrington presented a draft paper, the 'Arrangements for a General Settlement', to a plenary meeting of the Conference. The arrangements were comprised of the following components 'sovereign and independent republics with international personality for those that wish it; a free association of the republics with an international personality as envisaged in these arrangements; comprehensive arrangements, including supervisory mechanisms for the protection of human rights and special status for certain groups and areas; European involvement where appropriate; and in the framework of a general settlement, recognition of the independence, within the existing borders, unless otherwise agreed, of those republics wishing it'

(Bethlehem & Weller, 1997: 459).

The plan for the political redevelopment of Yugoslavia was designed along European lines, and in such a way that fitted into the EU's concept of a 'new Europe'. The plan was accepted by five Yugoslav republics, including the republic of Montenegro which had been Serbia's only ally and faithful satellite since the beginning of the crisis. However, the plan stumbled upon Serbian intransigence and was thus rejected. Milosevic claimed that the draft could not be the basis of a detailed discussion and he objected to the first and most fundamental part of the plan that proposed that all the republics could be sovereign and independent. The main reason for Milosevic's hardened stance was that if he was to accept the plan, and thus secure autonomy for the Croatian Serbs, it would mean that he would have to restore Kosovo's and Vojvodina's autonomy. This was of course unacceptable for Milosevic whose entire political career was built upon Kosovo. 'By extending to the Albanians the same rights that Milosevic was demanding for the Serbs in Croatia, the Carrington plan struck at the very foundations of Milosevic's power base' (Silber & Little, 1996: 194). By that time, the EC states were convinced that if Serbia was not the sole aggressor of the war, it was at least the major obstacle to peace.

However, because the plan was backed by Washington and Moscow, Milosevic's scope for rejection was limited. In an attempt to soothe international disapproval and impatience, he proposed an amendment to the plan which would guarantee the continuation of Yugoslavia for those not wishing to secede from it. This 'mini-Yugoslavia' would include Serbia and Montenegro and any other territory whose population wished to remain in Yugoslavia, which of course meant the Serbian dominated part of Croatia and Slovenia. It was an amendment that would enable Milosevic to create 'Greater Serbia'. Naturally, Carrington saw through this immediately and rejected the Serbian and Montenegrin proposal. However, as time passed, and in the absence of an effective solution, the voices within the EC favouring recognition of Slovenia and Croatia increased rapidly.

### **Recognition and German mutiny**

Since the beginning of the negotiations many high level diplomats involved in the peace process thought that any recognition of the republics as independent and sovereign states would be catastrophic. On December 1991 Lord Carrington in a letter addressed to van den

Broek, the chairman of the EC troika, underlined his strong belief that 'any early selective recognition would widen the present conflict and fuel an explosive situation, especially in Bosnia Herzegovina and Macedonia' (O' Sharp, 1997: 13). Warren Zimmerman, the last US ambassador in Yugoslavia, writes in his memoirs that he, as well as the EC ambassadors in Yugoslavia, understanding the dynamics of the conflict and how violence in Bosnia could spillover in the case of a premature recognition, were urging their governments to stall recognition. Despite these concerns though, as the situation in Yugoslavia was deteriorating significantly and the peace negotiations were constantly stumbling on Serbian opposition, some of the EC member states started wondering whether some alternative or supplementary policies were needed. One of these policies included the formal recognition of the republics. The policy of recognition was particularly favoured and promoted by Germany, as it was thought that only recognition could deter further Serbian assaults.

During the fall of 1991, the German leadership tried to convince their fellow EC counterparts to recognize Slovenia and Croatia. The decision of the German political elite to recognize Croatia and Slovenia is rather controversial. Germany had worked hard within the EC framework in order to promote and deepen the economic and political union among the European countries, thus it is rather peculiar why it favoured a recognition which was contrary to the official EC strategy. This defiant approach would undermine the EC's struggle to establish a Common Foreign and Security Policy and its attempt to prove to the international community, and mainly the United States, that Europe was able to maintain a solid and united front. Moreover, a premature recognition would also endanger the efforts and the credibility of the peace Conference and it was contrary to the decision of the EC's Council of Ministers that member states would not grant diplomatic recognition to any of the Yugoslav republics wishing to secede.

Many have argued that Germany's shift in policy was a combination of 'interests and sentiments'. Under this perspective, Germany's economic interests in the region would be better served by an independent Croatia and Slovenia. After the end of Cold War, the newly united Germany had begun a drive east to dominate its "natural market" in the Yugoslav provinces of Croatia and Slovenia (Pilger, 2008). Germany was extremely interested in the emerging markets of Central and Eastern Europe and wanted to reassert its hegemonic position in the region, so it needed to bring under its sphere of influence Croatia and

Slovenia. Moreover, Germany's defection from multilateral cooperation could be explained as a natural consequence of its newly acquired power. With the collapse of the USSR and its re-unification, Germany saw the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia as an opportunity to weigh its power in the new international order.

The German news media played an important role in influencing German public opinion in favour of the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia. The German media were very preoccupied with the Yugoslav conflict and soon after the outbreak of the war anti-Serbian public opinion had crystallized in Germany. For German public opinion the war in Yugoslavia was not a civil war but rather a case of Serbian aggression towards the democratically elected governments of Croatia and Slovenia. Serbia was frequently portrayed as an evil communist power trying to force its authority to the people who had chosen democratically to secede. It was perceived that the Slovenes and the Croats were committed to European and democratic values, whereas the Serbs were backward and 'hardly European' at all. Furthermore, there was a strong Croatian lobby within Germany as well as a significant number of Yugoslav expats, which explains why 'Germany considered itself the European country most intimately connected with Yugoslavia' and was thus extremely interested in the outcome of the conflict (Silber & Little, 1996: 198). So, popular opinion in Germany started putting pressure on the domestic political parties, who in turn applied strong political pressure on the governing party in order to please their constituencies. The German preference for recognition was thus a result of bottom-up, and media influenced, societal pressures.

Others argue that the shift in German policy and its preference for unilateral recognition was formed indeed in the 'domestic political arena' but the popular consensus followed the elite consensus and not the other way around (Crawford, 1996: 484). Germany's cold-war foreign policy tradition was always characterized by support to the principle of self-determination and the domestic political elite expected high domestic gains by following the same tradition in regards to the Yugoslav problem. The argument goes that the German politicians in order to rationalize their change of position 'linked the East-German victory for self-determination with the aspirations of Croatian and Slovenian people for independence from the communist-dominated Yugoslavia' (Crawford, 1996: 505). Thus, it was the moral responsibility of the German people to recognize the right of the Croatian and the Slovenes to self-determination and support their efforts towards democracy.

Regardless of the reasons behind Germany's decision, the reality is that this move led to two grave developments. Firstly, it undermined the peace negotiations and the role of the Peace Conference. It convinced the Serbs of the impartiality of the EU, as the rest of the EC members succumbed to Germany's pressure and recognized the two republics. Moreover, if it did not ensure the violent dismemberment of Bosnia, certainly it accelerated the process of dissolution that was already underway (Lucarelli, 2000: 28). With Croatia and Slovenia out of Yugoslavia, it was natural that the rest of the republics would proceed to proclamations of independence rather than trying to solve the political issues of the federal state, which would be entirely and openly now controlled by Serbia. However, if Croatia and Serbia had to draw firm borders between them, Bosnia was standing on the way and so it had to be destroyed. As Zimmerman puts it, the war in Bosnia that until then seemed probable, it became virtually inevitable (Zimmerman, 1995: 16).

Secondly, it was a fatal blow to the unity that the Twelve had demonstrated so far and made the idea of a CFSP sound like nothing more than a joke. The EC's first experiment in forging a common foreign policy turned out to be a disaster. Moreover, Germany's defection from multilateralism created a climate of mistrust between the EC member states and doubt over Germany's commitment to the CSFP. It was a given for the rest of the EC member states that Germany should never take a leading or a controversial role in world politics, it being the economic giant and the political dwarf of Europe. This decision was contrary to Germany's long tradition of multilateralism, and was considered by its EC partners as a major breach of the 'spirit of Maastricht'.

On December 16, during a summit of the European Council of EC Foreign Ministers, Germany put on the table the issue of recognition. Surprisingly, Germany managed to bully its partners into a compromise by threatening that Germany would carry on with its plans of recognition whether the rest would go along or not. Under German pressure, the EC produced a set of guidelines, one general called 'Guidelines for the Recognition of New States in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union' and one specifically for Yugoslavia, entitled 'Declaration on Yugoslavia' and announced that it would accept applications from all the Yugoslav republics that wished to be recognized as independent as long as they could meet certain conditions. Among the conditions were the protection of and respect for human rights

and the rights of minorities, acceptance of the inviolability of frontiers and rejection of territorial claims. The EC was to be counseled by the Arbitration Commission on whether the Yugoslav republics met the criteria and the Council of Ministers would act based on the Commission's findings in January 1992 (Kintis, 1997: 152).

However, even this concession was not enough for Germany. In another show of diplomatic muscle Geschner, the German Foreign Minister, announced the following day Germany's intention to recognize Croatia and Slovenia even before the EC had made a determination on whether the conditions have been met (Painton et al, 1991). Germany recognized unilaterally the republics of Croatia and Slovenia as independent and sovereign states on December 23rd, regardless of the fact that Croatia was no way near to meeting the Badinter criteria for recognition. According to the Badinter Commission only Slovenia and Macedonia met the criteria and were thus eligible for being recognized as independent states. However, the rest of the EC members, confronted by this fait accompli, had no other choice but to succumb to Germany's wishes in order to maintain European unity. So, despite their own initial better judgement all the EC member states had recognized Slovenia and Croatia by mid January of 1992, while postponing any action towards Bosnia and Macedonia. It could be argued that Yugoslavia was sacrificed on the altar of European unity.

This was indeed 'a great victory for German foreign policy', as Chancellor Helmut Kohl put it (Painton et al, 1991). However, as time showed this incident did not signal the beginning of a new German foreign policy, as feared by many; Germany has largely kept on its multilateral course ever since. However, although the EC's unity and pride was spared, the same cannot be said for Bosnia. A more bloody and gruesome war was about to begin. "Toward the end of 1991 two measures to deter further Serbian aggression in Yugoslavia- EC acceptance of popular referendums as a criterion for self-determination and German pressure for recognition of Croatia and Slovenia- insured the violent dismemberment of Bosnia " (Stedman, 1995: 17). Although one cannot be entirely certain that the recognition triggered the violence in Bosnia, there is no doubt though that it did accelerate the process. To add to this, it was also US passivity that played a part in allowing the bloodshed to take place in Bosnia. Although Washington was opposed to premature opposition it did nothing to stop the EC. As Zimmerman says the US appeals to EC governments were perfunctory and half-hearted (Zimmerman, 1995: 16). Besides the Americans had long decided not to get involved

in the quest for a solution for the Yugoslav problem and since 'there was not an American dog in this fight', were quite happy to off-load the burden on the Europeans.

## **Chapter 4: Enter the US: the death of the Vance-Owen Plan**

With the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia, the conflict legally assumed an international character which improved the possibility of intervention and made possible the entry of UN peacekeepers and EC ceasefire monitors in Yugoslavia. In retrospect, the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia managed to bring the JNA and Milosevic to the negotiating table to accept a UN ceasefire. Already by November 1991 the UN Security Council had launched a peacekeeping mission and appointed Cyrus Vance as a special envoy in order to deliver a ceasefire in Croatia, which he managed to do in January 1992. An UN brokered ceasefire had more chances of success than an equivalent EC arranged ceasefire, since the Serbs were more and more convinced that the 'EC was speaking with a German accent'. Any EC attempt to broker a ceasefire was doomed; the Serbs would never accept it as it would be 'capitulation to the Germans' (Gow, 1997: 64).

According to the arrangements of the Vance plan, UN-protected areas were established in Croatia and a UN-protection force of 10,000 was introduced. The UN troops' tasks would be the protection of the civilians in the area, the surveillance of the JNA's withdrawal from Croatia, and the disarmament of the Serbian militia. The UNPROFOR's mission was based on traditional peacekeeping guidelines. Milosevic accepted the Vance plan as the UN protected areas coincided roughly with the areas controlled by the Krajina Serbs and saw in the deployment of the UNPROFOR a way of consolidating his territorial gains in Croatia, as the UNPROFOR would serve as the barrier separating the Serb-dominated areas by the rest of the republic (Silber & Little, 1996: 202). Many believed that the Vance plan would bring peace to the region, however as events unfolded in Bosnia, this optimism soon faded away.

### **The Carrington-Cutilheiro talks**

After the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia, the work of the EC's Conference on Yugoslavia was limited. The Conference on Yugoslavia started with the very ambitious agenda of finding a new constitutional framework that would define the relations between the republics and reaching a settlement for the disputes and ended up sorting out the formal economic and bureaucratic details of the succession. There was still though one last area where significant work needed to be done and that was Bosnia.

Bosnia and Macedonia requested recognition of their independence by the EC in December 1991 instead of remaining in rump Yugoslavia. Macedonia was recommended for recognition by the Badinter Commission, but its recognition was stuck in limbo until 1993 due to a Greek veto. According to the Badinter Commission Bosnia also met all the criteria for recognition by the EC; however it recommended that a referendum on independence was needed to be held in order to confirm the will of its citizens for independence.

During January 1992, Carrington proposed the opening of a separate set of talks on the future of Bosnia within the framework of the EC Conference. At that time the Presidency of the EC had passed to Portugal and Carrington asked Jose Cutilheiro, a Portuguese diplomat to take charge of the negotiations. Carrington and Cutilheiro started a series of meetings with the political leaders of the three major Bosnian communities. Meanwhile, in March the referendum on Bosnia's independence was held, which had been boycotted by the Bosnian-Serbs. As a result only 63 per-cent of the population participated, out of which 99.4 per-cent voted for independence. Immediately after the referendum in Bosnia, the first barricades appeared in Sarajevo. Despite this, the talks between the EC mediators and the Bosnian leaders continued. The result of these talks was the 'Statement of Principles for New Constitutional Arrangements for Bosnia and Herzegovina', which was signed by all the parties involved in the Bosnian issue on March 18, 1992. However, it had the fate of so many other documents and agreements; signatures were so easy to give and simply meant nothing throughout the Yugoslav crisis.

The resulting plan proposed a new constitutional framework according to which 'Bosnia and Herzegovina would be a state composed of three constituent units based on national principles and taking into account economic, geographic and other criteria'. The Bosnian parliament would be composed of two chambers, the chamber of citizens- elected directly- and the chamber of the constituent units, where each unit would have an equal number of representatives and a veto over national policy. Moreover it called for the establishment of a working group whose responsibility would be the impossible task of drawing the map of the constituent units. This ethnic 'cantonization' of Bosnia was mainly an attempt by the EC mediators to come up with a constitutional framework that could please the Serbs and the only way to prevent a violent disintegration. Thus a decentralized state was needed and a significant transfer of power from the central government to the constituent units. All three

Bosnian political leaders accepted the plan as a platform for negotiations originally. However, the Bosnian-Serbs sincerity and commitment to the maintenance of Bosnia as an independent entity can be seriously questioned. Months prior to the talks over the future of Bosnia, the Bosnian-Serbs had declared their own autonomous regions, had formed and armed the own militia, and generally had prepared for a war. Despite these bleak signs though, and with recognition as the only leverage left on their hands, the EC mediators had carried on with the talks wishfully hoping for a peaceful outcome.

Unfortunately the Statement was repudiated a few days later, surprisingly by the Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic and the Croatian leader. Had Izetbegovic and his aides not reneged from the Cutilheiro-plan perhaps the Bosnian conflict might have been settled earlier. Although Izetbegovic always favoured the idea of a unitary Bosnia, he had undertaken negotiations and placed his faith in the EU for delivering a peaceful outcome. Some argue that Izetbegovic walked out of the plan as soon as he had a meeting with the US ambassador Warren Zimmerman, and according to the rhetoric of the argument Izetbegovic had acted that way having in mind that the US would support him in case of a war (Gow, 1997: 88). Others though resent these allegations and argue that this behavior of swinging from one decision to another was typical of Izetbegovic (Silber & Little, 1996: 219).

Izetbegovic's renouncement of the Cutilheiro-plan is considered by many as the main event that dragged Bosnia to war. Whether the Bosnian President had acted with US approval or not, the reality is that he had turned down the last chance to avoid a civil war in Bosnia. It is doubtful though whether the Bosnian-Serbs would have carried on with it anyway and honoured the agreement, which basically amounted to ethnic partition. This ethnic partition of Bosnia at an early stage does not necessary imply that the ethnic cleansing that followed would have been avoided nor that the population shifts would have occurred in a more 'civilized' manner. Anyway, with the US preparing to grant recognition to Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia on April 6, the need of the Bosnian government to follow EC's suggestions was obviated (Gow, 1997: 88). Moreover, it was highly unlikely that the EC would not follow the US initiative in recognizing Bosnia as well; this situation left no leverage in the hands of the EC mediators to pressure Izetbegovic not to reject the plan. In any case, the war erupted in Bosnia while the state acquired international recognition and from this point on the conflict in Bosnia got worse and worse. There was the hope of course that recognition would stop the

fighting, as was the case in Croatia, however in retrospective delaying the recognition until a political and constitutional agreement was reached in Bosnia and approved by all parties would have served Bosnia better. Furthermore, since Bosnia was recognized as an independent state and admitted to the United Nations, it instantly acquired the right to self-defence and naturally the right to procure weaponry. According to the UN charter only the recognized government of a state can request an arms embargo to be imposed on it, and since Bosnia was now recognized, the embargo requested by Belgrade was no longer legally valid (Ramet, 2006: 428). The non-lifting of the arms embargo was almost a criminal negligence by the international community as it would have helped the new state to arm itself and thus deter Serbian aggression.

### **The EC and the UN**

By mid-August it was felt that the EC conference had become exhausted. As the United Kingdom assumed the Presidency of the EU in July 1992, a new joint initiative by the UN and the EC was launched. In August an EC-UN conference was held in London, co-chaired by the President of the European Council, UK's Prime Minister John Major and the UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali. It is important to note that the conference was held in the wake of revelations of detention camps and 'ethnic cleansing' practices in Bosnia carried out by the Bosnian-Serbs, which increased the international community's willingness to put on forth strong coercive action on the Serbs. Clearly at the London Conference the Serbs were identified as the aggressors and the Croats and the Muslims as the victims of the war (Cafruny & Peters, 1998: 138). The outcome of the London Conference was the establishment of the International Conference on Former Yugoslavia in Geneva and a general agreement on a set of thirteen principles, with the most important ones being the principle of non-recognition of all advantages gained by force, cessation of the use of force, preservation of the integrity and inviolability of the borders, and the settlement of succession issues by arbitration not by force. The London conference was considered as a breakthrough by many and raised the expectations that a settlement would be reached soon, however the trick was to maintain this momentum.

The International Conference was co-chaired by David Owen for the EC and Cyrus Vance for the UN, whose work would be supported by a Steering Committee, composed by representatives from both the UN and the EC. Six working groups were set up to deal with

the different aspects of the conflict. The main focus was naturally the war in Bosnia and the International Conference's work bore fruits in January 1993, when the Vance-Owen plan was presented. What strikes though as peculiar was that despite the fact that during the London Conference Serbia was portrayed as the sole aggressor, Vance and Owen increasingly equated aggressors and victims as equally culpable for the war and introduced the concept of 'three warring fractions' (Cafruny & Peters, 1998: 138). This 'even-handed' approach could be seen as appeasement of the main instigators of violence at the expense of the victims.

The Vance-Owen plan called for a decentralized state divided into ten provinces, which would retain substantial autonomy and would have control over education, health, police and law enforcement, while the central government in Sarajevo would be in charge of foreign affairs and economic policies. Three of the provinces were designated with Serb majorities, three with Muslim majorities, two with Croat and two provinces were mixed (Edwards, 1997: 179). All three communities would have equal representation in the central government whereas the participation of the three communities in the provincial governments would be based on the ethnic composition of each province. The plan also called for demilitarization of Bosnia, as well as strong international involvement in the affairs of the new state.

The plan was opposed initially by the Bosnian Serbs, because it included the handing back of large territories that had been thoroughly cleansed by all Muslims and it also denied them their crucial war aim: the creation of a Serbian state within Bosnian territory (Glenny, 1996: 225). The Bosnian Muslims also rejected it at first as 43% of the Bosnian territory would be passed to Serbian hands, thus the plan looked like legitimizing the spoils of war. The only ones that were happy with the plan were the Croats. However, after international pressure and threats of financial sanctions, total isolation and air strikes against Serbia and Montenegro, the plan was signed in early May in Athens by the three Bosnian leaders. However it was reneged by the Bosnian Serbs soon afterwards. Surprisingly though the greatest resistance to the Vance-Owen plan came from Washington.

The new Clinton administration was very critical of the Vance-Owen plan and was extremely reluctant to lend its support to this EC-UN effort to resolve the conflict. Even if the plan was flawed, as it would not deliver a just peace and would definitely leave the Muslims and the Serbs bitterly unsatisfied, US support to the plan from the very start would have been a crucial factor, if not the most crucial, in convincing the belligerent parties to sign it at an

earlier stage and then engage them in further negotiations, once a ceasefire was achieved. To the US the plan seemed unacceptable as they judged it to be unfair to the Muslims and difficult to implement in the absence of a credible enforcement mechanism (Edwards, 1997: 181). Moreover, the US was reluctant to support the Vance-Owen plan could be attributed to the unwillingness of the US government to provide an appropriate share of implementation forces (O'Sharp, 1997: 24).

On the other hand, the 'lift and strike' approach that the US was proposing did not go down well with the Europeans. The 'lift and strike' approach was a combination of the lifting of the arms embargo to the Bosnian Muslims and punitive strikes against the Serbs, the EU strongly opposed as it believed that it would endanger the UN forces on the ground. The UN and the EU were committed to a traditional peacekeeping mission and opposed the use of force to bring about a settlement (Rupp, 1998: 620). US support to the Vance-Owen plan appeared belatedly and was rather ambiguous. Moreover, the 'Joint Action Program', an American initiative, signed by the US, Russia, France, Spain and the UK, which would provide military protection for the six 'safe areas', did nothing more than to undermine the Vance-Owen process and it also proved the lack of an international coherent and united approach.

Another broken agreement, another disappointment, another new quest for a peace settlement while the Western Powers were divided over which approach was more suitable in order to resolve the war. The discord among the members of the international community was the death sentence of the Vance-Owen plan, in order for a peace plan to succeed coherence and commitment was required by all the major players.

### **The Owen-Stoltenberg plan**

With the Vance Owen plan completely discarded, Owen and Stoltenberg, the Norwegian diplomat who replaced Vance as the UN special envoy, continued their efforts to find a peace-settlement for Bosnia. Their new approach unfortunately was based on the principle of ethnic partition, annulling completely the Vance-Owen process of maintaining a multi-ethnic Bosnia. The Owen-Stoltenberg plan called for a 'Union of Republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina', basically a confederation of three republics within the borders of Bosnia. This was a desperate attempt by Owen and Stoltenberg to reach a settlement and end the war, even on Serbian terms, rather than to seek peace with justice. The Croats and the Serbs were

content with this plan, as in the long term would enable them to create a Greater Serbia and a Greater Croatia. But the Bosnian government rejected the plan on September 29, as the 30 percent out of the total Bosnian territory that the Muslim Republic was going to receive was considered too little. In order to end this stalemate a Franco-German initiative, the 'Action Plan' was launched based on the principles of the Owen-Stoltenberg plan, but granting 33.3 percent of the Bosnian territory to the Muslims. This ground concessions would be accompanied by the suspension of some sanctions against Serbia. The EU formally adopted this new strategy in November 1993, but the plan was dead already by the end of the year. Naturally and justifiably this new strategy infuriated Washington, as an action like that would involve the deliberate rewarding of aggression (Kintis, 1997: 158).

## **Chapter 5: The end of European leadership in the Yugoslav crisis**

### **The Formation of the Contact group**

The turning point in the story of the Bosnian tragedy was mainly the bombing of a marketplace in Sarajevo in February 1994. Already by April 1993 the UN Security Council had declared that Srebrenica was a UN protected 'safe area' free from armed attack and the same status was later on granted to five other cities as well, including Sarajevo. The bombing really proved the vulnerability of the whole system and stiffened the West's approach to the Bosnian problem (Cafruny & Peters, 1998: 140). Up until then, the EU had showed its clear unwillingness to resort to force in order to resolve the Bosnian problem. The warring parties in Bosnia knew very well that none of the threats made by the EU or the UN were ever going to be backed by a credible use of force. However, after the bombing the EU member states gave the green light for future NATO air strikes. For the first time thus the Bosnian Serbs were faced with a NATO ultimatum accompanied with the possibility of air strikes if the siege of the city was to be continued. However, it was the Russian initiative that facilitated the success of this ultimatum as it provided some cover to the Serbian forces to withdraw from the area. Clearly the presence of Russian troops to Sarajevo was the factor that convinced the Serbian forces to accept a demilitarized zone around the city (O'Sharp, 1997: 32). The attempt was successful as it managed to achieve a ceasefire around Sarajevo and demonstrated how instrumental and necessary was the presence of the US and Russia in the resolution of the conflict. Moreover, the whole incident triggered a shift in French approach to the conflict, with President Chirac now confident that American and NATO participation was essential (Cafruny & Peters, 1998: 141).

Due to the increasing US involvement, a settlement was achieved between two of the warring factions in Bosnia. The result of this American initiative was an agreement between the Bosnian Muslims and the Bosnian Croats signed in Washington in March 1994. The agreement proposed the creation of a federation between the Muslims and the Croats in Bosnia, as well as the creation of a loose confederation between Croatia and this new Bosnian entity. The logic behind this attempt was that an alliance between the Croats and the Muslims would weaken the Bosnian Serbs' hold on Bosnia (Gow, 1997: 262). However, the viability of this federation relied heavily on US involvement and input.

Soon afterwards the city of Gorazde, another UN protected area, fell into the hands of the Bosnian Serbs after 10 days of bombardment. As a result the EU foreign ministers demanded an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in and around the city and called for an intensified and coherent diplomatic effort by the international community, including the UN, the US, the EU and Russia. In response to this EU call, the Contact Group, consisting of Germany, France, the UK, the US and Russia, was formed. The participation though of only three EU member states was hardly in line with the spirit of Maastricht and signaled effectively that the hour of Europe had long since passed (Edwards, 1997: 189). The creation of the Contact Group signals a new era in the course of the Yugoslav conflict as it is the first committed attempt of all the major players to provide a coherent international policy in regards to the Bosnian conflict. The principles of the Washington accords and the 'Union of Republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina' provided the basis of this new attempt (Lucarelli, 2000: 61).

The Contact Group's plan was presented on a 'take it or leave it' basis and it envisaged that 51 percent of the Bosnian territory would pass to the Muslim-Croat Federation and the rest 49 percent to the Bosnian Serbs, as well as the placement of Sarajevo and Mostar under international protectorates. The percentages allocated to the three ethnic groups by the EU Action Plan and the Contact Group Plan would later be enshrined in the Dayton Accords (Ramet, 2006: 442). Moreover, the international community accompanied the plan with a 'carrot and stick' approach, which comprised of the lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnia, the withdrawal of the UNPROFOR from Bosnia and the relaxation of the economic sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro. The Muslims and the Croats accepted the plan but once again it was the Bosnian Serbs' intransigence that led to the shipwreck of yet another peace plan.

Needless to say, none of the initial threats made by the Contact group were put into force, and several months of military and political stalemate followed before the next attempt to bring peace to the region. The Bosnian Serbs' rejection of the plan was not followed by a coherent and decisive international response as the Contact Group states could not agree to a common formula. The US were calling for tougher sanctions to be imposed on the Bosnian Serbs, the Russians for the easing of the sanctions against Serbia and the Europeans were committed to preserve their neutrality towards all of the Bosnian factions. The Contact group was torn in the middle and thus remained silent. The only punishment delivered to the Bosnian Serbs was further isolation and their exclusion from the peace process unless they accepted the plan

(Silber & Little, 1996: 343).

There was one positive development that can be credited to the Contact Group's efforts, the break between the Bosnian Serb leaders and Milosevic. Milosevic had threatened the Pale Serbs with a blockage on trade unless they signed the peace plan. After the rejection of the plan and the territorial map by Karadzic, Milosevic responded with cutting off the trade links between Serbia and the Republica Srpska. This development gradually facilitated the change in the military balance in Bosnia, since the Bosnian Serbs could no longer fall back to the financial and military assistance provided until then by their 'motherland'.

The formation of the Contact group meant the end of a European common effort; at the time it was considered more important to get the big players, namely the US and Russia, involved in the peace process than to test the capabilities of the CFSP.

### **US leadership and the road to Dayton**

Certain developments during the end of 1994 and throughout 1995 opened the road for further US involvement and more decisive use of force. First of all, the military balance in Bosnia during this period changed rapidly. On the one hand, the split between the Pale Serbs and Milosevic meant the end of any military or financial assistance weakened the Bosnian Serb military capability, whereas the Croats managed to strengthen their own due to US military assistance. Thus, the dynamic of the conflict had changed in favour of the Muslim-Croat coalition, and for the first time in four years of warfare the Serbs witnessed a dramatic loss of previously gained territory.

Moreover the following NATO bombing campaign in late August deteriorated the Bosnian Serb position even further. Already by July 1995, in response to the fall of the safe areas of Srebrenica and Zepa, and after the insistence of the US administration for NATO involvement, the UN authorized NATO to conduct a broad-based air strike campaign in response to the Serbian attacks. The Serbs retaliated by holding 300 UN personnel hostages. This move was exactly what the European states were afraid that would happen and their main argument against the use of air strikes. Events escalated with the shelling of Sarajevo in late August, and in response NATO undertook an intensive month-long bombing campaign. All of the above increased the probability of bringing to the negotiating table the side that so far had witnessed only victory in the battlefield and whose intransigence led to so many

failed peace attempts. Moreover, Milosevic who had been the major stumbling rock of almost every peace effort so far desperately needed a settlement to be reached in order to ensure the lifting of the sanctions against Serbia.

Secondly the creation of the Rapid Reaction Force had a direct impact as well. On June 1995, the UN voted a resolution creating a Rapid Reaction Force. The RRF would enable the UNPROFOR to carry out its mandate and was mainly made up by British and French troops with a small Dutch contingent. The task of the RRF troops would be to retaliate robustly if UNPROFOR units were attacked, assist isolated units to regroup, support besieged enclaves, resupply besieged peacekeepers, and police UN declared weapon-free zones. The creation and the deployment of the RRF to the region facilitated the UNPROFOR's peacekeeping mission and also gave more credibility to the diplomatic efforts as the threat of more military force became feasible. Moreover, the presence of RRF troops provided the stability required to secure the ceasefire in October 1995 that preceded the signing of the Dayton Accords.

The time was ripe for an 'all or nothing' approach. The international community had to either escalate the negotiations and the pressure on the Bosnian belligerent parties to end the war or it had to withdraw from the region and face humiliation and disdain. Meanwhile, the US faced with the possibility of the withdrawal of the French and the British troops from Bosnia before the end of the year, stepped up and started a series of strong diplomatic initiatives. From this point onwards any EU mediation effort was overshadowed and even jostled by the US diplomatic efforts. Holbrooke in his memoirs describes the EU mediators in bleak colours; according to him the Europeans had nothing to add to the peace process except frustration as they had a tendency to obsess with procedures and processes instead of substantive issues.

After months of shuttle diplomacy and after the warring parties had been exhausted, an agreement was reached in Dayton in November following Holbrooke's diplomatic efforts. The Dayton accords, despite its flaws, signaled the end of the bloody war in Bosnia and brought some peace in the region. It preserved the entity of the Bosnian state within its international recognized frontiers, with a reunified Sarajevo as its capital and comprising two entities: one Muslim-Croat controlling 51 percent of the Bosnian territory, and the Bosnian Serb entity with 49 percent of the territory.

Needless to say, American involvement and leadership proved to be decisive in the resolution of the conflict. The Dayton agreement worked where the Vance-Owen plan failed; because there was a willingness to use force and, crucially, because the US was behind the plan, rather than opposing it (Gow, 1997: 299). However, one cannot avoid the question of what would have happened had the Americans got involved earlier in the process or had they lent their much needed and crucial support to the various EU peace plans. Perhaps, many lives would have been spared.

## Conclusions

During the outset of the Yugoslav crisis, the European Community showed great enthusiasm over the role that it had to play in the resolution of the conflict. This enthusiasm that the Twelve displayed was clearly a result of the Maastricht Treaty, which incorporated new norms and roles for the EC as well as the genesis of the CFSP. The EU's willingness to step in and resolve the conflict on its own can also be explained due to the fact that initially there was the expectation that only minimum effort was needed in order to resolve the conflict and that an easy solution could be found.

The conflict provided the EU with an opportunity to demonstrate its unity and to weigh its capabilities in the new world order. At the time it was essential for the EU to develop into a united and effective diplomatic actor and stop being the subordinate partner of the United States and totally dependent on American leadership. However, this was an ambitious and challenging task to achieve. At the beginning of the conflict the European states committed themselves to common action. But action is always shaped by interests, and in the case of Yugoslavia, there were no shared interests between the EU member states, not a clear 'European' interest that could provide the basis for a common and coherent action. Perhaps this is the main reason why although at the beginning the EU managed to demonstrate a common position, it could not hold on to it later on. The existence of divergent interests and foreign policy traditions undermined the EU's effectiveness in trying to resolve the Yugoslav crisis. That was the case when Germany unilaterally recognized Slovenia and Croatia despite the decision of the EC council that something like that would be disastrous for the stability of the whole region.

Another characteristic of the EU throughout the Yugoslav wars was its unwillingness to use military force in order to convince the warring parties to sign a peace agreement. This EU unwillingness to resort to the use of robust and decisive force was a source of constant friction and tension between the EU and the US. When the Vance Owen plan was rejected by the Bosnian Serbs, the US very strongly advocated that punitive air strikes against the Serbs were needed as well as the lifting of the arms embargo in Bosnia. The EU member states, with the exception of Germany, were appalled by the idea of air strikes. When diplomacy failed, the EU member states were not willing to take the leap and move onwards to military intervention. But this 'lift and strike' approach was so contrary to the impartiality that the EU

had demonstrated so far and was determined to maintain. Many have argued that the EU's evenhanded approach towards the belligerent parties was an obstacle to moving towards a more decisive diplomatic approach and military action at an earlier stage of the conflict, while others, mainly the US, had identified the Serbs as the aggressors.

However, the driving force behind the EU's reluctance to commit to military intervention was not the belief that any intervention should be limited and impartial in order to succeed, but the pragmatic concern of the EU member states that something like that would endanger the already exposed and vulnerable European UNPROFOR troops on the Bosnian ground. The Europeans conceded to the use of force only when the Rapid Reaction Force was sent on the region to protect the UN personnel. Thus the EU approved the use of force as soon as it managed to guarantee that this approach would have the minimum impact and cost to its member states.

Additionally, when economic or material interests are not directly involved, it is highly unusual for the great powers to engage in overwhelming military action. The war in Yugoslavia was not at any time perceived as a threat to the vital interests of any of the EU member states, had it been otherwise the EU would have been willing to engage decisive military force in order to resolve the conflict. Military intervention occurred belatedly and only when the West's prestige was in danger of being shattered and completely discredited. Clearly the shift in EU's policy, from opposing any use of force to actually being in favour of it, was due to strong pressure from European public opinion and the US, and occurred only after so many diplomatic efforts had failed.

Needless to say, the creation of a shared vision of military intervention and foreign policy cooperation between sovereign states would always have been restrained due to the existence of different interests, perspectives and traditions of the individual member states. This is why it is very important for the right mechanisms, institutions and procedures to be in place in order to deal with external crises. When violence erupted in Yugoslavia, there were no common institutions and common mechanisms for crisis management that could be used to accompany the EU's diplomatic efforts. Perhaps, the EU's inadequate performance was due to this lack, this institutional weakness. But even if the right institutions had been in place, that would not have guaranteed that a different policy would have been pursued and subsequently a different outcome could have been obtained, as common or intergovernmental

institutions are always subject to the various member states' national policy preferences.

Without any common institutions and no common military capability the EU used the means available at its disposal at the time and, in a sense, acted in line with its capabilities. It undertook several diplomatic initiatives and supported them with economic foreign policy tools. Moreover, the EU excelled in humanitarian aid. The humanitarian aid given, prior, during and after the crisis, had a significant effect in limiting the damage caused by the war, particularly to the most vulnerable people in Yugoslavia. On the other hand, economic sanctions were the basic coercive tool in the EU's hands and after the recognition of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia, the only one left available. Economic sanctions were used intensely against Serbia and though not initially successful, ultimately played a significant role in encouraging Milosevic to support Dayton. This kind of long term approach ultimately paid off, though some would argue that economic sanctions are generally considered to have a minimum impact and should be complementary to harsher coercive tools. However, the use of economic sanctions was also the easiest option for the EU; they required the lowest levels of political cohesion between the EU governments, contrary to the use of military force.

Perhaps the EU's main contribution was that it established a framework for negotiations for the conflicting parties. This framework for diplomacy in the conflict allowed for successful mediation and provided the essential basis the US needed for its own diplomatic processes.

Ultimately the EU indeed failed to hold together Yugoslavia and none of its initial efforts to stop the republics from seceding were successful. Germany has a great amount of responsibility for the role it played in the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia. Additionally, the EU has some responsibility to bear in the sense that, though it was initially committed to the continuation of the federation, it ultimately gave a fatal blow to the fragile state when it succumbed to Germany's *fait accompli* and proceeded to recognizing the above republics and Bosnia as independent states. Clearly the preservation of European unity was far more important than preventing Yugoslavia's descent into war. Moreover, none of the diplomatic and economic policies adopted by the EU were successful in stopping the fighting. Had these efforts been accompanied by military intervention or at least unconditional and sincere support by the US, perhaps the war could have ended sooner.

However, it was not only the EU but the whole international community that failed to ensure

a peaceful dissolution. The lack of cohesion among the members of the international community and the lack of appropriate and robust measures condemned Yugoslavia to a violent and tragic dissolution. Particularly, the EU and the US were unable to forge consensus on intervention strategies, due to the absence of a common understanding of the nature of the war. The EU perceived the conflict as a civil war, whereas the US as an inter-state war, a war of Serbian aggression. Thus the EU member states were committed to peacekeeping and the US to peacemaking operations. This lack of cohesion and different perceptions led to a series of failed policies and stalled the peace efforts.

To sum up, the EU failed to intervene successfully in the dissolution of Yugoslavia firstly because it pursued strategies which, although in line with its capabilities as a civilian power, were ineffective. Its second failure was its inability to form the political will necessary to move to military intervention at an earlier stage. The EU's failure stems from the lack of cohesion between its member states. Ultimately, however, one of the most important reasons for the lack of cohesive intervention in Yugoslavia was not as some commentators call 'a lack of will' but in reality a lack of interest – particularly economic interest. The subsequent years have shown that European countries, particularly the UK, who were most against military intervention in Yugoslavia, are more than willing to engage militarily to protect their economic interests – most notable in terms of the invasion of Iraq. Perhaps, unluckily for those thousands who suffered, and still suffer, from the war, Yugoslavia was, in the end, not of enough economic interest in the new global economy to warrant the kind of early intervention which may have prevented the war.

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