

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
Foreign Insight Series

AMBASSADOR VLADISLAV JOVANOVIĆ

*Interviewed by: Biljana Jovic
Initial interview date: November 5, 2020
Copyright 2021 ADST*

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is November 5, 2020. This is a conversation with Ambassador Vladislav Jovanović, a senior diplomat and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which I am conducting on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. My name is Biljana Jović.

Mr. Ambassador, thank you for accepting the invitation to be the first foreign diplomat to participate in the Oral History of the World Program. Let us start with your childhood and youth. When and where were you born?

JOVANOVIĆ: I was born on June 9, 1933, in a family of teachers. We spent a good part of our lives moving between various small places, mostly villages. My parents were very curious and interested in world affairs. My father was once a member of the former Democratic Party, he even tried to join the Assembly in the 1930s as an MP, but did not succeed. At the beginning of 1943, we moved to Smederevo because of a sense of physical danger, since various factions, which were then fighting amongst themselves, had appeared in the village where my parents lived, creating the risk that they might be targeted by one of these factions because of their beliefs.

Earlier, in the fall, my father had responded to the plea of his Jewish friends in Smederevo and helped them find shelter for their children by hiding them in households in the village, until the German operation of arresting Jews passed.

Together with the village priest, my father placed and hid fifteen children in wealthier homes in the village. Unfortunately, someone found it out, and one night the Gestapo came and rounded up the hidden children. They were gassed in the vehicle on the way to the nearby town, Smederevska Palanka, while my father and the priest were taken to the Gestapo prison in Belgrade, where they spent a year. Only at the insistence of their neighbors did they somehow manage to save their lives and were eventually released in the middle of 1942. My family reunification in Smederevo coincided with the beginning of my war experience, and I encountered many tragic events while we were living there. With the force of an atomic detonation, the stored ammunition exploded in the depot of the medieval town of Smederevo. My father and one of his female friends were trapped under the rubble, he was badly bruised, but he managed to save himself, while his friend was killed. And then came other critical events, the American bombings in 1944, which were carried out in raids, about ten times nightly.

Unfortunately, many civilians were then killed, while the Germans managed to escape practically without losses.

When liberation came, my father, who was, in a way, independent from the new government, had to resign and died soon after. My family moved to Belgrade in 1948, where I finished high school and enrolled in the Faculty of Law, from where I graduated with a grade of 9 [out of a possible 10]. Not being a member of the Communist Party made it difficult for me to find a job. I lost almost a full year knocking on various doors and I always received the same rejection reply - do you have work experience - which, of course, I could not have had. In essence, this happened because I was not, as it was then called, "politically organized."

Eventually, I found out by chance that there was a selection process open for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since it was practically the last round of selection, I applied and somehow succeeded in getting the job. That year, the Ministry, for the only time in its existence under the communist regime, opened its doors to candidates who were not members of the Communist Party. This decision was prompted by the unsatisfactory selection of candidates in the previous application process, which had been reserved for members of the Party only. Thus, a group of 6-7 non-party members managed to get jobs in the Foreign Ministry. After I had passed the required exam, my diplomatic life started. In the early years, we were all a bit neglected and hindered in promotion, with a constant pressure to join the Party. In time, all of this slowly disappeared, and, ten years later, I no longer had that kind of pressure and constraint on advancement. My further professional evolution was standard - I served in our missions abroad four times and was appointed to senior positions in the Ministry. As a junior officer, I worked in the Department for Press and information, and later in the Planning Group, where foreign policy was created. After I had returned from London, I headed the Political Directorate for Western Europe for six years. Then I had another foreign post as the ambassador to Ankara. When I returned to Belgrade four years later, I was put in charge of the CSCE, Disarmament, and Human Rights issues. I headed this department until mid-1991, when the need for Serbia's new foreign minister became acute as the Yugoslav Federation began to rock on its foundations due to the secessionist activities by Slovenia and Croatia. The choice, for reasons I have never fully uncovered, fell on me, and I was transferred to the Government of Serbia in the capacity of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

At that time, Serbia was not yet independent, but it had to counter the activities against the common state of Yugoslavia coming from the north, from Slovenia and Croatia. Later, the two remaining republics, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia, joined them on that same path. Then a completely new life and a new undertaking began for me, both in terms of my position and of the new reality that was being created all around us, in the common state of Yugoslavia, in the region, Europe and the world as a whole. It was a turning point when the bipolar world was replaced by a unipolar one, and when there were various political collisions, which certainly reflected on our position as well. Unfortunately, we, as defenders of the unified state of Yugoslavia, were poorly viewed by the new rulers of the world, to whom the existence of Yugoslavia lost relevance for their interests and who, either openly or from the shadows, supported its disintegration. This put the wind into the sails of

secessionist forces, first in Slovenia and Croatia, and later in Bosnia and Herzegovina and elsewhere. That is roughly a brief overview from my birth to the disintegration of the common country and my entry into the Government.

Q: Thank you for that. As we proceed, we will deal in more details with the 1990s, which you have briefly tackled. Let us focus for now on your youth and some of the early years. Did you have a mentor as a junior officer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs? What did the work at the Ministry look like? It was called the Federal Secretariat of Foreign Affairs at that time, wasn't it?

JOVANOVIĆ: Yes, the Ministry was then called the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, and we, as junior officers, were sent to various departments, management bodies and sectors to gain experience. However, there was some discrimination in this process, as well, since promising members of the Party were immediately sent to better departments of the Ministry, political administration, analytical groups and so on, while we, who were not members, were sent to so-called less attractive ones, such as the consular department, archives and the like. We lost a lot of time there, maybe two years, while the others had greater opportunities. Thereafter, we were transferred to other sectors. I was detailed to the Press and Information Department, until my first mission abroad. Upon my return to the country, I was sent back to the same department. My first overseas post was in the consular section in Brussels, Belgium. There was some kind of restriction on my advancement, as they did not add me to the diplomatic staff of the embassy, even though I had passed the Foreign Service Exam and was an attaché according to the credentials I had received. I took advantage of this administrative glitch which gave me freedom for a broader cultural and political growth in Brussels, and especially for strengthening the affinity with a secret love from my youth, poetry. In the local literary and other circles, I met many people, including poets, and thus I came into contact with modern trends in European poetry. And, on the other hand, this activity allowed me to make interesting contacts, not only in this field. As I covered both the press and culture, I met many personalities from the press, including some political figures, who were not seen in the best light by our side. For instance, the editor of a political magazine, Ernest Mandel, was at the same time also the President of the Fourth Communist International, which was a big surprise for me, because not only was not that International respected at all, but it was even fiercely attacked by the then political leadership in Yugoslavia. I also had the opportunity to meet some of the leaders of the Congolese Liberation Movement, who came to Belgium from the colonies to study and were, in some ways, second-class citizens. This helped me to better understand the later turbulent events in Congo, and the coming to power of Patrice Lumumba, his assassination and the tragic death of the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld. At that time, I received his personal diary in English, which was a cherished discovery for me. Dag Hammarskjöld had, in essence, two personalities, one public, who was in the service of humanity, and the other, private and mystical, of a completely different man. The circumstances, which limited me politically in my work in Belgium, enabled me to become acquainted with new issues and ideas, to uncover facts that were, at that time, hidden in Yugoslavia. All of this nurtured my curious nature, opening it up even more to new knowledge and ideas, and enabling me to look at things with even greater independence, both in the country and in the world.

Q: You opened up a really interesting topic, and incidentally, I wanted to ask the same question. It is not widely known by the public that you are the author of a couple of poetry collections and several very interesting and important literary works, from the novel "Sisters", and "Diplomacy and Chess", to "The War That Could Have Been Avoided." When did this passion of yours and the interest in beautiful literature begin to evolve?

JOVANOVIĆ: I have to go back a little. As a young man, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, I experienced two deaths in the family that deeply shook me and turned me to metaphysical thoughts and moods. It was the early death of my sister, who was only 17, and two deaths, also premature, of my father and his father, my grandfather, all within the span of a few months. So, at the early years of life, I was suddenly confronted with its worst possible endings, the death of my loved ones. This affected my already withdrawn nature and developed my interest in the hidden, invisible, metaphysical, mystical... In those years, I secretly started writing verses; no one knew of this, until I published my first collection fifty years later. Coming to terms with untimely death, especially the death of my sister, has consumed me all this time. I dedicated two or three collections of poetry mainly to her and my parents, while the novel "Sisters" is dedicated exclusively to her, and the "Chronicle of the Life of a Teacher" is dedicated to my father, that is to my parents. My love of literature was constant and inseparable from me, which, in a way, also influenced my relations with colleagues and others, who were all turned toward public life and were only sated with its content. While public life was not alien to me, either, it was, in a way, irrelevant, considering my personal preoccupation.

Q: Was your sister, who tragically passed away at the age of 17, the only sister you had? Did you have any other brothers or sisters?

JOVANOVIĆ: My parents had three children before me. But, before the birth of my sister, they had two girls, who both died very young, maybe at the age of one. If they had not died, probably neither my sister nor I would have been born, but since our parents wanted to have three children, we came into the world as well. So, I have some kind of debt to these two sisters born 15-20 years before my birth. Whenever I visit my parents' grave, I always remember them, too, even though I never saw them nor could they have ever known that I would exist. This is a personal, emotional relationship that does not have to make sense to others.

Q: Let us now return again to your first mission abroad, to Belgium. When you look at this experience from today's perspective, what were your greatest results during this first mission, both personally and professionally? During your further career, did you remain connected to this country in any way?

JOVANOVIĆ: Although I was not a member of the diplomatic staff of the Embassy, I was in charge of consular affairs, and press and culture were also part of my portfolio, so I came into contact with the cultural elite of both countries. This was a pleasant part of my job, and I enjoyed it more than if I had been limited only to people from the diplomatic corps. And yet, working with the press at that time was very important for Yugoslavia, because it, due to its recognition of East Germany, had severed

relations with West Germany, and the issue of reparations, the issue of damage that Germany caused in Yugoslavia during World War II was very relevant. All Foreign Service officers were instructed to raise this issue in public in the countries of service. It turned out that the Embassy in Brussels was the most active in this regard, with headlines of dozens of articles printed on the front pages of the Belgian dailies reading "Yugoslavia is right" and criticizing Germany for refusing to pay reparations. This was my direct contribution that was, of course, attributed to the entire Embassy. Nevertheless, I was extremely pleased because it turned out that communication and work with journalists and newspaper editors that I had had contributed to this success. Working with journalists and newspaper editors, and later on with television, continued to be one of the primary duties for me in my diplomatic career, particularly when I worked as the First Secretary in Ankara and as the Minister Counselor in London. For me, it has always been a more pleasant part of the job than the other aspects that these positions covered. And, on the other hand, it also enabled me to expand my knowledge in the field of literature and politics. I had the opportunity to meet various people of different profiles at the lectures and workshops I attended, which would probably have been impossible if I had been engaged exclusively in diplomatic work.

Q: How many years did you work in diplomacy before becoming an ambassador? You are a career diplomat, but you worked in the Federal Secretariat for Foreign Affairs for almost three decades before you received the ambassadorial title. Did you set any goals for yourself when you became an ambassador? Have they changed over time?

JOVANOVIĆ: I entered diplomacy with the handicap of not being a member of the Party, which followed me for a long time. This was a factor of hindrance, but I was in no hurry, because I had a second life beyond the diplomatic work, a devotion to preservation of memories of my family, especially my sister, and my vow to ensure their eternity in some way. I did not know how to achieve it, along the way I slowly discovered that it could be through writing. From then on, I had two parallel worlds in my life, one was fulfilling my personal vow, and the other was about excelling in diplomatic work, regardless of whether it would be recognized and rewarded by others. Even though I never thought it would ever happen.

However, things changed over time. The political atmosphere in Yugoslavia was opening up, the absolute monopoly of the Party in political life began to erode and the invisible obstacles that had been set before me faded away. In 1985, after I had worked for six years as the Head of the Political Directorate for Western Europe, I was appointed as ambassador to Ankara. My earlier duty in Ankara made my work much easier. However, I became ambassador quite late compared to some other colleagues from my generation, who had achieved this 4, 5 or 10 years earlier. This is a consequence of the different political positions that we each had at the moment we entered the Federal Secretariat of Foreign Affairs.

Q: Let us take a brief look at your first ambassadorial mission to Turkey. As you said, you were in Ankara a few years earlier as the Second Secretary in the SFRY Embassy. How different was Turkey in the late 1960s and early 1970s from the country that you

returned to as the ambassador? What were the bilateral relations with Turkey at that time and what was the strategic impact of those relations on Yugoslavia?

JOVANOVIĆ: At that time, Turkey was a far less developed country compared to Yugoslavia. Turkish journalists that I sent to visit our Adriatic coast and see the local newly built hotels were delighted when they returned, convinced that Turkey would never be able to reach that level. At the same time, they greatly idealized the system in Yugoslavia, for them the leader of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, was a dream that they wished for Turkey, where corrupt governments replaced one another, which caused disillusionment among middle class Turks. When I returned, there was visible progress, as they managed to build some infrastructure and change the look of Ankara. Many young Turks, who had been educated in Europe and the US, dove into work and began the modernization of Turkey. However, this was not enough, as the duality of civilian and military authority prevented Turkey from moving forward more decisively, since they wasted time and energy on mutual confrontations. Furthermore, the problem of the Kurds emerged, as they were not satisfied with their situation and began violent operations, which then caused several military coups. During my first stay in Ankara, I witnessed a military coup, when some of my acquaintances, students, tried to get asylum at our Embassy. When I arrived as ambassador, the situation was completely different. The prime minister was Turgut Ozal, who began to implement the industrialization of Turkey. Of course, when I left, things started to develop much faster, and nowadays Turkey is a regional power with ambitions to have even a greater role on the global level.

Q: What was the strategic impact of the relations between Yugoslavia and Turkey on the events that followed in Yugoslavia?

JOVANOVIĆ: The then Turkish regime viewed the regime in Yugoslavia very favorably, not only because it was built on a firm, solid foundation, but also because the Turkish national minority, mainly in Macedonia and Kosovo, was not only fully protected but also privileged.

The level of rights the Turkish minority enjoyed in Yugoslavia was way beyond what they could dream of, particularly when it comes to their position in Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, not to mention other countries, and they constantly pointed it out as an example of good practice. Because of this fact, not only were we highly respected in Turkey, but the open sympathy for Yugoslavia and its government was widely spread at all levels, from the prime minister, the head of state, to the ordinary people. On the other hand, Turkey, by its historical nature, favors strong personalities and strong regimes. The then strong regime in Yugoslavia was something they loved and intimately aspired to. It was not difficult to be a diplomat in Turkey at that time, although back then, Turkey did not have much to offer, except for some raw materials, while Yugoslavia was engaged over there in the construction of hotels and some infrastructure projects. The most important thing for Turkey was to have a free transit passage for their trucks on their way to Western of Europe, which was made possible even with some incentives, which they greatly appreciated. However, they did not go beyond this, because they had their own internal problems, both with the Kurds and

with terrorist groups that very often carried out their actions, directed both at foreigners and at the domestic population.

Q: Upon your return from Ankara, you were an ambassador within the Ministry for a few years and then, as you mentioned, you had two very important positions. One was the position of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, and afterwards of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia. After that, you were Head of the Mission of Yugoslavia to the United Nations. From this perspective, did you personally prefer an ambassadorial position in a mission in another country, or the position in the most important multilateral organization, the United Nations?

JOVANOVIĆ: The problem was that the whole situation in Yugoslavia at that time was quite unclear and uncertain. And when I went to Turkey as ambassador, the processes of disintegration in Yugoslavia began to evolve, first on the cultural and historical level, and then soon on the political and inter-party level. So I was constantly pressed there by the accelerating spiral of negative events in the country. An uncertainty existed, at that time the so-called Croatian Spring took place, then the demonstrations in Pristina, dissatisfaction was being expressed, more and more demands were made. All of that drew attention. In New York, the situation was also very uncertain, because Yugoslavia at that time was the subject of a negative attention by the main stakeholders in the West, who even tried to raise this negative campaign to such a level that would make Yugoslavia the only culprit for all troubles that they had. And this exaggeration in defaming the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, i.e., Serbia and the Serbian people, had neither limits nor borders. It is perhaps the only case in European history that a nation underwent such a total satanization, without concessions or reservations. Even in the time of the Huns, when they invaded Europe across the steppes, the black picture of them was not so complete, nor were the Japanese and Germans viewed to be so absolutely black during World War II, as was the case with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Serbian people. It left a bitter impression on everyone, me included, because I was basically disposed in a friendly way toward the US. We held a high opinion of its history and of what it did for the creation of Yugoslavia in 1918. President Wilson played a significant role at this time, and the US was more constructive and important in this regard than the European winners in the War, France and Great Britain. We did not expect that there would be a total turnabout, which would even take on ethnic dimensions. This bitter taste surprised, haunted and disappointed me, but I also tried to contribute to the correction of this faulted image of us, to awaken a sense of morality in American journalists, especially in some intellectuals who spoke, without exception, all the worst about Serbia and even resorted to paroxysm. This was a futile effort. But still, my stay in the US was interesting, I was able to get first hand contact with the American people, I saw some parts of the country, I had the opportunity to visit the West Coast, the Washington region, and later Florida. I was able to talk to the ordinary people and see that they were sympathetic and not indoctrinated by the messages that came from the then political elite, which aimed to create false perceptions about other countries and nations. And when I returned, I did not have even a shred of bad thoughts about the American people nor of the US as a unique historical phenomenon. However, when it comes to the strange negativist politics that chose Serbia as a scapegoat to ease the US position elsewhere in the world, especially

in Islamic countries, I think it is something that was deeply unprincipled, unjust and harmful to America itself, because of the negative impression it created in the Serbian people as a whole.

Q: Today is November 10, 2020. Your ambassadorial tour of duty in Turkey ended in 1989 and you returned to the Federal Secretariat for Foreign Affairs (FSFA). Less than two years later, you were appointed the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia. Did you have some indications that you could move from FSFA to the Government of the Republic of Serbia? What led up to this decision?

JOVANOVIĆ: I returned from Turkey when the situation in the former common country was largely at the breaking point. It was not yet boiling, but it was at a crucial point, as the centrifugal forces had greatly evolved and were forcefully determining the further course of the state and its future destiny. Upon my return, I immediately noticed that the echoes of that deceptive plotting concerning the determination of the further fate of Yugoslavia could also be found in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A number of conspiratorial groups and circles had already been formed there, which were interested in moving in one direction or another. Regrettably, the direction that prevailed was the one that led to the further weakening of Yugoslavia. It supported the efforts of Slovenia and Croatia to separate as much as possible and as soon as possible from the rest of Yugoslavia in order to set out on their new independent paths. During this time, I was engaged for a while as an observer of these processes and then as the ambassador for human rights issues within the then CSCE, now the OSCE, as well as for issues of conventional disarmament. In this capacity I led a number of our expert delegations at meetings, primarily in Vienna, Copenhagen and Geneva. This allowed me to develop a better understanding of the throbbing differences in the views of the processes at hand. One way forward was to support fully the efforts of the then US administration and the West in general, and the other was to orient ourselves in the direction of a greater opening up, but without throwing the baby out with the dirty bathwater; i.e., not allowing a disorganized and unchallenged march to change in our country to threaten our basic values and interests. In 1991, I was more focused on European meetings, but, like everyone else at the time, I was very preoccupied with what was happening in the country.

The Republics to a large extent began to separate and formed their own diplomatic centers as inceptions of future national diplomacies. The impact of these actions could be felt at the top of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, i.e., the Federal Secretariat for Foreign Affairs. Serbia assessed that it was not receiving adequate information or protection from the federal diplomacy and decided to establish its own Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Several candidates were replaced in a short order. My predecessor was Mr. Mitrašinović, who began to invite prominent Serbian staff from the top of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ad hoc working meetings at the Republic Ministry. I was also among them. Someone was probably taking interest in the list of Serbian cadres at the top of Yugoslav diplomacy, as they were looking for one of their own candidates. I did not know anything about this, nor was I interested in it, but, as I later found out, there were 4-5 possible candidates for the new Foreign Minister of Serbia. For some reason, the choice fell on me and I was called to present myself to the Government of the Republic of Serbia. This led to a small uproar in the

Federal Ministry, whose leadership, at the time, favored those whose views were closer to West than those who held a more independent position. These are roughly the events that preceded my selection. What were the reasons behind choosing me? - I don't know, I guess it may have been my energetic address at CSCE meetings on national minorities, where I opposed the efforts to separate Kosovo and Metohija from Serbia, while arguing that the struggle there was not about minority rights at all, as it was formally brought to the fore, but that the Albanians were actually fighting for territory and independence. This was the first time this issue was addressed in such a way in public or in an official setting. This resonated throughout Serbia, and I assume it attracted attention of the senior leadership. Furthermore, there could have been other things that had happened earlier, which I had not paid attention to or had forgotten about. Many years earlier, I was offered the prestigious position of the personal secretary of the President of the Republic, Josip Broz Tito, which I refused on the pretext that, as my mother was in a very poor state of health, I would not be able to dedicate myself fully to the new job. It is possible that this, too, had remained in someone's memory and influenced my selection to a certain extent.

When I first arrived in the Serbian Government, I met with the Prime Minister, Mr. Zelenović, who greeted me, expressed his best wishes and asked if I needed any help. I replied that we would need funds to hire lobbying firms in Western countries, firstly in the United States, in order to counter the distorted propaganda messaging misrepresenting the policy and goals of Serbia. Zelenović immediately agreed and asked how much money would be needed for this. Although I was not familiar with the specific amount of money needed, I framed the answer at around two million German marks at the time, which should have been enough to start with. He immediately gave the order to pay that amount to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia. And then came, the so-called bureaucratic irresponsibility. The then Minister of Information, Mr. Vico, spent that money on his own initiative on the organization of long trips of two groups of individuals, one to Great Britain, the other to Japan. Even today, it is not clear to me why Japan. They stayed there for a while, apparently they achieved nothing, the money was spent and the whole thing simply died. I did not have time to return to this issue, because we were carried away by waves of other political changes and pressures, exerted on us with the high-speed escalation of the Yugoslav crisis.

Q: How did you try to overcome the problem of keeping your partners in the international community informed, given the fact that there was not enough money to implement the original plan that you had presented to Mr. Zelenović?

JOVANOVIĆ: I first tried to convince our people who were in charge of information affairs to hire, as soon as possible, a dozen or more experienced professionals from our Diaspora. Being highly proficient in various languages, and, at the same time, familiar with opportunities and needs in Western countries, they could have been engaged to collect, prepare, present and distribute such information, in the way standardly done in these countries. However, bureaucratic inertia combined with an outdated fear for security, and concerns that this could create some cracks in our security system were the reasons why this idea was not implemented either. I tried to

meet this need through my own diplomatic trips, to virtually all Western countries, and later to the countries of the former Soviet Union, Asia and Africa.

Of course, it was a palliative effort, it was not sufficient to break through the propaganda siege of Serbia. Somewhat later, after the Dayton Accords had been signed, on instructions from the government, we tried to hire one of the leading American lobbying companies. I contacted the third most influential company in the industry, they showed interest and provided us with a quotation. We were supposed to finalize all the details of the engagement during my second visit to their office. However, this company had to clear it with the State Department, which conditioned permission for their engagement on our fulfillment of four new requirements concerning the post-Dayton period. These conditions included the recognition of the former Yugoslav republics, but also the issue of Kosovo and Metohija, and a few other issues, too. I informed Belgrade about these demands, but the tone of an ultimatum by the State Department and the nature of the requests were not acceptable, so this endeavor hit the wall. I was surprised that a supposedly independent and profitable private lobbying firm in a democratic society had to seek the consent of the State Department in order to enter into a contractual engagement with a client. This was a big surprise to me from the aspect of a real-life limitation to the extent of American democracy. Thus the aforementioned attempt to inform the Western public failed before it was launched. We were forced to continue our struggle for the truth through more limited means, in a more limited manner, and with more limited results. One of the obstacles was that Milošević himself believed that the truth would pave a path for itself, that we were on a righteous path and that we should be concerned that others would succeed in distorting the truth with a false architecture. He remained relatively naive, well-meaning, but naive, because in today's world, where the tips of spears are bent and broken over everything, especially over winning the international public support, practically all means are acceptable and, the one who is hesitant or passive is perceptively a sure loser.

Q: What was your relationship with the Federal Government at the time? How did they, especially your colleagues in the Federal Secretariat for Foreign Affairs, view your appointment?

JOVANOVIĆ: As the Foreign Minister, I occasionally participated in the meetings of the Federal Government. I was later appointed the Deputy Prime Minister, which was only a formal title of a prestigious nature. However, my work distracted me from taking a more active part in these meetings and I was not obliged to attend the sessions on a regular basis, especially since I had daily contact with President Milošević, who, in essence, gave the main direction to our policy regarding all open issues. When it comes to the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 1990 and 1991 it was much more sympathetic to the western republics, Slovenia and Croatia, and to the western policies in general, regarding Yugoslavia and its crisis, than to Serbia and its approaches and perceptions. The then Foreign Minister, Budimir Lončar, surrounded himself with a group of like-minded diplomats, whom he over time shaped and oriented towards the agenda of the western republics, and, consequently, against Serbia and its concerns. These diplomats from Lončar's inner circle were mostly Slovenes and Croats, but there were Macedonians and Serbs among them, too, whom

he had co-opted even earlier. In light of this, it was no surprise that the majority in the political leadership of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs was obstructive towards Milošević and Serbia, and because of that, in a way, they viewed me with resentment. The result of this situation was that we, in the Republic Government, did not receive information, especially of a sensitive nature, from the Federal Ministry in a timely and immediate way. For example, the FSFA did not inform us in time of the European Community's Declaration to convene an international peace conference on Yugoslavia in the fall of 1991. We were officially informed of this Declaration after we had already learned about it from President Mitterrand during the official visit to Paris. But this is just a small illustration of the true nature of our relationship. Nevertheless, the group still tried to keep an external appearance of cooperation, so, for instance, I was formally allowed to attend a ministerial political session of the CSCE, I believe it was in Prague or Warsaw. However, I could not attend the session itself, and was left in corridors outside the conference room, since only the federal state was a member of the CSCE, and not Serbia as a federal republic. However, on the margins of the meeting, I had a chance to talk to numerous journalists, who were eager to hear something from other sources as well. In this and a couple of similar cases, the leadership of the FSFA was only interested in creating an appearance of fair relations and cooperation with us. However, the true nature of these relations soon became apparent, especially at the beginning of the International Peace Conference on Yugoslavia in The Hague in September 1991. At that time, it was publicly exposed that the top of the FSFA was not at all in line with the policy of the Federation and Serbia, and that it more and more openly supported the positions and policies of Slovenia and Croatia. This rift was completely visible in the response to one of the proposals of the President of this Conference, Lord Carrington, when the Federal State, including Serbia and Montenegro, were on one side and held a common position, whereas Foreign Minister Lončar supported the position of Lord Carrington, declaring himself actually to be on the same side with Slovenia and Croatia. In other words, Lončar no longer acted in line with the position of the federal state that he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of, which later led to his removal by the Federal Assembly.

Q: When you took office as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, the crisis in Slovenia and Croatia was in full swing and the Troika had already been formed. Shortly after taking office, you had your first meeting with Van Den Broek, Poos and Pinheiro. What were your impressions from that meeting and to what extent did the attitude of the Federal Government and Prime Minister Marković towards the demands of the Troika differ from the position of Slobodan Milošević?

JOVANOVIĆ: That was the very beginning of the crisis, when the federal policy was to preserve the common state. From that perspective, the Federal Prime Minister Marković was, in a way, in disagreement with the Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs and others, who already had strong sympathy for the positions of Slovenia and Croatia. The European Community had approached the Yugoslav crisis in a very diluted manner. Namely, the Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, Budimir Lončar, had rejected the offer of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries to intervene, to mediate in the Yugoslav crisis in order to enable the divided Yugoslav republics to ease their misunderstandings and preserve the common state. Minister Lončar quickly and

rather harshly rejected the offer and stated that the European Community would deal with the Yugoslav crisis. This indicated that some things had already been prepared in advance. The European Community took the first step at the so-called Brioni Meeting, when it managed to deploy its first observers to the north of the country, primarily in Slovenia, and then, with the outbreak of the conflict in Croatia, it requested the deployment of a full scale observer mission in parts of Croatia where fighting was taking place. The request was for Yugoslavia, with the support of Serbia, to accept this foreign element as an important factor in the further monitoring and resolution of the Yugoslav crisis. It was the nucleus of what later grew into the open presence, interference and dictate of the EC towards Yugoslavia. For something like this it was necessary to get the consent of both the Federal State and of Serbia, the Republic that was most interested in preserving the common state and in preserving the independence of that state, without allowing it to fall under the influence and policy of foreign factors. However, at the insistence of the EC, through its supporters, primarily in Slovenia and Croatia, and then under pressure from the Federal Government itself, the EC presence was brought practically to our door. It only remained to convince Milošević to accept it, so that the formal consent could be granted. Milošević understood well that any foreign presence, even a minimal one, would be a bad omen and would wet an appetite of the foreign factor, leading to even greater and more drastic interference in the internal resolution of the Yugoslav crisis, and he was, for that reason, fundamentally against it. All of us from Serbia were in one room in the Federal Government building, while the three EC ministers were in the other one together with the Federal Prime Minister Ante Marković, who shuffled between them and us conveying messages and attempting to get our consent. The tension lasted for a long time, several hours and longer, until, at one point, the Prime Minister of the Federal Government came and said that the conversation was nearing its end and that we should decide whether to accept it or not. However, if we did not accept, then we needed to know what this would mean for Serbia, given the fact that the practically united West was increasingly showing open sympathy for the secession of Slovenia and Croatia. At that point, Milošević paused for a moment and, while the Prime Minister still stood in front of the open door that led to the next room, began to consult with us. We, pressured by the whole situation, advised him to allow the mission of civilian observers, but on the condition that they deployed in civilian clothes and without weapons. The problem was that they were not really civilian observers, but military observers, but to make things easier, they were viewed by us as civilians and they didn't carry weapons. For them this did not matter, for them the only important thing was that their presence was officially approved by all of our institutions. This was the beginning of the proliferation of the network of various forms of international presence and the strengthening of the influence of the EC within Yugoslavia, especially towards Serbia. This later led to a decision by the EC at the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia in The Hague in 1991, which it had convened in agreement with the then US administration, to proclaim the joint federal state non-existent and call on all six former republics to declare independence and to come to the counter in Brussels, in order to meet the conditions for recognition and obtain the right to become new members of the United Nations. As it turned out, this was at the time and has remained since the first and only goal that the EC had towards us - to put an end to the existence of a state, which was the founder of the League of Nations, the United Nations, the OSCE and a number of other international organizations. To

put an end to the existence of the state in which the level of rights enjoyed by national minorities was so high that it could not be compared with any other country in the world including the EC members, in which minorities were, and still are, ignored or reduced only to cultural or other similar forms. Although this first meeting with the EC representatives was seemingly honest, it was only the beginning of a much rougher and much more direct bias against Serbia and the Serbian people, and, of course, Yugoslavia as a whole. Traces of this are present even today, when Serbia's candidacy for membership in the European Union is conditioned by various peremptory and insatiable demands, such as limiting our bilateral relations with other countries without a trace of a solid and tangible accession perspective.

Q: Shortly after the meeting with Van Den Broek, Poos and Pinheiro, you went to Paris for a meeting with French President Mitterrand. On that occasion, the Badinter Arbitration Commission was formed. What were your impressions from that meeting?

JOVANOVIĆ: There were only Mitterrand, Milošević, Vedrin, who was then Mitterrand's Chief of Staff, me and, of course the interpreters, present in the meeting. Since the conversation was conducted in French, I had the opportunity to listen to Mitterrand twice, both directly and in the translation of our interpreter. It was clear that Mitterrand had the task of persuading Milošević and securing his presence at the opening of the International Peace Conference on Yugoslavia in September 1991 in The Hague, as Milošević had previously rejected any possibility of foreign powers deciding the fate of Yugoslavia. He firmly believed that this was an internal issue that had to be resolved between the republics and their citizens. The choice of Mitterrand was not accidental, France was traditionally close and friendly with Serbia, and Mitterrand himself repeatedly expressed his attachment to the tradition and friendship of the two countries during the First World War and later. This was the main focus of his approach and, in essence, he deceived his guest claiming that it was an offer of good offices for quarreling brothers to meet on a neutral ground and try to smooth over their differences and disagreements. If they managed to reach an agreement, it would be a success for both the EC and for them, and if they fail, everyone will return to their home in Yugoslavia, as if nothing had happened. It was a deception, since, as it turned out later, it was not a conference based on good offices at all, but a conference at which the death certificate of the common state was dictated and an invitation was extended to all republics to declare independence and meet certain conditions for recognition as new states. Mitterrand also emphasized that the Arbitration Commission would be of an advisory nature, that it would be comprised of five prominent lawyers, including the French, Robert Badinter, and a prominent Greek lawyer, among others, that Badinter was his personal friend, and that if he was his friend, he was automatically a friend to Serbia as well, so Serbia had nothing to fear. Serbian arguments were such, Mitterrand continued, that Badinter would surely affirm them. In other words, he gently seduced Milošević with a mermaid song and eased him into a sleep until Milošević agreed to attend the conference as an expression of our good will, in the belief that what he had heard from Mitterrand was true. Regrettably, as it turned out later, everything Mitterrand said was a lie. We later learned that the EC, prior to our meeting in Paris, had issued a Declaration convening the conference with precise indications of what it was intended for. We in Serbia did not know this, as we did not receive any information in this regard from the FSFA,

and, on the other hand, we did not have a direct communication with Brussels to receive it from the EC either. We learned upon our return that there was such a document. Mitterrand knew about this document, but he closed his eyes to it and managed to deceive Milošević, which was not a very honorable act. But it was useful for the EC, and in politics usefulness often takes precedence over honesty and fairness.

Q: Shortly after the Paris meeting, the International Conference on Yugoslavia was organized in The Hague. Was the European Community unified or was the process managed by individual members? On that occasion, Lord Carrington entered the whole process. What was your impression of him and his role?

JOVANOVIĆ: Lord Carrington was an experienced British politician, who had previously served as the Secretary General of NATO, and he was a seasoned negotiator for the protection of Western interests. He immediately left an impression of impartiality, began to hold separate bilateral talks with the delegations of all six Yugoslav republics, and repeated this several times. For almost a month, the talks were conducted in this way. Of course, they showed that we held opposite positions, Serbia and Montenegro versus Slovenia and Croatia, while Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina followed the talks without exposing themselves to any risk. It was clear, however, that they were waiting for the success of Slovenia and Croatia so that they could also take the same path. I have no doubt that the break-up of Yugoslavia and the preparation of the four republics that I have just mentioned was masterminded, promoted and organized by the West, with an extensive propaganda involved, and that they were simply waiting for an appropriate political polish to give it the appearance of a reasonable and legally valid international act. The task of the International Conference under Carrington was to implement this, and he did so immediately after a month of separate talks with all parties involved, submitting first one and then three more drafts of the final agreement. The aim of the agreement, which was on the table, was to forget about the existence of Yugoslavia and have all of its republics declare independence. Of course, the four mentioned republics immediately did it, while Serbia and Montenegro said that they would remain in Yugoslavia as its founders. These were the only two republics whose independence was recognized at the Berlin Congress of Berlin in 1878 and which had vested their statehood and independence to the common state in 1918. However, Carrington was categorical: you cannot be a founding state, but only a state that emerged out of a common state, and as a new state you must seek recognition from the EC under certain preconditions that you have to meet. We opposed this, arguing that the right to leave the common state could not be stronger than the right to be loyal to the common state and that this right had to be applied to all the constituent nations living in the common country, including Serbs, regardless of whether they lived in Serbia, Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina. In response, the Badinter Commission issued a conclusion that the right to self-determination did not belong to the constituent nations, but to the territories of the republics. This is completely contrary to public international law and is more akin to the redrawing of borders in Africa by colonial powers, where the lines were drawn as they saw fit, based on territory and not on the population that lived there. This was an attitude that was arrogant, rude, unjust and which did not respect the Constitution of the Federal State, which stipulated that only

the constituent nations had the right to self-determination, provided that they reached agreement in advance with the republics and nations remaining in a common state. This was not respected, because secessionism, through the use of force, was immediately accepted as a unilateral act, without respect for the Federal Constitution. Slovenia did it first, when it dismantled part of the Yugoslav international border posts with Austria and Italy and occupied them, displaying their new state emblems. This was contrary to the CSCE principle, which declared all borders in Europe to be unchangeable until the country concerned agreed. In addition, all countries had an international obligation to protect their international borders. This is why, when Slovenia committed this unilateral act of violence, removing the symbols of the common state and displaying its secessionist ones, the Federal State sent several trucks of soldiers to the border to regain control over it, in line with its international obligation. However, they were ambushed and attacked upon entering Slovenia and several dozen of these soldiers were killed. So, the first acts of violence were committed by Slovenia, first in the legal sense, and then in the physical sense. This violence was ignored in the West, and the Federation, i.e. Serbia was immediately blamed for these acts. I have cited this as a small illustration of what will later, over four years, develop as a parallel to a terrible abuse of rights, morals and force by leading Western countries. The only goal was to end the existence of Yugoslavia, because it no longer served them, they no longer had a strategic interest in it, because the Cold War was over. Such a state, with such a flexible solution for interethnic relations and a high level of rights provided to minorities, could have been a dangerous example for Western countries, in which such a level of understanding for the needs of national minorities had never been shown.

Q: We are continuing our conversation on November 10, 2020.

In October 1991, you sent a letter to Lord Carrington. What prompted you to send it and what was this letter about?

JOVANOVIĆ: In the first month, Lord Carrington, as I have already mentioned, allowed a perception to be created that there was no progress in bringing together positions and that, consequently, the time had come to declare that Yugoslavia was dying, that it no longer functioned, that all former republics should resort to their independence and seek recognition of this independence, first from the European Community and then from others. This was a complete surprise, because it, all of a sudden, ignored all of the realities of the existence of a state such as Yugoslavia, all of its institutions and its Constitution, which was, when it comes to the rights of the constituent peoples and minorities, more advanced than practically all other constitutions that the world knew at that moment.

This shocked our team. We came to the conclusion that he should be responded to in a comprehensive manner while specifically opposing key provisions: that the state had ceased to function, that the right to self-determination was tied to the republics and not to the people living in them, that the administrative lines that existed between republics had definitely been defined and that they had become international borders. All of this was contrary to our Constitution and to international law, because internal borders, except in the case of the division of colonies among colonial powers, could

never be treated nor definitively established as international borders, and even in the case of division of territory they had to be the subject of special negotiations.

However, the most important thing was that Lord Carrington had tied the right to self-determination to territories, to the republics, and not to the people. Still, International public law binds all rights to people and not to territory. Whether it is the rights of national minorities or human rights, or the rights of the constituent people, they all apply to people and not to land. This distorted opinion was supposed to justify the violent separation of the republics from the common state. Our Constitution had never recognized the right of the republics to exit, but the right to express one's opinion on that issue had been vested in the constituent peoples, according to the procedure that required prior agreement with those who would remain in that state. This distorted interpretation of the right to self-determination was aimed at guaranteeing quickly the unhindered exit of Slovenia and Croatia from Yugoslavia, and subsequently of other republics as well, while wrongly assuring that this exit was legally equivalent to the position of the republics and the people that remained in Yugoslavia. Therefore, all republics would be new, and Montenegro and Serbia, which had remained loyal to their country, could not ask for greater rights, i.e. the rights of predecessor states. Those who left the common state had to seek recognition of their independence. However, in order for the destruction of Yugoslavia to be achieved once and for all time, it was necessary to erase it completely from the political map. As Carrington claimed, the constituent peoples and their republics, who wanted to remain in Yugoslavia could do so, but only in a new state of Yugoslavia. They could call this new state whatever they wished, but it had to be a new state, not a remaining part of the old state.

This was the murder of a state, to which the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia had no right. No international conference has the authority to kill a state, to declare it non-existent, unless this is an expression of the will of all citizens of the country and in accordance with the Constitution that they had. The Constitution was completely negated, if it was something that did not exist, totally unimportant, only the will of the secessionists mattered, and only their demands were to be accommodated. This means that not only were Lord Carrington and the European Community, as well as the block of Western countries that stood by Slovenia and Croatia completely biased, but also completely irresponsible towards reality and history, when they declared that an entire country had vanished overnight and called on its parts to declare independence. Something like that had never happened to any country before. Yugoslavia, through the Kingdom of Serbia, endorsed the first international conventions, from the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the First Postal Union, the Telegraph Union and so on. All these conventions were endorsed by Serbia, which was the nucleus of Yugoslavia, and was a founding member of the League of Nations, the United Nations, and the CSCE. Such a state, which confirmed its modern continuity of existence along with the national state of Serbia in the Middle Ages, was a tangible and established fact and its existence should not have been allowed to be terminated by this decision in such a manner. In this letter, we summarized in detail all of these facts and we challenged the right of Carrington to proclaim that the state had disappeared and that the republics that remained loyal to that state had no rights, because they could not be the successors of Yugoslavia. Furthermore, they, too, had to

abandon the common house, which was called Yugoslavia and no longer existed, and become completely new states. This was an effort without any chance of success, since, with this letter, we ran into the wall of the already made decision to destroy Yugoslavia and we could not expect that the response would be favorable. Indeed, Carrington's response was to reject our positions bluntly and continue to follow the line he had already taken. The letter was written more for history than out of an expectation that Carrington would change his position. This, in fact, was not his own position, but the position of a number of Western countries that he acted as a spokesman for, who was only in charge of implementing the earlier decision to erase Yugoslavia completely from the political map of Europe.

Q: A few months later, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was formed and you were appointed as the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Federal Government. However, other staffing decisions, including for the posts of the prime minister and the president, came as a surprise. Can you say something more about the circumstances surrounding the appointment of Milan Panić as the first FRY Prime Minister? Who were his advisors? What was their attitude towards you?

JOVANOVIĆ: I played no part whatsoever in domestic politics. I was not in the ruling party, nor did I belong to any political faction, I did not enjoy the patronage of any of the politicians, I simply did my job, and internal matters were left to others. I was not aware of the preparations for Panić's arrival. When Milošević informed me about the decision for Panić to be the new prime minister, I was baffled and asked who he was because I had never heard of him. Milošević said that he was a very respected Serb from America, a successful businessman with good connections in the United States, and that this man would introduce us to modern American capitalism and reconcile us with the United States. He really wanted this and believed in it. He thought that he was close to his goal, that the United States was finally not going to be an opponent, but a partner. How did this come about? The original idea, based on my knowledge, came from Dušan Mitević, who once, at the time he was the editor-in-chief or director of Radio Belgrade, during a trip to the USA, met Panić there. I am also sure that this was preceded by discussions Milošević had had with a few of his other advisors. As far as I know, Panić had come to Belgrade for a private visit a few months earlier and had discussions with Mitević, who had already paved the way for his appointment with Milošević. They agreed that Panić would do the job the way Milošević had envisioned it. However, something quite the opposite happened. When Milan Panić assumed office, he brought with him a group of American advisors, including the former US Ambassador John Scanlan. Former Tanjug correspondent Šaranović was also part of the group, as were many others. Panić formed the government according to his preferences and expectations. I was the Minister of Foreign Affairs in this government. Many other well-known intellectuals, scholars and members of the opposition were included in the government, too. On one occasion, when Panić visited Hungary on a small plane, during the return flight he asked me to sit next to him and showed me a letter he had sent to the then US Secretary of State. In this letter, he informed the American Secretary of State about the new government, about the goals of this government and its members, with a special explanation of why he appointed each minister. I read his explanation that he had accepted me because of the need for institutional continuity with the previous

government. He praised the other newly appointed ministers, most of whom were the Fulbright Foundation alumni, professors, scholars, close to America, with liberal views, and so on. I was shocked when I read this, first because he had written it at all, and also that he had shown it to me, and I told him, "Mr. Prime Minister, it is not customary for a prime minister to report to any foreigner on what kind of Cabinet he had formed, why he had selected its members and to justify his decisions to others." Panić replied that he had done so deliberately to break through any distrust of the American political leadership towards our intentions. I replied that there were different ways for him to send them reassuring messages other than to submit reports acting as their clerk. However, he understood this in his own way, with laughter, and this shocked me. It made me feel uncomfortable in this government led by such a prime minister. He even mentioned that he would like to take me to America one day, so that I could see his economic empire and stay there if I wanted to. Understandably, such a proposal was met by an ice-cold silence on my side. All of this gave me the impression that our new prime minister was not in control, that he was not independent. I suspected that he might have been deliberately sent by the U.S. services to finish the job, but he acted like a bull in a china shop, instead of performing this likely task with seriousness and discretion, as it might be expected from people with such or similar missions. He rammed into forceful confrontation with Milošević in personal conversations and in meetings with foreigners, which is undocumented in the political developments records in any country. He raised the temperature in relations with Milošević, attacking him most rudely in front of others, demanded his immediate resignation, called him the most insulting names and asked for support of others.

He demonstrated this behavior at the Conference in London, in August 1992, in the presence of the President of the Republic, Dobrica Ćosić, when he came to Milošević's room and called on him to resign immediately, calling him the harshest of names. On the one hand, I was shocked by such brazen and audacious behavior, while on the other hand, this all happened in our delegation that had gone to London to discuss the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a mission to eliminate doubts constructed about us and especially to counter decidedly the allegations that Serbs and Serbia were mostly and only to blame for the hostilities, which had nothing to do with reality. Panić kept attacking Milošević until well into the night, in front of all of us, and then continued at the conference the following morning. Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina were present in this session, as well as the Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger on behalf of the United States, since Secretary of State Christopher was busy with the election campaign. The chairman of the conference gave the floor to our country, namely to Slobodan Milošević. However, Panić stood up and forbade Milošević to speak, saying that he was the head of the delegation and that he represented the country. These were outbursts that are characteristic of an immature child, and not of an educated and mature politician. Such a behavior at an international conference, where the right to speak of the president of the republic, Serbia, to speak on behalf of his country, Serbia, had been challenged by the Prime Minister of the federal state, at the conference where Serbia was directly named, maligned and condemned. The second incident took place in the room of our delegation, when, as we were in the middle of the discussion, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Kozyrev, came to inform us that the Conference would introduce a

paper regarding Kosovo, which would affirm Kosovo in its secessionist intents and attack Belgrade for alleged injustices and violations committed there against Albanians. Panić immediately took a position and stated that we should accept this. Surprisingly, a few members of our delegation followed him in this position or kept silent, but I could not do it. I stood up and, in a raised voice, condemned such a position, Professor Oskar Kovač followed me in this, while others remained silent, overwhelmed by the Prime Minister's desire to please the Conference to the detriment of his own country. This was the moment when I started considering my resignation from the Government, which I did a few days later. I went directly from London to Jakarta, to the session of the Summit of Non-Aligned Countries, as President Ćosić was too exhausted for such a long-haul travel, and I wrote my resignation immediately upon return from this trip.

My work in the Government with such a Prime Minister, given his behavior and treatment of others around him that were both out of bounds of protocol and political norms and harmful for the general national interests of Serbia, and in Kosovo and Metohija in particular, was not possible any longer. At this time, there was another cycle of elections in the country and President Ćosić, who was also against Milošević, joined Panić on the same ticket and they campaigned as a duo, as a team. Ćosić surprised me with this decision. When I asked him why he was doing this, considering what Panić was like and how he was behaving, Ćosić reassured me by saying that I should not worry much, as his most important goal was to use Panić to overthrow Milošević, and then he would easily deal with Panić. It was naive to expect that Panić would hand over the newly won power to Ćosić on a silver plate. If it was possible at all, he would get rid of Ćosić, too. But they lost the elections and all these speculations were brought to an end. Milošević returned to the political scene as the strongest politician in Serbia. Under such circumstances, the process of negotiations for the peaceful resolution of the fratricidal war in Bosnia and Herzegovina began, and lasted until it was crowned by the Dayton Peace Accords.

Q: You mentioned Dobrica Ćosić as the choice for the President of the newly established country. It seems that, in fact, the only common denominator between Panić and Ćosić was their aversion to Slobodan Milošević. Were there any differences between President Ćosić and Prime Minister Panić on other issues of national interest?

JOVANOVIĆ: Perhaps there were some, but Ćosić downplayed them, and blamed the “youthful” inexperience of Panić, believing this was only the matter of a temporary mischief, which he would easily subdue and eliminate. He did not support accusations from others that Panić was doing great harm, not only to Milošević, but to Serbian national causes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo, by having embraced positions which were not in line with formulated Serbian policies and with the long-term interests of Serbia with respect to new developments. He downplayed all of this and tried to use Panić to clear the path for him to realize his own political ambition.

This is what the things looked like, even though he never explicitly said so. I was suspicious because he had once, immediately following my appointment as the

minister, invited me to a meeting at the apartment of a former intelligence official from the Tito period. I came to this meeting because I had just met Ćosić and had a great respect for him as an author and as a personality. There were only the three of us, the wife of the host served us with drinks, Ćosić began a barrage against Milošević, calling him all kinds of names and demanding that he be removed from power. I was shocked as I had known that they had a friendly personal contact, that they spoke frequently and shared almost the same views about the Yugoslav crisis, so I saw this as a kind of test for me. I was a new man in the government, they did not know much about me, and Ćosić was tasked with checking me up. This is the way I saw this conversation and did not say anything about it to anyone.

However, this proved not to be the case, this was not a test for me, it was rather Ćosić's attempt to form a circle of friends who would support him, as he was preparing for the political war against Milošević. In line with these intentions, he agreed to become the President of the state, he had the best relations with Milošević, but, as soon as Panić had arrived, it became clear that he had a fundamental reservation towards Milošević, which only increased in time.

Q: It seemed that, upon his arrival, Milan Panić de facto took over foreign affairs, while, at the same time, his activities deviated greatly from usual diplomatic behavior. Can you say something more about this?

JOVANOVIĆ: He acted like a bull in a china shop in every way. He first leased luxury planes from the European Union and the state paid large sums for his flights all over Europe. These were extremely luxurious airplanes. I joined him on the trips to Tirana, Budapest and Madrid only, since, in the meantime, I went on a tour to Africa and other countries. When we traveled together, he simply ignored the fact that the Minister of Foreign Affairs was with him, during those trips he presented himself as all knowing and led discussions completely ignoring my presence. Furthermore, when we visited our embassies, especially in Madrid, he behaved in a strange way. He entered the embassies together with his American advisers, asked for all cables, including the classified ones, to be brought to him, and he read the confidential information with the foreigners. This is an unacceptable act for anyone, there is a clear and strict procedure on the protection of the official and classified correspondence and only authorized personnel can have access to and read it, and definitely not share it with others.

He really behaved very strangely, he was immature and not even aware of all of his actions and how unacceptable they were. However, his American advisers were by his side all the time and, as educated people and career diplomats, they should have warned him not to do it. I do not know if they warned him or not, but those were painful scenes and, as the minister, I was powerless to protect diplomats because the Prime Minister exercised all power over them, behaving in a very strange way. He was personally pleasant, he smiled, he was very proud about being a successful and wealthy man in the US. I heard later that his wealth had not been made without some controversy, but I would not now go into this as it is irrelevant. Panić came as he was, and Milošević hoped that he would be the bridge that would connect him with the US, with absolutely no shred of doubt that he could have been sent to Serbia on a mission.

But, since it turned out that Panić was completely contradictory and unrefined, in my opinion, he was not capable of such missions either. I believe that he did not have any assignment, except that he tried to gain the sympathy and support of the American political leadership throughout these sensationalistic public demonstrations of actions against Milošević. I do not think that he succeeded in this, because they determined that he was not equipped for any delicate political action towards any country.

Q: With the formation of the new state of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and with the formation of a government, which we have talked about thus far, the Conference on Yugoslavia continued. This brought about Cutileiro's plan, which, at that time, looked promising. What happened? Why was this plan cut short?

JOVANOVIĆ: This was the first plan that used cantons as the basis of a solution. The cantons would not have been all interconnected, and each would be mostly comprised of one of the 3 constituent peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. Following the hard work of Ambassador Cutileiro, which lasted several weeks somewhere in Portugal, he managed to persuade them to accept the cantonal system, which would guarantee a minimum of protection and rights for each of the three peoples against possible abuses by the central authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We had great difficulty convincing Karadžić to agree to all of this, because such a solution was the third choice on Karadžić's wish list. The first choice was for the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina to remain in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which, as a constituent people, they were entitled to. If this was not possible, the second-best choice was to be independent of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the third, the last one, was to remain in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which wanted to declare independence, but with full and real protection of the rights of Serbs as a constituent people. At our insistence from Belgrade, he agreed with a heavy heart to the third solution that he saw as the least favorable. He did it in the interest of avoiding the outbreak of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, as it turned out, was worse than any other alternative. At the Conference, which was then moved from The Hague to Brussels, Ambassador Cutileiro reported that an agreement had been reached.

He asked for a few more weeks to complete the final details and to put everything in order, after which he would come to submit a report stating that Bosnia and Herzegovina could be recognized as an independent state. Everyone present, Tudjman, Milošević, Cyrus Vance, Lord Carrington and others, were in favor of allowing Ambassador Cutileiro another two weeks. The only one who immediately opposed this was Alija Izetbegović, the leader of the Bosnian Muslims, now Bosniaks, who insisted on the immediate recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina's independence. Milošević replied that he should wait for two weeks, as Ambassador Cutileiro had requested, because it was important that the matter was completed, and he stated that Serbia would be the first country to recognize such an independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Milošević's statement literally countered all earlier claims that Milošević had some territorial claims over Bosnia and Herzegovina and that he wanted to divide it with Tudjman. Tudjman, too, said immediately that he would recognize the cantonal Bosnia and Herzegovina under the necessary conditions. When Izetbegović returned to Sarajevo, Warren Zimmerman came to see him. At that time, he, as the ambassador, had the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina in his portfolio,

since it had not separated from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia yet. He asked Izetbegović why he was dissatisfied, and Izetbegović replied that it was not the best solution he had wanted. Zimmerman encouraged him that he could have continued the talks and could have gotten a better solution. This was enough for Izetbegović to withdraw his initials from the deal and for the whole thing to fall through. Afterwards, in his book, Ambassador Zimmerman denied that he encouraged Izetbegović to withdraw. But the young diplomat, the secretary who had accompanied the ambassador, in his book denied Ambassador Zimmerman's claim and quoted the words that Zimmerman said to Izetbegović. In any case, Zimmermann did not make this move on his own, the American administration stood behind him. An American ambassador would never be authorized to make such a decision alone. Obviously, it did not suit the then US administration to close this book so quickly, because they wanted to achieve some goals with the beginning and duration of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. One of the goals was to show the European Community that it was not capable of taking care of its own backyard, let alone that it was capable of portraying itself as an independent global power. The second goal was to divert the attention of the Muslim world from the Middle East, where relations were very strained with occasional conflicts, and to focus it on Bosnia and Herzegovina and the so-called suffering of the Muslims in the Balkans instead.

The third goal was to drag Serbia indirectly into the war and weaken it further, which would lead to the downfall of Milošević and the realization of some additional interests. These were undeclared but evident goals, given that the then US administration was very restrained, not to say reserved, towards the plans that the international mediators, first Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen, and then Lord Owen and Torvald Stoltenberg, produced one after another starting from the cantonal arrangement. The American administration was either uninterested or, at best, lukewarmly supportive of these ideas. It was obviously not interested in putting an end to the war in B-H, because it did not produce all of the expected so-called benefits yet. Of course, its representatives never stated or wrote this, it was something that was present in the seams of all events and anyone who wanted to observe things neutrally could see it. Only when the United States showed a genuine interest in speeding up the resolution of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina by entering the scene for the first time in Washington D.C. in April 1993, did the five known EC countries, with Spain and Russia on board, adopt the so-called "joint action plan".

That plan was characterized by the rejection of any idea of a cantonal organization of B-H while launching the idea of its reorganization as a union - a federation or confederation, composed of three territorial units, formed according to an ethnic principle. The idea immediately paved the way for seeking a solution based on ethnic principles, Lord Owen quickly accepted it and, in a conversation first with Milošević, he determined the percentage of the territory that Serbs in B-H could count on as their entity. Then followed painful negotiations with Tudjman and Izetbegović about the extent of the territory that would belong to them. Since the Bosnian Serbs controlled most of the territory, they were asked to give up various pockets of these territories that would mostly benefit the Bosnian Muslims. This ordeal lasted for a long time, until the international mediators, Owen and Stoltenberg, made the decision to transfer

everything to the newly formed Contact Group, which included both the United States and the Russian Federation.

That Contact Group soon launched its plan for the territorial demarcation of the three peoples in BiH and began negotiating the percentages of those territories. Then Richard Holbrooke appeared, as the representative of the United States, who soon left the others behind and began to negotiate with Milošević, Tudjman and Izetbegović single-handedly. Using the stick and the carrot, a so-called bulldozer diplomacy, he led to the convening of the conference and the achievement of the Dayton Accords. The United States ended the war in BiH in a way that suited their interests, and not in a way that suited the interests of the EC or individual actors in this tragic war. The responsibility of the then US administration for the outbreak of the war was not small. To cover up that responsibility, all responsibility for the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina had been shifted to the Bosnian Serbs and Slobodan Milošević. A scapegoat was found, constantly marked as the only and biggest culprits, and all other participants in the war were left in the shadows, if not shown as innocent victims of the policies of Milošević and the Serbs in B-H. It was not adequate, it did not correspond to the facts on the ground, it was not fair, nor was it useful, but it was the dictated will of the largest and only power in the world after the end of the Cold War. Nothing could be changed there, because like with the former Roman emperors, the will of this single power had the force of law – everything had to be done the way they said.

Q: In March 1992, just before the outbreak of the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, you met in Washington D.C. with Lawrence Eagleburger. What were the impressions you returned from this meeting with? What were the messages of Lawrence Eagleburger?

JOVANOVIĆ: I went there with a concern that the conversation would be unpleasant, because prior to this meeting, Eagleburger had been openly dissatisfied with the talks he had had with Milošević's closest associate, Borisav Jović, the Head of the Presidency of Yugoslavia, and Aleksandar Prlja, who was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia before me. Apparently, they acted very clumsily, and I will not go further into this. However, when Eagleburger heard from me about our view of the Yugoslav crisis, its origins, development and what we had done to bring it under control, he was visibly satisfied, and he said it to me in front of other participants in the meeting. He welcomed my arrival and my approach and he even challenged Lord Carrington and his insistence on the ending of Yugoslavia. Eagleburger noted that Serbia had the same right as Russia in relation to the Soviet Union, that it was a predecessor country and not a successor country. He said this on his own, without my insistence. I believe that he did this because we proved that we were not interested in any kind of war or the continuation of the war in Croatia and that we had initiated a series of actions to end this war, including bringing the United Nations peacekeepers to the territory of the Republic of Srpska Krajina based on a spot system and supporting the double-key decision process for use of heavy weapons, all of which Tudjman eventually accepted. This was the end of the war in Croatia and its unnecessary further prolongation was avoided. Cyrus Vance was the chief negotiator on this plan with Milošević, then with Tudjman, and when they both accepted the

initiative, it was transferred to the UN Security Council, which decided to deploy a United Nations peacekeeping force. That was the contribution to peace made by Yugoslavia, or, to be more precise, by Slobodan Milošević, because, at that time, Yugoslavia did not yet exist after Lord Carrington had abolished it. Only Serbia existed at the time, and a few months later, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was formed, composed of Serbia and Montenegro, in response to Carrington's denial of the existence of Yugoslavia. We would have been at the beginning not only of settling relations with the United States, but also of their possible improvement, had there been no war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We had no interest at all in the outbreak of this war, and neither did the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first victims in this war were Bosnian Serbs. In Sarajevo, a Serb wedding procession was attacked by armed Bosnian Muslim militia, while a Croatian paramilitary group, Zengas, crossed the Sava River, attacked a Serb village in the northern B-H and massacred civilians living in the village.

Therefore, the first shots and the first victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina were not shots fired by Serbs, killing Muslim and Croat victims, but vice versa. The first victims were Serbs and the shots came from the other two sides. The Serbs in B-H were afraid that they would lose their right as a constituent people and they fought for this right only politically until the other two sides started killing them. This right was threatened by the proposal of the European Community to organize a referendum on independence. However, a referendum is a majority vote, and outvote would violate the rights of the constituent nations. If the votes of Muslims and Croats had provided a majority for Bosnia and Herzegovina to become an independent state, then the rights of the third constituent people would have been revoked. Serbs in B-H did not agree to have their rights revoked in such a way, and this was the reason why an agreement had to be reached that would address their fears and secure their consent. This was achieved by Ambassador Cutileiro in his proposal for an agreement in early 1992, but, as I said, his success was blocked by the then US administration by pulling the Bosnian Muslims out of the agreement that had been reached already.

Q: Let us briefly go back to the issues that you have already talked about, the London Conference and the relations within the Yugoslav delegation itself, which were often on the verge of an incident. Why was the Council for the Harmonization of State Policy established? What were the objectives of the Council and did it have any tangible results?

JOVANOVIĆ: It was an attempt to, in a way, set limits to the arbitrary behavior of the Prime Minister, Milan Panić. This was Čosić's initiative, but the Council was stillborn, it met only a few times. It could not produce anything, because the need to organize a joint front against Milošević prevailed. After that, Čosić himself joined the front with Panić and several other people. Unfortunately, this good idea did not work out, because things got out of hand. Prime Minister Panić was unstoppable in his arbitrary behavior, and Čosić did not want to rein him in, because he estimated that it weakened Milošević and his position and, in a way, eased the path for Čosić's secret aspiration to be the ultimate master of the situation.

Q: Sometime during the London Conference, Lord Owen joined the whole process alongside Cyrus Vance. What were your impressions of him?

JOVANOVIĆ: I knew Lord Owen from the time I was the Minister Counselor in London, he was then a young Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. If I can recall correctly, he was 32 years old, very young, very popular, especially among journalists, charming, and communicative. We did not know each other personally, but I knew him from his public appearances. He then lost this position after the government he was in had fallen, but then, years later, he was pulled out of retirement and placed in the position of an international mediator - precisely because he was English. The reason is that the British, by the nature of things, considered themselves to be special experts on the Balkans, and especially on the Serbian space, and had a specific tactic of treating Serbs, politely and insincerely at the same time. His attitude was marked with strong anti-Serb sympathies and prejudices, so it was difficult to cooperate with him.

Over time, he adjusted and changed his opinions and positions, especially when he realized that the US officials practically did not support him and were blocking him indirectly, which surprised and disappointed him. He gave vent to this in his book on mediation in the former Yugoslavia. Over time, Owen realized that the imposed position that the Serbs were the only and most responsible culprits was not true, and he understood that there were many flawed theories circulating around the world, which were part of the propaganda univocally repeated by the officials and the media in the West. In his frequent travels around Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, he saw that the intensity of the conflict between, say, Croats and Muslims, in 1993, and in early 1994, were much fiercer, more heartless, more inhumane than the conflict between Muslims and Serbs. He also saw the destruction in Mostar, and even told Milošević that the consequences of the destruction and fighting in Sarajevo were nothing compared to what was happening in Mostar. But Mostar was not talked about in the West, photos of the atrocities and destruction of Mostar were not shown in a panic on Western media, while Sarajevo was exploited to the maximum. This corresponded to the image created in public by the then US administration and the Muslims, which portrayed the Serbs as absolute culprits, irresponsible, incorrigible, who should not be pitied, no matter what happened to them.

Q: Today is November 13, 2020.

In late 1992 and early 1993, international engagement in resolving the Yugoslav crisis intensified, along with individual initiatives and a growing number of foreign mediators trying to make progress in finding a solution. At the same time, it became apparent that there were differences in attitudes and goals between Slobodan Milošević and the Serbian leadership west of the Drina. In January 1993, the Geneva Conference was held, the Vance-Owen Peace Plan was published and it became evident that the role of Slobodan Milošević was different than before. Why was Vance-Owen's plan not acceptable to Karadžić?

JOVANOVIĆ: This plan was not acceptable because its goal was to separate Serbs and Muslims, who were closer to the Serbian border, into separate cantons that would

not have a point of contact with the Serbian border. Serbs in Bosnia were to be territorially organized in 5-6 cantons, and Muslims had a similar number of cantons. Of the total number of cantons, Serbs in Bosnia had only one canton on the border with Serbia, while Muslims could not have a physical contact with Sandžak, an area in Serbia populated predominantly by Muslims. The idea of preventing a compact territorial organization of Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina and opting for a number of cantons instead was politically motivated to prevent one of these constituent peoples from becoming too powerful, which might have happened if they had been compact. Thus, the cantons were to counter a compactable territorial organization. Karadžić, the Bosnian Serb leader, did not want to accept it because he insisted on the territorial unity of the cantons, striving for the Serb community to defend itself more effectively from Muslim outvoting. The Muslims did not want to be separated from Sandžak either. However, for practical reasons, they were ready to accept this while knowing that the Serb side in Bosnia would refuse the plan. They, in essence, wanted to shift the blame from themselves to others.

Milošević persistently insisted that the plan be accepted, because it was better to have a territorial organization in one's hands, even if it was not compact, than to expose oneself to the risk of a continuing war with an uncertain outcome. At the same time, I would like to remind you that there were five plans made in an attempt to resolve the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which were offered to the three communities in exchange of waging war. The first was the Cutileiro Plan, the second was the Vance-Owen Plan, the third was the Owen-Stoltenberg plan, the fourth was the European Community Action Plan and finally the Contact Group Plan. The Vance-Owen Plan was the second in line, as Ambassador Cutileiro's Plan, which we have already discussed, was rejected by the leader of the Bosnian Muslims after the United States had encouraged him to do so. The big question remains: why did the then US administration give preference to the dangerous outbreak of an armed conflict over preventing such a conflict by endorsing the Cutileiro Plan? The next in line, the Vance-Owen Peace Plan, did not have the good fortune to come to life at all, mainly due to Washington's cold reception and absence of stronger international support. The Plan was accepted as a fact and immediately closed for any serious consideration, and the key stakeholders chose not to fight passionately for it. The main reason behind this decision was that defusing the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina so early did not suit the US administration at the time, as, by continuing the war until more favorable circumstances, it was counting on winning on all sides. Dr. Owen was profoundly disappointed with such an attitude of the United States, and he made this known in his book, when he assessed that the United States, throughout his mediation, first with Vance and then with Stoltenberg, kept a certain political distance towards this process. Without Washington's full support, none of these plans could be fully imposed on communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the second plan had not received any international support, Cyrus Vance withdrew and the UN Secretary General appointed a new envoy, Thorvald Stoltenberg. Stoltenberg was a Norwegian politician who spoke Serbian because he had lived in Yugoslavia as a child with his parents who were diplomats. Dr. Owen was the locomotive of those negotiations, Vance and Stoltenberg more or less stood by, acting more like witnesses and reporting to the Secretary General of the United Nations. However, even the Owen-Stoltenberg plan, which was additionally developed and more comprehensive

than the preceding initiatives, did not succeed in the end, although it came very close. The plan was presented to all stakeholders - Milošević, Tudjman, Izetbegović, Karadžić and others - and was rejected by Karadžić, who remained dissatisfied with the cantonal approach and the lack of territorial compactness for Bosnian Serbs. This plan envisaged territorial separation from others, but through pockets, cantons, which were not territorially connected with each other, and this was the main reason behind Karadžić's disapproval.

As a result, at the initiative of Greek Prime Minister Mitsotákis, an international meeting was held in Thessaloniki dedicated to this plan, attended by the leaders of all three communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in addition to Mitsotákis, Milošević and Tudjman. The participants joined efforts to convince Karadžić to change his position, since it was the Serb community only who resisted the plan for the reasons I mentioned. In this meeting, Karadžić was brought around to accepting the plan; various arguments were used, both those that would encourage him to do so, but also those that suggested that Bosnia and Herzegovina would be organized by cantons, and not as a territorial whole. Pressed from all sides, Karadžić reluctantly agreed to sign an agreement to accept the plan, but on the condition that the plan would be confirmed by the Parliament in Republika Srpska within a few weeks. This was accepted more as a *pro forma*, as it was believed that the Parliament would ratify the document as it was signed by their leader. The Thessaloniki group parted quite cheerfully, and, a couple of weeks later, a joint visit to Pale, a town near Sarajevo where the Republika Srpska Parliament was meeting, was organized by the presidents of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro. They went there to emphasize the significance of the event with their presence and to encourage the deputies to support the Plan.

Before this session, the three presidents quickly wrote a letter to the deputies of Republika Srpska, which I was assigned to take to one of their meetings in Bijeljina, in Eastern Bosnia, at three o'clock in the morning, and read it to the deputies. The letter was very direct, very harsh, very firm. Before the draft of the letter was finalized, I had tried to throw out some particularly harsh words and phrases, but without any success, as, reportedly, everything had already been decided. I read the letter to icy silence, the leadership of the Assembly was kind, they did not speak out against it, but the deputies, one after the other, including Biljana Plavšić, were against it and, in the end, they voted not to accept the appeal of that letter.

However, this was not the final decision; it was only a precursor to the meeting of the Assembly of Republika Srpska in Pale, near Sarajevo, a couple of weeks later. This was how the Owen-Stoltenberg Plan ended in history and did not see the light of day. There was an unpleasant and ominous silence, military conflicts continued, and suddenly the phoenix rose out of the ashes, and the United States organized a meeting between five countries in Washington, D.C., in which Spain also participated as the Presidency of the European Community. At that meeting, the Joint Action Plan was adopted, relatively unnoticed but very important, because this plan abandoned the idea of territorial fragmentation of the three communities in favor of the idea of territorial compactness, based on the ethnic principle.

The future Bosnia and Herzegovina, a confederation - as it was then conceived, was to consist of three territorially unified entities, Serb, Croat and Muslim. This idea suddenly brightened the horizon, Dr. Owen grabbed a hold of it and very soon after that, in July, he and Stoltenberg arrived in Belgrade and presented the idea to Milošević, who immediately accepted it. This was when the first concept of the percentage allocation of territory to the entities was made. It was agreed with Milošević to propose to Republika Srpska, and later to Tudjman and Izetbegović, that Republika Srpska received approximately 51%, and the allocation of the rest would be discussed with the others. Owen and Stoltenberg then spoke with Tudjman, to whom they proposed about 17.5% of the territory because the Croats were the fewest in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and with Izetbegović, who was against the territorial organization of the other two communities because his ambition was a unitary Bosnia and Herzegovina in which a majority of Muslims would play the dominant role. The Owen-Stoltenberg concept opposed Izetbegović's ambitions, as it foresaw a confederation of Bosnia and Herzegovina composed of three entities, which would have equal rights.

From this moment on, i.e., from July 1993 until the beginning of 1994, all meetings between international mediators and communities' representatives, as well as meetings specially organized in Geneva and elsewhere by the European Union, acted within this framework – to provide each community with an acceptable territorial percentage and to make everyone happy. It was not an easy job, Republika Srpska had to sacrifice the most, because it covered the largest part of territory, about 70%, and parts of the territory it controlled were severed to meet the wishes of the other two parties, as the mediators aimed for around 51% for the Muslims and Croats and 49% for the Serbs. There were smaller adjustments to this percentage, but this was, roughly, the main approach to be taken. These lines were later accepted and vigorously pursued by the Contact Group, which slowly took shape in late 1993 and took over the work on the details of the plan from the international mediators, who formally continued to exist and operate. However, it was the Contact Group that assumed the key role, and it was also joined by US representatives, who slowly took charge of the Group from the representatives of France, Germany, Great Britain and Russia. At one point, when Richard Holbrooke was appointed to his position, he took matters into his own hands and simply eliminated everyone else, becoming a self-proclaimed exclusive point of contact for all communication with Milošević, Tudjman, Izetbegović and the others.

Q: We will return to the Contact Group a bit later. In 1993, when the Geneva Process was still formally active, the then American representative, Reginald Bartholomew, came to Belgrade to discuss the proposal that was then on the table. What were your impressions from those meetings and what was his relationship with Milošević like?

JOVANOVIĆ: He was a typical American diplomat: he was direct in his approach and not too diplomatically polished. He performed in a pragmatic manner, as the Americans usually do, which was not the appropriate behavior in meetings with the heads of state, in this case, Milošević and Čosić. Nonetheless, he was tasked with pushing through his assignment at all costs, which was the behavior that Holbrook later continued with more energetically and successfully. However, Bartholomew

himself was quite direct, almost to the point of embarrassment, especially during the meeting with Dobrica Ćosić, the President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, who explained to him the history of the problems we had with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bartholomew listened to Ćosić with not too much focus, eventually making a few diplomatic gaffes. He interrupted his interlocutor in the middle of the meeting and he went to the corner of the conference hall to talk to someone over a satellite phone. After he had hung up, he came back to the conference table, declared that the meeting was over and left. This is an extremely unusual behavior for meetings with heads of states, as it is the host of the meeting - and not the guest - who determines the moment when the meeting should end. However, some American diplomats allowed themselves the luxury of behaving not only as if they were equal to, but also as if they were above the heads of other states. This is an illustration of the weakness of all leaders of the countries of former Yugoslavia, not only Milošević, but also Tudjman, Izetbegović and others. As they were very weak politically in relation to other countries, they had to suffer such diplomatic and political humiliation.

Q: During these peace processes, an agreement between the Serbian and Croatian presidents, Milošević and Tudjman, was considered crucial for progress in resolving the crisis. What were the dynamics of their relationship at the meetings in Geneva in July and August 1993?

JOVANOVIĆ: They had several dozen *tête-a-tête* meetings over the years and did not comment on them. Apparently, they thought that there were too many mediators, internal and external, and that it was harder to find a common denominator in the mix of all these voices, so they thought that the two of them could overcome controversial issues and problems that they had between them more easily, quickly and with greater success if they acted on their own. This was one aspect of their relationship. Another was that they were almost regularly on the same side during meetings organized by the European Community or international mediators, attended by representatives of the communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and representatives of the great powers, who later had their representatives in the Contact Group. Tudjman and Milošević were often on the same side, starting with the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia in 1992 in Brussels, where they immediately supported the Cutileiro Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and then later on when the European Community, I think it was already the European Union at that time, organized a meeting in Geneva in 1993, with the desire to promote its Action Plan, which was a repeat of the already existing plan, but in a slightly more comprehensive way. This plan could not work because Karadžić and Boban, the Bosnian Croat representative, disagreed with the decision Tudjman and Milošević had taken jointly in support of the idea presented by the international mediators.

The communities of Croats and Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina held opposing views, and because of this, the attempt of the European Community to enter the game with their special plan failed. This is another example of where Tudjman and Milošević were efficient and quick in supporting international initiatives with the aim of ending the war and finding a political settlement. Apart from this, they had meetings where they mostly engaged in cartography, where they, on a large map of Bosnia and Herzegovina, agreed upon where to draw lines, editing and marking the

borders of the future ethnic territories of Serbs, Muslims and Croats. They did this together with Izetbegović, his prime minister and others around them, who mostly acted as observers. As expected, each of them attempted, in the give and take of parts of territory that would belong, let us say to Herceg-Bosna, i.e. to the Croatian ethnic territory, or to Republika Srpska, to grab a better or a wealthier piece of territory as their own in the process of trading portions of territory. Although they did not share a common language when dividing territories, as was the case when they acted together in plenary meetings, they were quite cooperative and somehow they would eventually find common grounds. The problem was the third party, the Muslim community and Alija Izetbegović, who were not overall satisfied because of the ethnic principles used in this arrangement.

When they eventually had to accept it, because it was the plan of the international community, they were then dissatisfied with the percentage of the territory allocated to them, around 31%. They insisted on 33%, then on 33.5%, which was the maximum they requested for themselves. Their demand was supposed to be met by taking away territories from Republika Srpska and Herceg-Bosna. This was a painful process, since it was difficult to satisfy their requests regarding the quality and percentage of territories. Croats insisted on 17.5%, Serbs did not want to fall below 49% and it took a lot of pain and effort to reach 33.5% at the expense of the Croats or Serbs. The negotiations lasted more than a year, practically until Dayton. Even there, as we know, were a series of territorial chess moves, not big ones, but there were some. Although the participants in this process looked like cartographers viewed from the outside, because they all held pencils in their hands and drew what they aimed for on the map, they were, nevertheless, politically liable to the people who were supposed to live in those territories, to Muslims, Croats and Serbs. This relationship between Milošević and Tudjman was, on the one hand, a partnership and, on the other, it was a competition, because both of them had obligations to the Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat leaderships, respectively, and they could not act independently from their expectations.

Q: At the beginning of fall 1993, a very unusual meeting was organized aboard the British aircraft carrier, the Invincible. What happened at that meeting?

JOVANOVIĆ : Everything that I have just described actually happened at that meeting. There was a huge round table with a large map of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the central part of the ship, and Presidents Izetbegović, Milošević, Tudjman, Karadžić and a representative of the Bosnian Croats gathered around the table. Since Boban had died in the meantime, the Bosnian Croats were represented by someone else. The rest of us stood around them, we were between 15 and 20 people awaiting an agreement on the percentage of territories to be reached. During one of the coffee breaks, Izetbegović came into Milošević's room on the ship, where Karadžić and I were at the moment, and started a conversation about percentages. At one point, Milošević was willing to accommodate Izetbegović and, when he asked him what percentage of the territory he wanted, Izetbegović replied: "33%". He even said: "Give me this percentage and then Republika Srpska can either declare independence or go with Serbia." He was ready to go this far in order to get the percentage he wanted. Everyone was surprised, I suggested that this should be put on paper, but

Karadžić insisted that it was unnecessary as that they would “easily” solve this after the meeting. However, at that moment, Haris Silajdžić entered, I think that back then he was either the Prime Minister or the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Muslim Bosnia, who, having heard of Izetbegović's offer, immediately nixed the agreement. Even though this Izetbegović's divergence from their established policies yielded no fruit, this incident hinted at a possibility that the Muslim side would be prepared to agree with Republika Srpska leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina in compensation for the desired parts of the territory. Nevertheless, the parties did not succeed in resolving everything fully on this ship. The demands for percentages remained unfulfilled, since the Bosnian Croats and Serbs were not ready to give up their claims for the specific parts and percentages of the territory. Instead, they made other offers, which did not satisfy the Muslims. The division of territory was only partially finished, some percentages remained incomplete, and this was the subject of continuing discussions and meetings practically until the end of 1994, when things accelerated and moved toward Dayton expectations.

Q : At that time, Slobodan Milošević came out with the initiative of the Declaration of Lasting Peace, which was signed by Radovan Karadžić and Fikret Abdić. What did Milošević want to achieve with this Declaration?

JOVANOVIĆ : The Muslims presented the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina as aggression committed by Serbia and Serbs, which was absolute nonsense because Serbs in BiH (Bosnia-Herzegovina) cannot be aggressors on their own land nor was there any question that Serbia also could not be an aggressor. For more than a year, throughout 1993 and early 1994, the only war fought in BiH was between Croats and Muslims and between Muslims factions. Fikret Abdić, who governed the autonomous province around Bihać, also had his own army. They were at war with the central Muslim army commanded by Sarajevo, which challenged their separation and autonomy, and this war was fought parallel to the war between Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats. The Bosnian Serbs, in the meanwhile, were on the side-lines, as they had already established their territory and were waiting for the others to do so.

Therefore it suited Slobodan Milošević and Fikret Abdić to meet and make some kind of peace agreement between this autonomous province and Republika Srpska, indicating that it was possible to have cooperation between Muslims and the others. This also proved that the irreconcilability expressed towards the Serbs was not based on sound grounds. I attended this meeting, it was a pleasant conversation, practically brotherly, with mutual respect. This Declaration was supposed to be an appeal to others for understanding that war was not the only approach, that it did not have to happen, and that many things could be solved through other means. However, the effect of this was insufficient for a number of reasons. First, the international community did not stand behind it, they favored Izetbegović and the Bosnian Muslims in Sarajevo, whereas Abdić was a kind of a renegade, although he was more popular among Bosnian Muslims than Izetbegović himself. In fact, Abdić beat Izetbegović in the elections, but he was not interested in running Bosnia and Herzegovina. Instead, he was interested in running the economy, as he was a well-known successful businessman even in the former SFRY. His critical weakness was that the Western powers did not support him, but stood behind the Muslims in

Sarajevo whose unity they supported, and they looked upon Abdić as some kind of secessionist. This event, which demonstrated the possibility of good relations between Muslims and Serbia and Serbs, went somewhat unutilized, although it was an example that needed to be highlighted to improve the atmosphere between Muslims and Serbs in BiH and Muslims and Serbia, in order to overcome the war and its terrible consequences faster.

Q: At this stage of the negotiation process, the then Senator, Joseph Biden arrived for a visit to Belgrade. What was the impact of this visit?

JOVANOVIĆ: He was a powerful senator, I think that, at the time, he was the President Pro Tempore of the Senate or held a similar senior position. He was an influential political figure who was openly anti-Serbian and who acted very ambitiously and aggressively in support of the Bosnian Muslims and Croats, piling onto Serbs the worst possible accusations anyone could even imagine. He had an agenda, and a part of this agenda was to visit Belgrade and meet with Milošević. During one long night in the course of this visit, when everyone was again leaning over the map of Bosnia and Herzegovina, he strongly insisted on getting Milošević's answer as to which territories in BiH Serbia wanted. The reply Milošević constantly gave him was that Serbia did not want any territory in BiH, it only wanted BiH to be organized as an equal community of the three constituent peoples and that Serbs in BiH, who were a constituent people under both the federal and republican, Bosnian-Herzegovinian, constitutions, would be treated as a people whose voice must be respected in any reorganization of BiH. Since this was not done, since they were outvoted in a referendum, they were thus forced to organize and resist the attempt at their marginalization and their transformation into a national minority. Milošević tried to explain the essence of this to Biden, but he was not prepared to listen. He was only interested in taking arguments from Belgrade that he would be able to use even more fiercely against Serbs, Serbia and Milošević personally. The conversation was polite and very energetic, but there was no question of Biden having said to Milošević, to his face, that he was a criminal or something like that, as he praised himself triumphantly in an editorial in the Guardian a few years ago. It was a polite but persistent conversation in which Biden tried to obtain some responses from Milošević that he could later use against Serbia and against him personally. Since he did not receive any replies he had looked for, but only an explanation of the situation and a clear and strong denial that Serbia had any territorial claims on Bosnia and Herzegovina, he left, probably dissatisfied given what he had expected to obtain. Nevertheless, he did not fail to falsely describe his visit to Belgrade as a triumph, which might have corresponded to his propagandistic nature, but not to the political substance of things.

Q: At that time, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was established. Did Slobodan Milošević fully understand the implications of the establishment of this court?

JOVANOVIĆ: I do not think that he did. The first hint of creation of such a court was given by Lawrence Eagleberger, the US Deputy Secretary of State, at the London Conference in late August 1992, which was, in fact, convened in order to slander

Serbia, Serbs and Milošević. Eagleberger hinted at taking a series of the most severe measures against those the then US administration labeled as main culprits. Then, in his speech, which was given in a similar style, he read a list of names of the so-called war criminals to be tried by an international court, and the name of Slobodan Milošević was at the top of this list. This was a step away from the rules of diplomacy and politeness of an international conference. Such things are not to be done. While such initiatives may be discreetly prepared during similar peace conferences, I had never encountered such a demonstration of insensitivity towards the participants. In any case, at that moment, Eagleberger indicated for the first time that a number of individuals, and he mentioned a list of about 10 or 15 names, should be tried by an international court for war crimes. The idea for that court sprang out of American heads, although later the French and others tried to take credit for it. The court itself was established in the spring of 1993 as an auxiliary body of the Security Council, in order to facilitate a more successful maintenance of peace and security in the world. This was contrary to the principles of the international law, which require that international criminal courts be formed only at meetings of the contracting states, which would form a treaty to this effect, with all of the provisions that a treaty should contain. Therefore, an international criminal court should be established through the will of the contracting states. In this case, the International Criminal Court was established by the will of the executive body of the United Nations, which is the first and the most important flaw. Furthermore, the Court submitted reports on its work to the Security Council, which was dominated by the United States. The Court was financed mainly by the western powers and NATO, and, as a consequence, it was difficult to talk about its full independence, as required in the work of the permanent international criminal court in The Hague as a United Nations body. The Court was established in 1993 and, along with its rapid structural development and organization, it soon started working on the first indictments. Milošević was not that impressed. He thought that it was a temporary political dark cloud, which would go away with the successful resolution of the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, he did foresee that not only did the western powers aim to put an end to the war in BiH (Bosnia-Herzegovina), but that they also meant to deal with Serbia and the Serbs, to put them in a new quarantine and to place them before the bench as the accused. So, he did not completely ignore this court, but he did not want to give any importance to it either, even when the text of the agreement in Dayton also mentioned the very same international criminal court. As far as I know, indictments against a number of leading politicians of Republika Srpska had already been filed or were filed immediately after the signing of the Dayton Accords.

Q: You have already mentioned that, at the end of 1993, the Contact Group took over the role of the chief negotiator from the European Union and that the Geneva Negotiation Mechanism was abandoned. Within the Contact Group, two personalities were most imposing during this period, Willy Claes and Alain Juppé. Klaus Kinkel acted from behind the scene and you have already talked about the role played by Richard Holbrooke. However, Russia was also a member of the Contact Group. What role did Minister Kozyrev play?

JOVANOVIĆ: Just to be precise, the Contact Group was composed of the political directors of the foreign ministries of these countries, whereas Kozyrev, Juppé, Claes

and others were the foreign ministers of the western countries and Russia, who were engaged in contacts with Milošević and others in order to improve the atmosphere and prospects for reaching a political agreement on ending the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. So, Kozyrev, Juppé and Claes, as well as a few others, occasionally visited Belgrade, Zagreb and Sarajevo. Belgrade was their main target, since they believed that it was Belgrade that had to make the most substantive concessions in order to achieve a successful ending of the war and they would always bring a new arsenal of threats. So, on top of the demands for facilitating, for example, the cessation of the shelling of Sarajevo, and making additional concessions to the Muslims in the negotiations on the territories, threats were made that, unless this was done, the sanctions would be strengthened, the airport in Tuzla would be opened, etc. They also indicated the possibility of American shelling of some parts of Republika Srpska, which, at one point, actually did happen in Goražde, and later occurred in other locations, too. The aforementioned attempts to intimidate Milošević with threats of what awaited Serbs if these demands were not met appeared apocalyptic as they used all possible ultimatums they could think of. Milošević calmly and reasonably explained the facts on the ground, noting that he did have political influence on the leadership of Republika Srpska, but that this influence was neither dominant nor decisive. The leadership of Republika Srpska had their own perception of their situation and did not always think and act in accordance with Serbia's actions. The Contact Group officials did not accept this explanation, believing that it was just role-playing – which it was not. Thus, all conversations they had with Milošević were attenuated to attacking him and Milošević acting defensively and pointing to the facts, which were insufficiently taken into account by the western politicians.

Some of them were, however, more delicate, for example the Belgian, Claes, tried to tone down the fierce French chords. Kozyrev visited Belgrade independently, as did Churkin, who was the Russian ambassador to the United Nations at the time. For the most part they came to convey messages, mostly from the West, about what we should do and warned what awaited us if we did not comply. In other words, they, in a supposedly more friendly tone, actually brought messages of the same kind as we also received from Owen, Juppé, and others. It was expected that their messages would be more easily and better received, that they would be more trusted than others, because they were representatives of Russia, a traditionally friendly ally country for Serbia. At that time, Russia was itself down on its knees, perhaps even more than Serbia, and its representatives, with the exception of Churkin, cared more about the US than Russian interests, and they were not shy in making this clear to us. There were no tangible benefits from talks with Russian representatives. They fiercely conveyed to us the demands of the West, fought for their acceptance, and we usually responded that the demands were unjust or unfeasible for various reasons. Whether they transmitted this to the Western countries as they heard it or if they dressed it up - we did not know. In any case, it was a painful time of conversation between the deaf, because the Western interlocutors did not want to know the truth at all, neither in Serbia nor in Bosnia. They had their own dimension of truth, which they forced on everyone and it was difficult to find a place for a convergence of views and some kind of agreement.

Luckily, the whole situation was eased by the fact that the United States, through the Joint Action Plan, abandoned the idea of fragmentation and marginalization of Serbs

and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and recognized that they should be respected in whole and that this should be territorially expressed. The ethnic principle of territorial delineation of the three constituent peoples was the way out of this chaos. Such a solution made it possible to reach the Dayton Accords and create nowadays Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, unfortunately, the US is now trying to centralize to the detriment and at the expense of the other two constituent peoples, the Serbs and Croats.

Q: A final plenary meeting was held in Geneva in January 1994. What was the outcome of this meeting? Were there any tangible results?

JOVANOVIĆ: This forum had always been a place where arguments were confronted in the most direct way, and it was the last meeting of a plenary nature. After this final meeting, the technocrats from the Contact Group, the political directors, took matters into their own hands during 1994 and 1995, and especially in the second half of 1994. When this meeting was held, things went the same old way and it was impossible to achieve any unity of views. It turned out that these plenary meetings were not the most effective way to reach any agreement. They were more of a stage for displaying their firm positions rather than for subtle diplomatic negotiation.

At this time, Milošević was accepted as the undisputed political leader of all Serbs, and his importance and role grew. He became the primary point of contact for everyone who wanted to say or do something about Bosnia and Herzegovina. He received a lot of these people in Belgrade and, when he traveled for meetings abroad, he always appeared strong and consistent. As I mentioned, he had immediately supported all five plans that were proposed to end the war in Bosnia in a peaceful way. He supported Cutileiro's plan before the war broke out, and then, after the war had broken out, he supported the other four. To this end, warmongering cannot be attributed to him, as, whoever is interested in war, avoids supporting any peace plans or supports them with reservations, and then sabotages them. Milošević immediately and unreservedly supported all peace plans on the table and had problems with the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina in bringing them around to supporting these plans, failing eventually in this endeavor. It was insisted that Milošević was the main culprit for the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that Serbia allegedly committed aggression, that he wanted to annex that territory to Serbia, and so on. This was nonsense, because from the beginning, before the war erupted, he had supported the idea of an independent Bosnia and Herzegovina in line with Cutileiro's plan. After the others had agreed with this plan, Milošević openly said that Serbia would be the first to recognize Bosnia and Herzegovina when Cutileiro brought the final version of the plan two weeks later. What could be a bigger rebuff of the accusations that he had aggressive intentions towards BiH?! And, if he had them, why would he then accept the subsequent four plans proposed by others immediately and without reservation? This fully rebutted the persistent claim that Serbia was the aggressor, first in Croatia, and then in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that it was the biggest culprit and the only one responsible for all of the horrors that happened during the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. This is a big and insidious lie, which was consciously invented and launched with the help of the Western media and the Western politicians, with a few honorable exceptions.

Q: What were the main topics of your meetings with Mato Granić in 1994 and 1995?

JOVANOVIĆ: Lord Owen saw that talks between Tudjman and Milošević on some issues could not move forward and thought that, if he included other intermediaries and moved these issues to a lower level, he might be able to refresh the heated political atmosphere.

Both Milošević and Tudjman agreed with this idea. Granić and I met at a military base in Hungary. Our meeting was not unpleasant, but, as we did not have a mandate to abandon the positions of our presidents, we could not do much more than to express good wishes for a solution. I was perhaps a little more imaginative while proposing to thaw the atmosphere with some occasional sporting events, so that people would understand that there was more to our relations than hostile and aggressive behavior, that there were also human activities that had been put aside, etc. However, Granić was very limited by Tudjman's extremely strict instructions, so the meeting could not make any serious breakthrough in tackling difficult issues or thawing the atmosphere. When I was in Zagreb, which was again Lord Owen's idea, and when I spoke with Tudjman and Granić, nothing could be done because they were firmly fixed in their positions. They simply did not want to face the facts when it came to bilateral relations. There was no moment, nor was there a climate, for any breakthrough in improving relations between Croatia and Serbia, because Croatia had already prepared a plan to eliminate the Republika Srpska Krajina by a decisive military action, which was carried out soon afterwards.

Q: At that time, you were the initiator of the preparation of the outline for the Global Plan for Resolving the Yugoslav Crisis. What was the reason behind the preparation of such a document?

JOVANOVIĆ: I believed that we had fallen to some extent for the approach and tactics of the West, which had imposed unprecedented sanctions on us, in a way that was all but just. By tightening the noose around our necks, they tried to solve one problem after another, calculating that time would be their best ally, as Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia would, in time, weaken and become less resistant to the pressures and demands that followed. This was a tactical approach, which, perhaps, may be found as a model in some negotiating manuals, but it was detrimental to the overall resolution of relations, because it brought the heat of relations to a boil without tangible results on the ground.

On the other hand, the West had a number of other unresolved issues left after the breakup of the SFRY, which it could slowly, one by one, pull out of its drawers and, while using the deadly embrace of sanctions against Serbia, squeeze out many unprincipled concessions from us. This is why I thought that it would be good for us to get out of that passive position, not to be a mere object of Western activity, but to move ourselves in all directions opened by the Yugoslav crisis, both externally and internally. Externally - to address the issues of discontinuity and continuity of Yugoslavia, in parallel with the partition balance, to address the issue of the recognition of the former Yugoslav republics that seceded, subject to resolution of the

problems created by their secession, to address the internal consolidation and reorganization of Serbia itself, to neutralize and eliminate the latent points of weakness and resistance, such as Kosovo, Vojvodina, Sandžak, by timely meeting some basic demands, and so on. And, at the same time, to connect the issues that arose after the breakup of Yugoslavia - recognition, the cost of separation, the resolving of the issue of Serbian minorities in the newly formed countries, etc. I believed that such an approach would help us break out from the position we had been cornered in and would put more issues on the West's plate, forcing them to deal with principle issues instead of just going after Serbia because of the military conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, in fact, they had made possible, despite Serbia's desire to avoid it by accepting Cutileiro's plan. I had repeatedly pointed out to Milošević that it was not good for us only to listen passively and respond to the demands of others, and that it was necessary to voice our own demands and the so-called lower limit of acceptability of demands of other parties involved, to set our red lines. To follow what Tudjman practiced in his interactions with the West - whenever they approached him with something that did not suit him, he would immediately say: "It is a non-starter", in other words, a red line, after which they would withdraw. My intention was to improve our overall negotiating position through a series of internal and external actions. Milošević took a look at this proposal, the idea was not unknown to him, but he was not willing to engage decisively with these issues and problems. He still believed that he could deal with one issue at the time and thus write them off one by one. Such an approach corresponded with his tactical nature, so we remained at the point that he received this concept and kept it in mind, but left its implementation for later.

Q: It was evident on several occasions that Milošević trusted well-meaning foreigners more than his closest associates. Why do you think this was the case?

JOVANOVIĆ: In the situation in which Serbia found itself, and in which any country, large or small, could find themselves, the associates of the most senior official might be tempted to look for weak points or to think that they could do things better and in a different way, which would subsequently lead to some schisms of an open or latent nature. Milošević certainly could have always suspected that something that was suggested or said to him might have been done with an underlying private agenda. It is the way of thinking of every top leader in a difficult or critical situation. Some seemingly well-intentioned foreigners, who came to convey unpleasant messages with explanations that sounded friendly and benevolent, were perceived by Milošević as more reliable interlocutors and partners. In most cases, such an approach turned out to be deceptive, with the exception of Yasushi Akashi, a Japanese diplomat who was the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Yugoslav crisis, and for Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular. All the other foreign mediators were just executors of jobs assigned to them by others, who set goals for us that were not well-intentioned, or not always well-intentioned. Although, for example, Kozyrev, Churkin, Zotov and others had personally good intentions, Russia did not have the strength to be of any help to us. On the contrary, because of its own weakness, Russia had to go hand in hand with the western powers. Although reluctantly, they supported the West's actions against us. The French, who were our traditional friends and remained as such in our memories, are today something different from what they were at the beginning of the

19th century. They have become strategic and geopolitical allies of the United States, and in all of their activities with us, with all of the Gallic charm and all the gentleness of words, they pursued the goal set by the United States: to keep us on the dissection table and to harvest from us all parts that might be useful to them.

Q: You have already talked about the refusal of the leadership of the Republika Srpska to listen to the requests and demands coming from Belgrade. At that time, there was a dramatic break up with Republika Srpska. What was the specific cause of such a development?

JOVANOVIĆ: Milošević was a tactician as a politician, and also a seasoned negotiator. He was highly intelligent and always knew how to quickly separate the primary from the secondary. This was not always the case with some other negotiators, who had emotions prevailing over cold-blooded reasoning, to whom a detail might have seemed more important than the whole. Bosnian Serbs, given their direct interest and connections with their land, their villages, etc., were quite difficult and weak as negotiators. Everything was important to them, they did not want to give up anything and they held off the negotiations and Milošević, who better and more quickly saw what the main objective was.

Sometimes the main goal was time, to achieve something as soon as possible, because, if the negotiations lasted longer, the losses could be greater than what was targeted to be achieved at the time of negotiations. On the other hand, he realized better than the leaders of the Republika Srpska that the most important thing for Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina was to reach a solution that would protect them from being outvoted and from the hegemony by the others. Such a solution was to achieve the creation of their own state within a state, their territory where they were mostly concentrated, and it was irrelevant whether that territory would be an integral part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, an independent country, or annexed to Serbia, i.e. to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. At that time, the most important thing was to preserve them as an ethnicity from all the storms that ravaged Bosnia and Herzegovina. This could have been achieved by their territorialization, which would be less than a state, but would be recognized by the international community. It was not easy to convince them to embrace this idea, because, legitimately, as one of the constituent peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the Former Yugoslavia, they were entitled to more rights and they had the same right to self-determination as Slovenes, Macedonians, etc. Why would their rights be three times less than the rights of these other constituent peoples? These were idealistic beliefs, which had nothing in common with real politics. They were also somewhat romantic, as all fighters for freedom are romantics. However, for cold reasoning and negotiations, it is necessary to break with romanticism. Milošević had conflicts with them in this regard, and, at one point, he even intended to end all relations with them, but we discouraged him from doing so. In the end, he eventually succumbed to pressure and false promises from the West that, if he severed ties with them and established international control on the Drina River, Yugoslavia and Serbia would be freed from the main sanctions. Kozyrev, the Russian minister, played a major deceptive role in this regard. Milošević hoped the West would keep their promise as the sanctions had a damaging impact on Serbia, and he agreed to this extremely unpopular move and established a blockade on

the Drina. This decision was met with odium among Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also with confusion and disapproval among Serbs in Serbia. I found out about this decision after it had been made already and I tried, during the conversation we had on the secure telephone line when Milošević informed me about it, to dissuade him from this, pointing out that, if we ourselves imposed sanctions against part of our people, we would undermine our own arguments against sanctions imposed against Serbia and FRY. Nevertheless, Milošević dismissed my appeal saying that everything would be fine, that everything would be as it should be, etc., and did not want to back down. The sanctions were imposed against Bosnian Serbs, and I had to take part in talks with a Finnish negotiator on the deployment of international observers. Truth be told, Milošević did it in good faith that he would get rid of much of the sanctions and would relax his tense relations with the West, but at the same time, he foresaw and subconsciously accepted that the blockade would have some gaps, simply because it was difficult to implement it on the Drina all the way from the Sava River to Montenegro. The supply of Republika Srpska with oil and all other necessities was difficult, but it seemed that the blockade was porous to a certain extent. Although the blockade was not total and completely negative, as it seemed at first glance, it made it very difficult to maintain the functioning of Republika Srpska and the needs of its army.

Q: There was a very lively diplomatic activity during this period. You had a series of meetings, including a meeting with Alain Juppé in New York in September 1994. There were a series of meetings with representatives of the Contact Group in Karadjordjevo and Dobanovci, and the foreign ministers of Great Britain and other Contact Group countries came to Belgrade. Were there any significant developments that we should mention from this perspective?

JOVANOVIĆ: This was all in preparation for the territorial separation of the three communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, through the settlement of the estimated percentages required for Bosnian Muslims and Croats. We helped as much as we could, but there was resistance from the Serb representatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who were reluctant to cede parts of the territories already under their control to others. On the other hand, there was a constant pressure on us to recognize Slovenia and Croatia. At one point, Milan Panić recognized Slovenia, but Slovenia refused to accept this recognition, which was a paradox in itself. These visits did not bring any tangible results, except that they reminded us of the difficulty of our position and the need to meet more demands of the West more quickly. It kept us in a kind of confined situation as the sanctions created greater negative consequences. It is difficult to single out any of these meetings as having had any significant importance, since the Contact Group had slowly begun to effectively develop the concept of the future Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina. To this end, the American and German representatives played the main role - Michael Steiner on behalf of Germany and a number of US representatives before the arrival of Richard Holbrooke. Holbrooke left Steiner behind and started working alone. But, a year before Holbrooke arrived on the scene, the process was led by Steiner, Ambassador Frasure, and a couple of others from the American side, while all others stood by and assisted them in case they encountered any resistance from our side.

If we look from this perspective, 1994 and 1995 were the most productive years, first in regard to establishing the concept of the future of B-H and, then in regard to reaching an agreement on the percentage of territories that would satisfy both the Muslim and the Croat sides.

It was not only the percentage that was the issue in dispute, but also the quality of territory, which was the cause of numerous problems in the negotiations. First, there was an issue of Sarajevo, that is, which side Sarajevo would belong to. There was an idea that Sarajevo should be a free zone, at the expense of territory that would eventually belong to the Serbs. There were various ideas, all of which became moot when Milošević ceded the whole of Sarajevo to the Muslims in exchange for some other parts of Eastern Bosnia in the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Sarajevo was constantly the subject of these talks because, despite the fact that the artillery of Republika Srpska was moved away from Sarajevo, the airport was opened and the water supply was enabled, there were still occasional incidents, especially those with multiple civilian casualties, which were promptly blamed on Republika Srpska. Over time, it turned out that many incidents were set-up by the Muslim side. With the silence of, or possibly even in the agreement with some of the Western countries, incidents of massive civilian casualties were orchestrated, such as the blasts at the Markale market and in front of a bakery, which were immediately blamed on the Serbs and their cannons. In this unfortunate fratricidal war, everything was utilized, even the sacrifice of one's own civilians for the sake of achieving political goals, a strategy which was used extensively against the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even today, there is not a full admission that these were actions by the Bosnian Muslims themselves to provoke NATO military intervention, which, after the third such incident had been staged, was eventually launched and NATO began bombing the positions of Republika Srpska around Goražde and elsewhere.

Q: It seems that, in this period, the role of the United Nations was already quite marginalized. You have mentioned Yasushi Akashi, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy. He often came to Belgrade. What were your impressions from the meetings with him?

JOVANOVIĆ: Akashi was a fine, classic, Japanese-style diplomat, with a profound knowledge of the West, who was refined and humble, which is typical of Japan. He fully understood the situation. When he conveyed unpleasant demands to Milošević, he did so in a way that was not only verbally acceptable but also logically understandable. On the other hand, as the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative in the Yugoslav Crisis, he was the only foreign representative to oppose the political will of the then US and NATO administrations to bomb Bosnian Serbs after the provocations with mass civilian casualties, which I have mentioned earlier. Namely, he had one of the two keys, it was the principle of the so-called double keys, the procedure to give permission to NATO to use bombs to intervene in B-H, which practically meant to bomb the only one side in the conflict, the Bosnian Serbs. Representatives of NATO and the US urged Akashi to give this permission several times, but he refused, and he remained firm in this position until the end. It was only after he had been replaced through a brutal attack on him by the US

Ambassador to the Security Council, Madeleine Albright, and after Kofi Annan, the future Secretary-General of the United Nations, had taken his position, that the double key worked and Annan immediately gave NATO the right to attack the Bosnian Serbs. This speaks volumes about the difference in the quality between these two men, one of whom decidedly opposed the use of force in the internal suffering of the peoples in one country, while the other was ready to allow it immediately.

Q: Today is November 17, 2020.

In addition to the already mentioned initiatives and processes, there were other international activities that were very intensive.

What were the relations with other international actors? Greece tried to play a constructive, even protective role towards Belgrade. What was the relationship with Papandréou, and how did the interesting idea about a Yugoslav-Greek confederation come about?

JOVANOVIĆ: The sanctions were the most comprehensive ever imposed by the United Nations Security Council. They also had another, more hidden side: to enclose the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, like in a box, so that it could not escape in any direction. In other words, to completely equalize our domestic and foreign politics, to make our internal politics external, and to leave us practically to the mercy of those who had turned against us and who instituted all of these measures. This was the reason it was decided on our part to break through this mental and political blockade and to go out into the world as much as possible. This would demonstrate, firstly, that we were not as enclosed as they wanted to present it, and secondly, to explain to the other world, which was willing to hear us, what the truth was concerning all of the storms that came from the west and fell upon our country.

So, we first started contacting neighboring countries, which was most important, as foreign policy starts from the borders of one's country. In general, these activities were part of my portfolio, but, in the case of Romania and Bulgaria, President Milošević, and later, the President of Yugoslavia, Zoran Lilić, decided to engage personally. Greece was very friendly to us politically, economically and strategically, and did not try to hide it, starting from the president of the state, the prime minister, individual ministers, to businessmen and ordinary people. We had therefore been in frequent contact at all levels with Greece, received great political, moral and economic support wherever it was possible, and were encouraged to endure in the fight to preserve our independence and territorial integrity.

At one point, the Greeks were willing to extend to us the so-called "free zone" in Thessaloniki, which at the time, was coming to an end. The free zone status had lasted for several decades to expire just at the time of the sanctions. We had been in talks with them regarding the extension of this status for the same or an indefinite period of time. However, at one point, Greece withdrew and refrained from taking any action, fearing that the outcome of the entire crisis in the former Yugoslavia might be such that our free zone status might not belong to us anymore in the near future. This probably referred to the separation of Macedonia as an independent state. But, in every

other respect, it was an unusually significant help in economic, financial, humanitarian and other forms. Milošević went to Athens, where he talked to Papandréou. I met several times with Papandréou, as well as with Mitsotakis and other colleagues, with whom conversations were always pleasant and with substantive content. However, at one point, Milošević thought that we could find an elegant way out from the total isolation by having Greece agree to create a confederation with us. One of our trips to Athens was tied to this. On a small plane, Milošević let me see on paper what the proposal would look like.

I immediately expressed my reservations, pointing out that Greece was not independent, that it was a member of the European Community, i.e. the European Union; that Greece had a common foreign policy and that it could not make such a decision on its own, although it might have sympathy for such a proposal. Milošević did not completely accept it and he made this proposal at a meeting with the elderly Papandréou and his associates. Papandréou had a lot of trouble expressing his reaction in a warm, delicate and yet reserved way, buying time to respond, and saying that provide us with his reply later. We never received his answer, which was logical. So the whole idea of a confederation was a good intention, released up to the sky like a smoke that promised to bring some better time. After waiting for several weeks, Milošević himself realized that Greece was not able to accept a proposal like this.

Romania, which was also a traditionally friendly country with which we had never had any military or other serious conflicts, was politically sympathetic to us, but it also had its own obligations, which stemmed from the sanctions against us, to which it had to adhere to. However, in a framework of minimal possibilities, it tried to help us. Laws, decisions, pressure can be compact, but never enough to present an obstacle to human imagination and the ability to find openings even where they were not visible at a first glance.

We received significant help in prevention of sanctions that would completely suffocate us, as was the case with the help we received from Greece. Also, other neighboring states, such as Bulgaria and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, had to respect the Security Council's decision on sanctions, but had their own interests that were not negligible.

They showed imagination, which suited us, even though it cost us much more than if the flow of cooperation went in a normal way. Hungary was a passage for us as we could use air traffic, because we would drive to Budapest, where we would take a plane and visit various countries in Europe, Africa and Asia.

On the other hand, at the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis, Hungary secretly supplied rebel Croatia with small arms and ammunition, which was discovered later. After it had been discovered, Hungary ceased to engage in this underground hostile business against Yugoslavia.

But many of my meetings with Minister Géza Jeszenszky and his successor were colored by other unpleasant moments, which came from the Hungarian temptation to

use our difficulties in relations in Kosovo and Metohija in order to put pressure on us to obtain new concessions for the Hungarian national minority in Vojvodina. I reacted quite energetically to such attempts, after which they gave up.

We continued to exchange visits frequently; from their side the aim was precisely the use of our difficulties in order to obtain the most favorable position for their national minority. It was all within the limits of what was allowed, Hungary, of course, never stopped having an interest in us, especially in Vojvodina, but it never exceeded the limit of what was acceptable.

On the other hand, Hungary was also an exception in relation to many other European countries, especially in the west, which were completely closed and hostile to us. The exception may have been Italy, because of its own interests. It always had an interest in frequent relations with Serbia, precisely because of its old problems with Croatia and Slovenia in the past.

Thus, Italy was the initiator of my visits and at the same time the mediator on behalf of the West, not only in continuing the pressure on us, but also in trying to solicit our more flexible attitude to the demands made to us regarding the Yugoslav crisis, such as the recognition of former Yugoslav republics and so on. It turned out that this circle of neighboring countries did not fall out of our policy, on the contrary, it was constantly refreshed, sometimes strengthened, especially in relation to Greece and Romania. Bulgaria, as a neighboring country, was interested in uninterrupted and non-worsening relations with us, but within the framework of respecting the resolution on comprehensive sanctions against us.

Regardless of this, we had several meetings and exchanges of visits with the Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and relations with Bulgaria were maintained at a lower level, which was important enough. This helped, after the sanctions had been lifted, to bring our relations back to the previous normal level. A big surprise happened during my last visit to Italy, I think it was in 1994, when I was unexpectedly received by the Holy Father John Paul II in the Vatican. Not only was this surprise to me, but to all of us.

Pope John Paul II showed a lot of flexibility here, precisely because he was among the first to recognize the independence of Slovenia and Croatia. However, he did not support sanctions against us and was in favor of removing the sanctions, which was important to us at the time. The publicity about the Pope's reception was a surprise both for the West and for our public, which was hungry for fresh news and news regarding our contacts and relations with the outside world. This was the picture in the Balkans, to which I would add our relations with Cyprus, where I also frequently travelled and where we had support with almost the same emotions that we received from Greece. This is not surprising, because it is an ethnic Greek area, and, on the other hand, they themselves have problems with the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus, because of which they had natural sympathies for us and our position.

Q: In addition, you often visited countries that were members of the Non-Aligned Movement. How did the Western partners view these activities of yours, especially on the African continent?

JOVANOVIĆ: As I have said, we realized that the West wanted to enclose us completely into a shell, so we were utterly helpless towards them and their pressure. They believed that they would achieve this with our general satanization and sanctions. It is understood that they opposed the breaking of this blockade, which we did in all possible directions. We first renewed contacts with the countries of the Former Soviet Union, starting with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, Turkmenistan, all of which I visited one or more times. These countries had a good relationship with us and wished us well in every way.

After that we made a breakthrough towards Asia. I was in India and China, which was also significant, because these countries were not in favor of imposing sanctions against us. Let us not forget that China abstained when Russia voted to impose sanctions, and that India, although not a member, was against this during the discussion at the Security Council.

So we managed to break the blockade in our immediate neighborhood and in the east, and then all that was left was to remind non-aligned countries that Belgrade was the synonym for the decades-long friendly cooperation with them through the Non-Aligned Movement. I visited a number of African countries, without restrictions and at the highest levels, but apparently this did not please the then American administration and the West, so they tried, wherever they could, to limit these talks and bring them down to the lowest working level, i.e. the ministerial level. Of course, while they did not succeed everywhere, they managed to do it in some places. Although done behind the scenes, from time to time, these attempts would be obvious and public, as was the case during the visit to Nigeria, where, after a reception with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, a meeting with the head of state was planned, and even his private plane was accorded to my disposal. I went to the capital, Abuja, and headed from the airport to meet him with his foreign minister, but halfway there, the minister was notified by telephone that the president would not be able to receive me. It was clear from the behavior of the minister and his explanations that someone from the outside had intervened to prevent the meeting. I assume that the then American ambassador had acted according to the instructions and prevented my meeting with the President of Nigeria. That was understandable, as the then American administration was an advocate of the sanctions and did not hide that they desired that the sanctions should economically and politically suffocate us as a country and make us a spineless mass that would do everything that was demanded of it.

Of course, no country would accept this and would try to counter it in any way possible. We got out of this shell very quickly and created a wide space for conversations with a number of other countries that did not accept the situation we had found ourselves in. Only Western countries, meaning all members of the European Union and few candidate countries, as well as the whole of North America, were completely closed to all political contacts with us, and even often responded

rudely to initiatives for working visits coming from our side. This is an example of the insensitivity of the then politicians in the West, who had lost the need to use the accepted political vocabulary, so they allowed themselves outbursts of passion and insults, which was not the best attribute of countries taking great pride in their developed political past and skills. In any case, with this series of visits, which were, in most cases, frequent but brief, especially in the neighboring and eastern countries, we broke through the political blockade, although not the economic one. Economically we also managed to find channels for survival and these channels were sufficient to help us endure this period of five or six years, practically, without any need for foreign help.

Q: This was a period when the situation in both Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially when it came to the position of Serbs living in those former Yugoslav republics, was approaching a critical point. For example, in Croatia, at the end of 1994, relations and communication seemed to be relatively normalized between representatives of the Republika Srpska Krajina and official Zagreb. They also signed a plan on Economic Cooperation in December 1994. However, in January 1995, the Z4 Plan took shape and the situation changed again. What were the main reasons for the failure of this plan?

JOVANOVIĆ: The problem from the beginning was that Croatian President Franjo Tuđman, in the rebellious and separatist Croatia, aimed first to separate Croatia as an independent state and, second, to provoke the Serbian people there in order to force them to initiate some radical and even unreasonable actions to induce thoughts about the possibility of leaving Croatia. The first armed conflicts between Croatian paramilitary forces and Serbs in Croatia were the result of provocations against Serbs by the Croatian side, so that Serbs, who had not forgotten the trauma of the genocide committed against them by the then puppet Nazi Croatian authorities during World War II, would again be frightened and would resort to some type of armed self-defense. They were deliberately provoked to oppose attempts to deprive them of all their rights and return to the atmosphere of 1941.

That was one of Tuđman's goals, and he succeeded in it to a certain extent, as he gained some kind of legitimacy from his public - to deal with the resistance of the Serb people in Croatia because of the danger of returning to the experience of World War II. On the other hand, he wanted to present Croatian policy to the Western public as well-intentioned, so he pretended to tolerate and respect Vance's plan to deploy UNPROFOR forces on the territory where Serbs lived, that is, in the Serbian Krajina in the west and in the Eastern Slavonia. However, he did not really respect this and hence he repeatedly sent his paramilitary forces to invade United Nations-controlled territory, to kill Serbs and to keep them constantly in fear of a pogrom, which was imminent if they did not agree to capitulate and accept a regime that he intended for them - to be a national minority deprived of all rights.

After that, he established contacts with Milošević. They had endless conversations in private, and when they did not talk directly, then it was done through Hrvoje Šarinić, the head of the intelligence service and Tuđman's Chief of Staff, who had about fifty one-on-one meetings with Milošević. A direct outcome of these meetings was the idea

of creating a so-called three-phase plan to open roads, gas and oil pipelines, in order to semi-normalize cooperation between the Republic of Srpska Krajina and Croatia, in the expectation that this would alleviate mutual mistrust and create a basis for some kind of *modus vivendi* until a final political solution. Tudjman allegedly approved this concept, but he was not honest, because he was preparing an armed attack on the Republic of Srpska Krajina, which he later carried out with the help of American retired generals and direct US assistance during the operation.

In any case, Milošević also had a problem with the leadership of the Republic of Srpska Krajina, which, for the reasons I mentioned, and because of the terrible memories of the genocide conducted upon them by the Croatian authorities during the World War II, decided to rule out any possibility of allowing their territory to remain in Croatia. Hence they were only and exclusively interested in independence or in joining the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. These were goals they did not give up and it was a problem for Milošević, who realistically understood that it was difficult to realize something like this at the time of the then global political constellation, and that these were maximalist demands, although legitimate and justified by fears of the Croatian government. He tried to convince them indirectly to keep the situation as it is, to *de facto*, in their Republic of Srpska Krajina, separate the Serbs from Croats, and to give them time to decide whether another final solution would be possible in the form of a plebiscite or something similar.

He could not tell them this directly, because they did not want to hear anything less than what was their maximum goal, so he estimated that the opening of some form of economic cooperation between the Republic of Srpska Krajina and Croatian Government could melt away the greatest mistrust and consequently create the conditions for seeking an as yet undefined solution which would be a *modus vivendi*. That is roughly what he expected with the three-phase plan. However, as I said, Tudjman was not honest in his talks with Milošević or with international mediators, except with representatives of the then US administration, whom he probably trusted enough to reveal that he intended use force to resolve the issue of the Republic of Srpska Krajina.

For this reason a group of retired American generals came to Croatia to train the Croatian army and to make plans to conquer the territory of the Republic of Srpska Krajina, which was done in the summer of 1995, with the help of American aviation that neutralized the airport and small amount of planes that the Srpska Krajina had. The Z4 Plan, formulated by the Contact Group, composed of 4 representatives of the West and a Russian representative, was in itself a well-conceived plan, which enabled the western part of the Republic of Srpska Krajina, without eastern Slavonia, to gain a relative self-sufficiency within Croatia, meaning a high degree of autonomy. Milošević was in favor of this plan, yet he did not want to declare it publicly. Instead, he left the decision to the authorities of the Republic of Srpska Krajina, who were still in a maximalist mood and did not appreciate the positive elements of this plan.

To be honest, the Z4 Plan only covered the needs of the western part of the Republic of Srpska Krajina, whereas the eastern part in Slavonia was not covered by it at all. And this was one of the reasons why they were reserved towards it. On the other

hand, Tudjman himself did not like the Plan, but for tactical reasons he did not dismiss it, which proved to be psychologically correct, because it was the Republika Srpska Krajina that was eventually blamed for rejecting it. Thus, this opportunity was missed, although it was neither the best nor a complete solution for the entire Republic of Srpska Krajina, because, as I said, it did not cover the Eastern Slavonia. However, regardless of everything, for Tudjman this was only a temporary destination, since his strategic goal was still to regain that territory by military force with, not only tacit consent, but, later, with active cooperation from the United States, which, in the end, actually occurred in May and August 1995.

Q: Do you think that Milošević sincerely and intimately supported the Z4 Plan, or did he simply let the leadership of the Republika Srpska Krajina bear all the responsibility for rejecting the Plan?

JOVANOVIĆ: Milošević never commented on it publicly. When Owen and Stoltenberg came to give him the Plan, he said that the Plan should be handed over to the leadership of the Republic of Srpska Krajina, because it concerned their destiny, and he did not want to receive it. But Dr. Owen still found a solution to leave it *ad informandum*, which showed that he did not deliver it, but that he had left it, so that we could get acquainted with its content. Milošević had two problems: one was that he had an opposition that used every opportunity for an unpleasant or deadly blow at him and they could hardly wait to portray his acceptance of the Plan as his abandonment and a betrayal of the Serbian interests in Croatia, which would seriously harm his political position in Serbia. This was understood to be the case and it was certainly a part of his calculations.

He did not talk about it, but this was obvious. The opposition was constantly hostile to Milošević and waited for every opportunity to attack him as an inconsistent politician who had betrayed the Serbian cause in Croatia. This was one of the reasons. The second problem was that the leadership of the Republic of Srpska Krajina, as I have already said, maintained a maximalist position to the end and it did not want to accept any form of remaining in Croatia. This was unrealistic, but they did not see it that way and it was very difficult to explain to them that something like that could not be a viable solution. At one point, in an interview with a newspaper, I mentioned that it would be best for things to remain as they are for a period of, say, 10 years, and that after that they could decide in a plebiscite whether they wanted to stay in Croatia or not, suggesting that by then Croatia would probably be in the European Union and that they would probably find it more attractive to be within the European Union than to remain outside it in a very unregulated and precarious position.

It was a working assumption that I spoke about publicly to help them rid themselves of fears, war and pressure for a period of 10 years, calculating that time would be the best medicine and that it might be able to do its part in defusing tensions. However, they fiercely attacked this idea and criticized me harshly to Milošević for what I had said in this interview, which showed how much they were absolutely determined for final secession from Croatia only and not mentally prepared to accept anything less. Milošević was fully aware of it, he knew much more than I did, and he probably estimated that they should be the ones to decide. They could not cope with the

intricate political machinations that were rapidly unfolding in the west-Tudjman-Milošević relations, and they remained rigid in their positions from the beginning to the end, which, unfortunately, eventually led to the worst possible outcome: military invasion, ethnic cleansing and the annulment of the existence of not only the Republic of Srpska Krajina, but also of the Serbs in that area.

Q: Throughout the summer, tensions increased in both the Republic of Srpska Krajina and in Republika Srpska. What happened at the beginning of August 1995, and why did the American Ambassador to Croatia, Galbraith, make a trip to Belgrade only one day before the 'Operation Storm' began?

JOVANOVIĆ: This remains a bit enigmatic. Galbraith came to Milošević, they had a one-on-one conversation and allegedly, according to Milošević, Galbraith said that Milan Babić, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Srpska Krajina, who was in Belgrade at the time, should urgently sign his readiness to accept the Z4 Plan and deliver it to the American Embassy by, say, 12 o'clock that day. Milošević asked me to help Babić write that statement immediately and I tried to do it with him as expeditiously as possible. While I did my best to create a little space in it so that it would not sound as a complete capitulation, leaving instead some room for maneuver, this was, in essence, a simple acceptance of Galbraith's demands.

The late Babić handed it over at the Embassy, not precisely at 12 o'clock, but, perhaps, an hour later, and, allegedly, this one-hour delay was the reason why Galbraith could not stop Tudjman's aggression on Krajina. In my opinion, although I have no evidence of this, he came to Belgrade to warn Milošević that he should not try to oppose or react to the pogrom that was set to take place, because, in that case, he would have problems with the United States. Something similar was done by the previous US administration at the end of 1991, when the then US Ambassador Zimmerman tried to give Milošević an ultimatum regarding Kosovo and Metohija and when he threatened that the US would attack the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, i.e. Serbia, since the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had ceased to exist.

When Milošević refused to receive him, Zimmerman handed me this ultimatum. This means that the idea of a US military solution to the problem, which the then US administration perceived to have with the Serbs, was not unexplored by the US even back in 1991, when the conflicts in both Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina were still far away, and the Republic of Srpska Krajina had not yet been formed. Therefore, there was some sediment of animosity and bad will of the US towards Serbia and Serbs from before, it was not directly related nor was it a consequence of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina or the conflict in Kosovo and Metohija. In my opinion, Galbraith came with the goal of dissuading Milošević from any attempt to help militarily or to assist the Republic of Srpska Krajina, suggesting that, in such a case, Milošević would have to deal with the United States, which is much more than strong political language in addressing another statesman.

Q: What was Slobodan Milošević's reaction to the suffering of the Serbian people in Krajina? What do you think the reason was for such a reaction?

JOVANOVIĆ: I think that he experienced it very emotionally, but did not allow it to come out of him. While he refrained from appearing in public during these events, he privately put the blame for the tragedy of Serbs in Krajina on the leadership of the Republic of Srpska Krajina, which was stubborn and had refused to show any flexibility and cooperation in finding a practical way out of that situation. His approach was - others are to blame - especially the Government of the Republic of Srpska Krajina, which, in his words, had not prepared for the battle, had practically not engaged in the battle, but had immediately begun to encourage the people to flee. This was political language in his internal reactions to what had happened. It is certain that there was some truth in this, there was corruption as Croatia, through the before mentioned three-phase form of cooperation, tried and perhaps succeeded in undermining the unity of Serbs in the Republic of Srpska Krajina, it acted to corrupt, it also had operations of its secret service, all this was possible, but there was also a certain disorganization and unwillingness of the leadership of the Republic of Srpska Krajina to prepare in time and to fight back in an organized manner. If their defense had lasted several days, which Milosevic had hoped for, then he could have alarmed the international community to intervene and stop the Croatian action, which would have then opened up space for an accelerated search for a final political solution. That was, roughly, his expectation, which did not prove true due to the rapid collapse, even without serious resistance from the Republic of Srpska Krajina. It is difficult now to comment on his thoughts at that moment, because he did not share them with anyone.

Q: During these events, you had the opportunity to discuss this topic with the highest military leaders. You spoke with the then Chief of the General Staff, General Momčilo Perišić, who claimed that he had had no information about the Croatian operation that was unfolding. Is it possible that the then Yugoslav intelligence services did not have any information that something like this could happen?

JOVANOVIĆ: That was a surprise to me, too. General Perišić, whom I knew from the meetings with foreigners that we had in Dobanovci and elsewhere, although I had never worked with him, called me several times in a panic, asking for information about what was happening and whether we would defend the Republic of Srpska Krajina or not. I could not give him a satisfactory answer to that question, because I was myself out of the loop about it the entire time, although he thought that I was in constant contact with Milošević. I had tried to reach Milosevic, but he was probably out of town at that time, as it was a Saturday or Sunday, when he would routinely leave Belgrade to rest on some mountaintop. During this time he would not accept any telephone calls. So I had had no contact with him. Perišić was very upset and, at one moment, after his third call, said that he was prepared to take off his uniform and depart for the Republic of Srpska Krajina to fight as a volunteer. His reaction showed how powerless he was. The head of the intelligence agency also called me trying to reach Milošević, believing that I was in contact with him and had more information. When I told him that I did not have contact with him, he did not contact me further. So, this time was quite confusing on our part, there was no visible indication of some kind of coordination between the most important institutions and the government and government policy. It is hard to say if this was something that was accidental or not. I think it was a surprise for everyone, not only concerning the day that Tudjman chose to launch the attack, but also the defeatism of the military forces of the Republic of

Srpska Krajina and their complete unwillingness to offer any resistance. This was also surprising, as they had prepared in time for an adequate response and had received arms assistance from Serbia. However, the arms shipments, according to accounts of witnesses, remained unpacked and the arms did not even get out of the box in time. It is a tragic part of our history that cost the Serbian people in that part of Croatia greatly, as they experienced the greatest ethnic cleansing in Europe after World War II.

Q: Perhaps we can say that the last act in the crisis was the Agreement on the Integration of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srem. Who was the author of this agreement on the Yugoslav side?

JOVANOVIĆ: I was already in New York at the time, it happened on the margins of Dayton, when Milošević and Tudjman with their associates talked about the future of Eastern Slavonia, the part of the Republic of Srpska Krajina that was not yet under Croatian control. Then they reached an agreement, the so-called Erdut Agreement. According to what I was able to learn, this agreement was made by Milutinović with his Croatian counterpart, which Milošević and Tudjman approved, and it was a supposedly satisfactory solution for the Serbs in that region, which was to fall under Croatian rule, i.e., to return to their rule with guarantees for the rights of Serbs living there. However, it turned out that the only thing that proved true was that the region returned to the Croatian rule in a year or two, but the rights guaranteed for Serbs were not respected at all, and are not respected in many ways even today. It was a form of a simulated surrender of territory in the form of an agreement. Personally, I was quite surprised by this decision, which I learned about in New York. I believe that this happened under the US pressure to conclude the problem of Serbs in Croatia, in order to open up the space for mutual recognition and complete the picture drawn by the then US administration regarding the objective to wrap up the agenda of Croatia and other former Yugoslav republics that had seceded from Yugoslavia. The issue of Serbia's recognition of the former Yugoslav republics was a topic that was constantly raised in all meetings and talks that Milošević had had with Western partners from 1992 onwards. Whenever they talked about anything, one of the issues on the agenda was always the recognition of the former Yugoslav republics. This was linked to the sanctions, which were used to break our side and our resistance to unilateral recognition and our wish to connect it with some other issues of interest to us. In the end, despite our earlier persistent rejections, they obtained these recognitions without appropriate concessions to our side after the Dayton Agreement.

Q: In parallel with these processes that took place in Croatia, things seemed to spiral out of control in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well, and the resistance of the Republika Srpska leadership was eventually broken. To what extent was the leadership of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia informed about the events in Eastern Bosnia in the middle of the summer of 1995, and were there any attempts to prevent further escalation in communication with international officials?

JOVANOVIĆ: We first had a break in the relations between Serbia and the leadership of the Republika Srpska and the establishment of a blockade on the Drina in 1994, which was totally unexpected and was not well received by the public in Serbia. I was

personally against this, but the decision was made by others, near the top. After the blockade, relations between Belgrade and Pale, Republika Srpska were virtually non-existent, although informal communication was maintained through unofficial channels. For example, Milošević attempted to win over the majority of members of the Republika Srpska Parliament and turn them against the political leadership, so that it would accept the agreements Milošević had already worked on and finalized with the Contact Group concerning the existence of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a federation, a union consisting of two entities. However, the Republika Srpska, led by Radovan Karadžić, did not fully agree to this, because, apart from some disputed territories that the Republika Srpska was supposed to cede, they did not accept the unequal treatment between the Republika Srpska and the the Muslim-Croat Federation. For Croats in the Federation, they would be allowed to establish special relations with Croatia whereas Republika Srpska, in the future BiH, was not allowed to do the same with Serbia. This difference in treatment was the main reason for them to oppose this agreement. In principle, this was a legitimate complaint, in the end they were granted this right, as well as others, but this was one of the reasons, in addition to the territorial one, for the persistent rejection of the political leadership of Republika Srpska to what was proposed by the Contact Group.

Milošević was trying to get a majority in the Republika Srpska Parliament, which would lead to a change in the political leadership, so that someone who was more moderate and with whom it would be easier to reach an agreement would come to power instead of Karadžić. This approach was attempted, but failed, and Milošević still had to turn to Karadžić and reach an agreement with him, and later this was done with the help of Serbian Patriarch Pavle, in Belgrade before his departure for Dayton. In Dayton, as it is known, Milošević was accepted as the only negotiator with others regarding the final solution of the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Karadžić found this difficult to accept, but the word of the Patriarch was decisive for him to submit to this general position. Although Milošević 's attempt to bring about political change at the top of Republika Srpska through the Parliament failed, in the end it was achieved that Milošević was the only Serbian negotiator in Dayton, his word was final, and he showed great dexterity and talent for negotiations. He was a far better negotiator than all the Republika Srpska leadership, who were emotional, to whom every inch of territory they controlled was equally important and were very unwilling to cede anything for a final political solution. On the other hand, it is fair to say that Milošević was a born negotiator and, in essence, the most deserving for nowadays existence of the Republika Srpska, internationally recognized as a state, even though it is not recognized as a subject of the international public law.

Q: On the other hand, many memoirs of other participants in the Dayton Conference mention that Milošević gave up the Serbian part of Sarajevo too easily. What do you think about it?

JOVANOVIĆ: The Serbian part of Sarajevo and some other elements. I was out of the Dayton process, as I was already in New York at the time and I had indirect information only, but I learned it from the reaction of some analysts there. For example, the French ambassador Alain Dejammet, whom I knew well because he was once a member of the Contact Group, was completely surprised and said that Serbia

would have gotten its part of Sarajevo and some other territories, possibly Brčko and others, if it had been determined and persistent and if it had not immediately surrendered Sarajevo. This was the opinion of a man who observed things from afar, who was not at the scene and who did not know what was going on in the heads of the participants in the negotiations, whether they were the Americans, Milošević or others. Milošević probably had in mind the need to change his personal image in the eyes of Western partners with the Dayton agreement and to show himself as a man of vision and a man of peace. I say probably because I did not talk to him about this. His moves roughly place him in this position. And then, with the gallant surrender of Sarajevo to the Bosniaks, i.e. the Muslim side, as well as by his agreement to the division of Brčko, which became a district, he pleasantly surprised Bill Clinton and Warren Christopher. After that, they saw him and even publicly validated him as a peacemaker and the most deserving for the success of the Dayton Agreement. He carried the new aura of positivity and could have carried it for many years, if he had not destroyed it all with his rather unreasonable political attitude after the defeat of his party in the local elections in 1996, when he refused to accept the elections results. This caused the West to re-doubt his political cooperativeness and start treating him as a potential enemy for the second time. A historic chance was gambled away for him personally, and through him for the country, too, because he could have secured international support for another term, possibly for 4-5 years, by continuing his peacekeeping role, after which we would have seen how things would have developed further.

Q: The collapse of a unified and coordinated foreign policy and your personal distancing from Slobodan Milošević were extremely visible at the end of 1994 and in the first half of 1995. Meetings were often held without your presence, some secret visits to key foreign capitals took place, especially Milan Milutinović's visit to Washington at the end of 1994, and Milošević also had secret contacts with US mediators, including Robert Fraser, Senator Richards and former President Carter. You were excluded from all preparations for Dayton, and Milošević's trusted man, Milan Milutinović, was appointed to your post. You were sent to New York in early September 1995, with the presumption of taking over the Embassy in Washington in six months. What challenges did you encounter after your arrival in New York?

JOVANOVIĆ: My isolation by Milošević began as early as the end of 1994, around the beginning of 1995, when his meetings with others, in which I would also participate, became less frequent. Later, he started inviting my assistant instead of me to attend some of these meetings. This was obvious to me, I would rather not get into all of it now. He probably wanted to be as independent as possible in making political decisions and he did not want to deal with any opinions that were perhaps a little more cautious. But this is a different question. I found myself in New York a bit in an uncharted territory, because I did not have any political tasks, considering that our main political opponents at the time were, in fact, in the United States.

Milošević favored the Embassy in Washington, which is natural, because the embassy had direct contacts with the country in which it was accredited, while I was more focused on international organizations. But it was surprising that our ambassador to Athens, who later ascended to my ministerial position, was engaged in contacting the

US administration and in formulating in nuance some of our ideas. Without my knowledge, he traveled to the United States several times, held meetings there, made contacts, helped US officials visit Belgrade to talk to Milošević, and so on. This was unexpected for me, because I had learned of one such Milutinović's trip to the United States organized without my knowledge while I was still in Belgrade. This was highly unusual, because ambassadors are not allowed to leave the country of service without the consent of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, which is a basic rule in diplomacy. There is no doubt that this was done with Milošević's knowledge, who tasked the ambassador with making a number of contacts in the United States. Following this trip, he made many subsequent visits to the U.S. This falls to the prerogative of the President of the State that, for certain tasks he deemed to be special and secretive missions, he could delegate individuals who were especially close to him and shared with him certain interests. I myself was at the time relatively cut off from all bilateral contacts and communication between Serbia and the U.S.

Even the Charge d'Affaires of our Embassy in Washington came to New York with special assignments to contact a few political figures from the US administration. He once confided to me about it, believing that I knew it, even though I had no information whatsoever.

More importantly, I was not up to speed with the preparations for the Dayton Process. I was the only ambassador of the countries participating in these negotiations accredited to the UN who was not invited to Dayton, which was not a coincidence. I later learned that I was allegedly on the list, but that my successor, the new Minister, Milutinović, crossed out my name, an act which I understand, since a new minister does not want to see his predecessor in such a significant international political operation. I ended up on the sidelines and I learned about the progress of the process in Dayton only from the US media and occasionally from a foreign ambassador, for example the French, who, if we met, would additionally brief me about what was happening there. Even when the Dayton Agreement was signed and became a public document, we at the Mission in New York did not receive its text for a long time. I repeatedly asked the Ministry for it, but they replied with the excuse that it was allegedly kept as a confidential document. I got the first information very quickly when the text was published on the Internet and when my associates in the Mission printed it out on paper. So, I became acquainted with the text thanks to the Internet and not thanks to our government, which only sent that document to our Mission once the matter had become part of history.

Q: With Milutinović's signature, derogatory dispatches arrived about the leadership of the Republika Srpska, and he publicly repeated such opinions in an interview with the American media, with an explicit ban on Yugoslav journalists on transmitting any information on it to the media in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In addition, the report on the events in Srebrenica that you received from the Ministry, which was requested by the Security Council at the initiative of the then Russian ambassador, Sergey Lavrov, was amateurishly prepared and unusable. Was this the intent or was it plain ignorance?

JOVANOVIĆ: That is hard to say. Lavrov had sincere intentions to get first-hand knowledge as the Security Council prepared to discuss the issue. For weeks, I had asked the Ministry in vain to provide us with information about what happened there, but I never received this information. In the end, it is through them that I received the input from the president of the Srebrenica Assembly, which was completely useless. I was in trouble about what to give Lavrov, and I asked my staff in the Mission to try to extract the data that were actually usable from what we had available, and to transmit this information to Lavrov in a special letter sent to him personally. The draft was done early the following morning and brought to me for signature. I made the mistake of not checking who it was addressed to, but I signed it quickly, because the document was supposed to be taken to the Russian mission immediately.

However, when the matter blew up in the Security Council, I saw that the document was sent to the President of the Security Council, which was Lavrov at that time, and, as such, it was distributed to all members of the Security Council. This was a serious mistake, which, of course, I took very badly. However, I did not put the blame on my staff, but I personally accepted responsibility for it. The mistake was probably accidental, because it turned out that at that time, Lavrov was both the ambassador of the Russian Federation and the president of the Security Council. My subordinate, instead of sending the letter to Lavrov directly at the Mission of the Russian Federation, as we had agreed in the first place, sent it to the Security Council. This incident was very unpleasant. However, I must say that, at the time, Milutinović was quite fair during our telephone conversation on this subject, he did not dwell on it; he even advised me not to defend the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina that much, and he let me know that I should stop expressing myself about this subject.

I actually could not even comment on this topic as I did not have any facts. It was an embarrassing episode that went the way it did, the Security Council debated and issued a very sharp statement, which would have been made in such a form anyway, even without the incident, because Mrs. Albright was generally very hostile to the Republika Srpska, and she based her position on this specific issue on alleged aerial footage of NATO or NASA overflying the terrain around Srebrenica, which, as she claimed, showed something else. Of course, she magnified and dramatized this to the maximum, which corresponded to the then need to keep accusing Serbia and Serbs of being bad in their core and that they had not changed by signing the Dayton Agreement.

Q : You have already talked about the fact that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia missed the opportunity to use the capital gained at Dayton, i.e. the positive atmosphere after the signing of the Dayton Agreement. What was it that actually had the decisive negative impact on the gradual thaw in relations with some countries where this process had already begun and then unexpectedly ceased and, what had an impact on the activation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the internationalization of the Kosovo question?

JOVANOVIĆ: These are two questions. First, there is a small reference in the Dayton Agreement to the International Criminal Tribunal seeking cooperation with this court, to which Milošević, when the text of the agreement was edited, did not pay any

special attention. However, this was the nucleus of the policy of turning the screws on Serbia and Milošević himself, which quickly emerged after Dayton. The Chief Prosecutor of the ICTY visited me a couple of times in New York, asking for some information and requesting that the Court have its office in Belgrade, which I, of course, passed on to the Foreign Ministry. Milošević did not pay attention to the importance of it and agreed to it, however, this office would later cost him his freedom, among other things, because it was given a legal status in the middle of Serbia to develop its activities, gather information and contact people useful to it in achieving the goals of the Tribunal.

This is one reason - to pressure Serbia through the activation and the beginning of the effective work of the Tribunal. Another reason why Milošević went on the defensive as a peacemaker was the aforementioned negative stand towards the defeat in the local elections, which was decisive for the West to abandon finally the idea of cooperating with him for another four or five years until the time was right for the opposition to mature and take the helm of state after him. This idea was abandoned and, soon after, the first signs emerged that a storm was brewing in Kosovo and Metohija. There was an organization in the United States at the time, the Project on Ethnic Relations, seemingly benign in name, but very well-conceived as a form of an acceptable pressure on Serbia. The heads of the organization were, if I remember correctly, Professor Allen Kassof and his assistant, Alexander Grigorev. They were tasked with holding meetings between Serbs and Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija, which at the time had their so-called government abroad, in order to peacefully discuss contentious issues with the aim to reach a compromise on the breadth of rights and autonomy in Kosovo and Metohija. This is what Professor Kassof presented to me in a series of meetings we had. Transmitting the information to Belgrade, I pointed out the importance of this organization, because it had a direct connection with the State Department, which Professor Kassof did not hide. As far as I understood, our side was at one point ready to send some representatives from Belgrade who, in addition to the representatives of our opposition and non-governmental organizations, would have been a counterpart to the Albanian participants from their diaspora, who were invited to those gatherings. Professor Kassof's idea was that it would be better to hold meetings of those who do not normally see and talk to each other and to find some forms of solutions that would not require greater involvement of the international community.

This idea was deliberately worded in a well-intentioned way in order to encourage our side to enter into those dialogues. At that time, there was no talk about the storm that was brewing, about the contacts that future terrorists had with a few Western countries, which trained and prepared them for the "D-day", to strike at Serbia and Milošević from the south, from Kosovo and Metohija. He had started his career in Kosovo and, as they imagined, he should have received the decisive blow from there. Although it was a creation of the State Department, the idea of the Project on Ethnic Relations failed. It was better to use this form of dialogue, if nothing else, in order to gain time, if nothing better could be achieved than what followed, and that was the armed conflict due to the violent rebellion of the Albanian terrorist organization, KLA, in Kosovo. For about a year, in the contacts and conversations with Professor Kassof and Georgev, I was involved in this idea and conveyed it to Belgrade. As I later

learned, our representatives, who had already been assigned to go to one of the meetings in New York, cancelled at the last minute, or had been discouraged, by what I do not know. This is a brief testimony to what happened before 1998, when the terrorist activities began to gain intensity in Kosovo and Metohija and when foreign countries, especially in the West, showed sympathy for this violent movement for various humanitarian reasons. In essence, these terrorist actions were only an overture for the war, which some agencies in few Western countries were working on with full speed, signaling, at the same time, when and where these actions would begin.

Q: Today is November 24, 2020.

With the arrival of Živadin Jovanović as Minister of Foreign Affairs, after Milan Milutinović had become President of Serbia, the status of the Yugoslav Mission to the United Nations, which you headed, changed for the better. Your third year as the Head of the Mission was marked by the internationalization of the issue of Kosovo and the already visible preparation for NATO military action against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. However, the problem of the southern Serbian province arose many years before 1998. Can you say something more about the events that preceded the escalation of the conflict in Kosovo and Metohija?

JOVANOVIĆ: Yes, you are correct. We have to start in 1991, when Ibrahim Rugova, the then political leader of the separatist Albanians, publicly stated to the press that the Albanians in Kosovo are not interested in any minority and human rights or autonomy, but only in territory and independence. He then announced for the first time that this national minority was only interested in independence and that it was not interested in the scope of autonomous rights provided by the then Yugoslav and Serbian constitutions, and the high degree of their implementation for members of national minorities, including Albanians. Therefore, the separatist goal of the Albanians was clearly defined at the beginning, it was followed systematically to the end, and it is now embodied in their absolute demand for their so-called independent state to be simply recognized by Serbia.

After the top political representative of the Albanians had declared this goal publicly, this attitude constantly lingered, and it gained momentum when the President of the American Senate, Bob Dole, visited Yugoslavia and Serbia. As a part of this visit, he also went to the Serbian autonomous province Kosovo and Metohija, and, to the surprise of the authorities in Belgrade, repeated the earlier cry of Charles de Gaulle in Quebec - "Long live free Kosovo!." Because of this, Bob Dole was rightly declared a *persona non grata*, which was the first major scar on our relations with the United States. Therefore, at that time, the idea of the independence of the Albanians in Kosovo was not only theirs, it was also American. Otherwise, Dole would not simply shout out at that gathering, "Long live free Kosovo."

Let us not forget, as I have already mentioned, that, at the end of 1991, on Christmas Eve, the then American ambassador in Belgrade, Warren Zimmerman, handed a formal ultimatum to the Serbian government, noting that the United States would attack Serbia militarily in case of an armed conflict in Kosovo and Metohija, if it was caused by Serbia. This means that the idea of a military attack on Serbia was in the

minds of American politicians at that time, at the very beginning of the 1990s. What was attributed to Milošević and Serbia later, that it was their wrong political moves that forced the United States to bomb us through NATO, was just a fairytale for small children. The idea of a military confrontation between the United States and Serbia existed at the very beginning of the Yugoslav crisis, when Yugoslavia had not yet been brought to the dissection table nor cut into six parts. Tying Serbian hands in Kosovo was the constant guiding idea of the American and western side.

It dragged on to 1997, when the Security Council tried to usurp the internal issue of relations within Serbia and Kosovo and Metohija, which, under international law and the United Nations Charter, was not within the jurisdiction of the Security Council. Since such a direct attack on the United Nations Charter could not pass, they resorted to the creation of a Contact Group, composed of 5 leading powers in the Security Council with the right of veto, including Russia. They discussed the issue of Kosovo and Metohija and drew the conclusion that it could pose a danger to the maintenance of broader world peace and security. The conclusion was forwarded to the Security Council, which, unexpectedly but in a pre-planned manner, adopted it. That is how the transition was forged, which enabled the Security Council from then on to keep the issue of Kosovo and Metohija on its agenda. It took over the further resolution of the issue, which was the end for the Serbian position that this was an internal matter and that the Security Council had no authority to deal with it. In early 1998, given the strengthening of separatist terrorism in Kosovo and Metohija, this was enough for the Security Council to start considering this issue on a regular basis, qualifying it as violence. Almost regularly, if not always, the Serbian side was more criticized than were the actions of separatist organizations. The trend established at the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis continued, with the first conflicts in Croatia and later in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the members of the West in the Security Council always used much stronger words of condemnation for Serbs in those former Yugoslav republics and for Serbia as their mother country, than those used only out of formality to reprimand Croatia, and the Bosnian Muslim and Croat sides.

This matrix and inequality in observing the same violations of international law was applied to Kosovo and Metohija and used constantly. To the extent that Albanian terrorists, who had been initially registered as a terrorist organization by the State Department itself, were seen as a liberation organization as early as sometime in March or April 1998. This is thanks to Richard Holbrooke, who, during a visit to one of their secret bases, mimicked their customs and sat barefoot on the floor with his legs crossed. Since then, the terrorist organization became a political and strategic ally of the United States, and during the NATO aggression, they were NATO's combat infantry on the ground. As it can be seen, there was no room for a broader position of the United States on this issue, and even less for some degree of understanding for the Serbian side. As I said, even at the time Warren Zimmermann delivered the ultimatum almost 10 years earlier, Serbia was seen as a potential target for a US military attack. This was a constant, which is overlooked in the view of western observers and analysts, who sought the genesis of things. Serbia, as a historically freedom-loving and independent country, was not at the goodwill of the New World Order created after the end of the Cold War, when the United States, as the only remaining great power and master of the global situation, wrongly calculated that there should be no

independent country in the Balkans nor freedom-loving people who were not immediately ready to kneel before the New World Order.

The freedom and justice loving nature of the Serbian was a problem, because all of the attacks on the territorial integrity of the former common federal state, then on the smaller Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, then on the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro and, finally, the takeover of the southern Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija, were all part of a single point of view and attitude towards Serbia. All this indicated that Serbia as a people and as a state must be weakened both territorially and demographically, and that Serbs in the former Yugoslav republics must be thinned out as much as possible. The West chose to turn a blind eye to the ethnic cleansing of Serbs, primarily by Croats, when 250,000 Serbs were ethnically cleansed by the US-backed military action, as were 150,000 Serbs from Sarajevo and various other areas. In the end, 250,000 Serbs from Kosovo were forced to leave the territory following the end of NATO aggression, without any protection from KFOR - NATO military representatives, who were on the ground, which allowed the terrorist Albanian KLA to simply ethnically cleanse Serbs from this province. In conclusion, it can be said that the people in the former common Yugoslavia who suffered the greatest casualties, who were the greatest victims of ethnic cleansing, and who suffered the largest forceful displacement of civilians from other former Yugoslav republics, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as from the southern province of Kosovo and Metohija – were the Serbian people. This in itself speaks of a dishonest policy, which the West has always pursued towards the Serbian people as a whole, and Serbia as the founder of the common state of Yugoslavia and ally of the West in both world wars.

Q: You mentioned the letter, which was handed over by the then US ambassador to Belgrade, Warren Zimmermann, in 1991, and which took the tone of an ultimatum. The sentence uttered by Secretary of State, Baker, before his visit to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991, when he came with the aim of defusing the situation, is also known. He then said that the United States "does not have a dog in that fight", which meant that it did not root for any side. Based on this statement, which was quoted in many memoirs, it was concluded that the United States initially supported the survival of the SFRY. On the other hand, at the time when you were the head of the Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the United Nations, you had contacts with official representatives of the American administration, such as Madeleine Albright, but also with, for example, Henry Kissinger, who is a gray eminence of American diplomacy and, their views differed considerably. Can you say something more in this regard?

JOVANOVIĆ: First of all, let us go back to Minister Baker's visit. I don't know if I have already mentioned this. In June 1991, he came on a fact-finding mission and visited the federal authorities and leaders of all six republics. As he stated in the memoirs he wrote, he had at the time drawn the attention of the Federal Government and Slobodan Milošević to the fact that they had to refrain from using force against the republics of Slovenia and Croatia, which had expressed their intention to leave Yugoslavia. At the same time, he had said to the leaders of these two republics, Slovenia and Croatia, that, if they left Yugoslavia, they should not expect to be

recognized by the United States. In his book, he presented it as a kind of equidistance, but, in essence, he had tied the Federation's hands to defend the international borders in Slovenia, which the rebellious Slovenian republic took over and thus violated the SFRY's obligation to the CSCE to protect its international borders. Therefore, it excluded the use of force by the Federation in honoring its responsibility to protect Yugoslavia's international borders. The same applied to Croatia. Moreover, Croatia and Slovenia, as I said, were not prevented from carrying out unilateral secession, but were only warned that, if they did, they would then have to wait for the recognition of the United States.

Basically, this was short-lived, for a few months only. This kind of hypocrisy was more than obvious, because it was the common goal of the western power centers to divide the big common state of Yugoslavia into six parts, as a timely measure against the possible strengthening of the influence of the former USSR or Russia through the strengthening of Serbian power in the common state. For the strategic interests of the West, the British and the Germans influenced American thinking claiming that Serbia was unreliable because of its historically close ties with Russia, which is why its influence in Yugoslavia after Tito was not to be allowed to strengthen at any cost. And the ideal solution to prevent this was to declare it a non-existent country on the political map, to favor the secession of 4 of its former republics and, in the end, to destabilize Kosovo and Metohija. This is a historical truth; everything else is a smoke screen to cover up the ugly image and the ugly side of this strategy of the western powers towards a country in the Balkans, which had been their most faithful ally in both world wars and a guarantor of peace and stability in the Balkans.

Q: In addition to Western countries, Russia was also a member of the Contact Group, but, at that time, it had a very restrained attitude towards the increasingly strained relations of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia with the western partners. Based on your communication with the then Russian ambassador to the United Nations, Sergei Lavrov, what was your impression of the reasons for such a restraint?

JOVANOVIĆ: It was not just a restrained relationship. Yeltsin's Russia was on its knees before the West. It was not even able to provide enough bread to its population for a period of one week, but had to rely on daily deliveries of flour from the West in order to feed its citizens. It was practically an economic ruin after the collapse of the Soviet Union, to such an extent that it could not and did not want to oppose the West seriously. Instead, it acted hand in hand with the West. For example, in imposing comprehensive economic sanctions on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in May 1992, it voted in favor of the sanctions, did not abstain like China, and did not – even faintly - consider the possibility of a veto. This is one of the lowest actions of Russia towards Serbia and Serbs in practically all of history. But, at that time, Russia could not even speak in a Russian voice, but in a submissive voice, because it was on its knees in front of the West, and this is a historical fact. Later, Russia tried to position itself more or less correctly in relation to Serbia, but, as it was still a member of the Contact Group, in 1997, as I said, together with the four largest western powers, it agreed that Kosovo should not be considered as an internal issue of Serbia, as it should have been considered under the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Instead, the Contact Group concluded that this issue should be

considered as a latent threat to security and peace in the region. And this statement by the Contact Group was very quickly grabbed by the Security Council, forming a bridge across which legitimacy was gained to deal with a purely internal issue of a member state.

From that moment and on, the issue of Kosovo and Metohija was an indefensible matter for Serbia, because the western powers were united, with no opposition coming from the weakened Russia and a silent China, as a result of the events in Tiananmen, and Serbia was left alone against the extremely hostile attitude of the western centers of power. This was something that was practically predictable and every new move towards the issue of Kosovo and Metohija by the Security Council, that is, by the western centers of power, was to the detriment of Serbia and in favor of justifying terrorism as means of separatism of a national minority, insisting, at the same time, that Serbia no longer had the right to maintain the province within its composition, which was free to become a new independent state.

Q: How do you assess the negotiation processes in Paris and Rambouillet? Why did these processes fail?

JOVANOVIĆ: That was already the final stage of a dictate that had been enforced even before these processes. Holbrooke came to Belgrade several times to discuss the situation in Kosovo and Metohija with Milošević. A couple of times when the Albanian terrorists were cornered and threatened with being permanently wiped out, Holbrooke intervened and protected them. Even more than that. In mid-1998, he demanded that Milošević, as a condition for reducing the continual threatening pressure from the West, withdraw the Serbian police and army from strategically important areas, covering about half of Kosovo and Metohija. This enabled the already destroyed terrorist organization to rebuild, carry out forced mobilization among the local Albanian population in the province, additionally arm themselves, first from Albania and then from other sources, and launch new terrorist attacks, primarily on Serbian civil officials, then on the police, and later on the army. Holbrooke saved them this way twice until the autumn 1998, when the pressure took on an open tone of ultimatum and when the preparations for the NATO aggression against Serbia, which had already been decided on, were in full swing.

This decision, made back in 1998, became determining in the fall of that year, as preparations for political talks were held in Rambouillet. As it is well known, these were not the talks between Serbs and Albanians at all, these were the talks between four Western powers and the Albanians, without any physical meeting or conversation between Serbs and Albanians. In these separate talks between the Albanians and the four Western powers, some agreements on Kosovo were reached, which were later handed over to the Serbian side in a "take it or leave it" manner. From that point on, there was no space for negotiations, of course, Serbia could not accept this, it had no choice but to reject it. Years later, Henry Kissinger confirmed this in a public speech. As he described it - "no sovereign country could accept that offer". The offer was made in an unacceptable form, it was made in order to fulfill the demand of Secretary Madeleine Albright that the offer made to Serbia, that is, to Milošević, should raise the bar so high that he could not possibly jump over it. In other words, excuses and

justification were sought to justify the war. The decision on the war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia i.e. Serbia was made consciously and it was only necessary to find a reason or an excuse to launch it, and things were staged in this way. In the later phase of the negotiations, the unilateral agreement reached by others was presented to the Yugoslav delegation in the form of a letter by the French ambassador, as France was one of the hosts of the talks.

As France and Great Britain co hosted the meeting in Rambouillet, the French and British ambassadors forwarded to the Security Council the text of the unilateral agreement of the Western powers with the Albanians, not with Serbia, the receipt of which was then registered by the UN administration under a certain number. Later, when the war ended and Resolution 1244 was to be drafted, the registration number of the letter submitted by the French ambassador was taken as fact that an agreement had been reached in Rambouillet and was inserted in the Resolution, although that agreement did not exist at all. It stated, "referring to the Rambouillet Agreement" and then quoted the letter from the French ambassador. This was a ploy that is unacceptable for mature and serious international politics, but this only shows the extent to which serious diplomacy of the time on the issue of Kosovo and Metohija had fallen and to what extent it had been misused to deceive the Security Council in passing the UNSC Resolution 1244 with the deceitful clause "referring to the Rambouillet agreement", which never existed. These were dishonorable things for serious diplomacy, but the western powers had embarked on such a path aiming to prepare the public for their policy of occupying Kosovo and Metohija and, a few years later, declaration of the so-called independence of Kosovo and Metohija.

Q: In February and March 1999, you submitted several letters from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General of the United Nations. After the attack on the FRY had begun, you tried to address the United Nations Security Council. What were the reactions of Kofi Annan and other members of the Security Council at that time?

JOVANOVIĆ: As the situation worsened, especially when the war began, we flooded the Security Council with data on the violations of numerous provisions of both national and international law; at the same time, we requested a meeting of the Security Council in which we could present our position on the situation in Kosovo and Metohija following the terrible consequences of the aggression on Kosovo and the rest of Serbia. I also asked to be received by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan. He agreed to meet with me, but he very carefully avoided committing to any personal engagement that could hinder the continuation of the NATO aggression. He was once invited to visit the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. At the height of the NATO aggression, when hundreds of civilians and other victims were killed in the bombing, I invited him to come urgently to visit the FRY. The same way he had replied to my earlier invitation, sent before the launch of the NATO attack on the FRY, Annan acknowledged the receipt of the invitation but said that "he would visit Yugoslavia when the best conditions were created". I told him that the best time for a visit of the Secretary General was when the war was imminent, when peace and security were directly threatened by a publicly prepared NATO military attack.

However, he remained faithful to his position. In other words, he did not want to act against NATO and threaten its preparations, which is not surprising at all. Let us not forget what happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Japanese diplomat Yasushi Akashi, who was the then UN Secretary General's Envoy for the Yugoslav Crisis, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, had “the key”, i.e. the right of veto, which is why NATO could not engage militarily against the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. NATO put pressure on him several times to give his permission, but he refused, and thanks to that, many Bosnian Serb lives were saved. These lives would have been extinguished if he had given in to NATO and agreed with their military action against one side in the conflict, the Bosnian Serb side. After Akashi had been withdrawn by the Security Council, he was replaced by Kofi Annan, who immediately gave permission for the bombing of the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That was probably one of the reasons why he was elected Secretary-General of the United Nations very soon after the removal of Boutros Boutros-Ghali. Such a good, cooperative - or rather obedient - Secretary General was needed by the United States and other western powers at the time.

Q: At the beginning of the war, diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the United States of America were severed and the Yugoslav Embassy in Washington was closed, shifting the focus of all activities to the Permanent Mission to the United Nations. You, as a senior diplomat accredited to the United Nations, had a status that protected you from the repressive measures of the host country, but you certainly suffered certain restrictions and your life and work in New York were significantly hampered by these logistical problems. How did you manage to cope with that avalanche of challenges?

JOVANOVIĆ: First, I was handicapped due to the 1992 UN General Assembly's passing of a resolution, which had suspended the voting rights of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) at the United Nations. This was a measure imposed by the West to show their dissatisfaction with the independent policies of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. However, the FRY remained a member of the United Nations, a due annual contribution was paid to the United Nations budget, including a quota for the costs of United Nations peacekeeping operations around the world. The FRY flag was displayed on the UN flag poles together with flags of the other UN member countries. However, we were not allowed to participate in the work of the UN General Assembly or its committees, nor to vote, even though the Yugoslav flag was displayed there.

Passing the Resolution on the suspension of the voting rights of our country three years before had put me in a difficult situation as I could not directly participate in the work of the committees and of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Later on, during the war and with its end, the United States imposed additional restrictions. First, they restricted my movement and the movement of members of my mission to 25 miles from downtown Manhattan. This meant that I could not travel around the US and conduct my business in various states at the invitation of some groups. For example, there were regional meetings of the Council on Foreign Relations that I was invited to, but I could not respond to those invitations. On the other hand, I was in some way limited by my own government, which, before the bombing, authorized

the *chargé d'affaires* of our embassy in Washington to perform political duties in New York, too. This measure was directed at me personally, for reasons that I would not elaborate now. However, with the beginning of the bombing and the severance of diplomatic relations with the United States, our embassy in Washington closed. Only one young diplomat remained in it, and the protection of interests on both sides was taken over by Switzerland.

Therefore, as provided by international law, if the United States had certain issues that it wanted to raise, it was supposed to pass them on to Switzerland, including the question of what it wanted to do with our embassy. On the contrary, not only did the then US administration ignore Switzerland, but it also broke into the Yugoslav Embassy overnight and searched it, so that the Embassy was in American hands throughout the bombing. As far as I know, that was not the case with the American Embassy in Belgrade. Such a course of action that ignores international practice and international law was not exactly the best attribution of the reputation and prestige of the world's strongest power at the time. I was quite limited by the severance of diplomatic relations, but at the same time, I was bombarded with constant requests for statements and interviews from various media, not only in the United States and the western countries, but also from Latin America, Japan and Asia.

It was a great mental and physical effort, but at the same time, it was an opportunity for me to say something that would deviate from the monolithic media and political false representation of the situation and propaganda regarding the bombing and its course by the western media centers of power. In fact, there was a political center of power in the State Department and in the intelligence services, which fed and gave instructions to all media in the United States and across the west and even a little beyond, that the responsible party for the whole situation was exclusively found in Serbia, in Serbs and in Milošević; and that the aggressors and all their allies, plus the media and other acts of “satanization” were absolved of all guilt. They indoctrinated the world public with a one-sided and very shameful approach about the crime committed against a small country, a UN member, which did nothing to them, and which was simply faced with a terrorist attempt by a national minority to secede through unprecedented use of violence. Indeed, as a member of the UN, it had the right to oppose such terrorist actions and it had the right to protect its southern province from separatist violence. However, not only was this right denied to her, but she was also illegitimately punished by the illegal bombing. This was a unique situation, with the Serbian province militarily occupied by NATO through illegal military action and a crime against peace according to the definition of the United Nations, even though the political power in that province had been transferred to the United Nations. Immediately after that, the envoys, who were supposed to administrate the situation in Kosovo and Metohija under UN rule, engaged in cleansing Kosovo and Metohija from all legal and political forms of Serbia's presence as quickly as possible. This was contrary to the UNSC Resolution 1244, according to which they were only supposed to ensure peace and security in order to implement the other elements of this Resolution.

However, with the visible pressure from the then US administration, everything was done opposite of the UNSCR 1244 goal. The first international representative, the

United Nations representative in Kosovo and Metohija after the bombing, was Bernard Kouchner, later the French foreign minister. Richard Holbrooke, even though he was not his superior, because Kouchner's superiors were the UN Secretary-General and the United Nations Secretariat, instructed Kouchner by telephone that he should not be guided nor should he follow the instructions he received from the United Nations, but that he should work according to his own will, that is, according to what he had agreed with Holbrooke, which was to eliminate completely all forms of Serbia's presence in Kosovo and Metohija. Kouchner did this with lightning speed quickly squeezing out all elements of Serbia's presence. At the same time, he completely turned a blind eye to the ethnic cleansing of 250,000 Serbs who lived in the Province and the cases of revenge carried out by terrorists against local Serb civilians, attacking them individually and in groups. No one has ever been held accountable for these crimes against humanity and terrorism committed during a heavy NATO presence in the Province.

Q: We will return to that period a little later. I wanted to ask you about the events that had taken place a few months before Resolution 1244 was passed. The capture of three American soldiers and the initiative for their release, which came from Jesse Jackson and US Representative Rod Blagojević, received great attention in the American public. Their trip was largely coordinated by you personally. What were your impressions from the preparatory meetings you had with them?

JOVANOVIĆ: First, the capture of three American soldiers who crossed our border from Macedonia is a normal act by a country at war - to immediately control every presence of a foreign soldier on its territory and to arrest him. This provoked violent reactions in the United States, because it was inconceivable that an American soldier could be captured by a country that is a victim of the US aggression. Jackson, who was once a presidential candidate, came up with his ideas to help solve this problem. Since other attempts had failed, he contacted me and came to the Mission. After a series of contacts with Belgrade, I managed to get them to accept the arrival of Jackson with his team for talks, hoping that it could ease the situation and open the way for an end to the bombing. I presented Jackson as a man who was anti-militaristic, who was peaceful and who had a political perspective quite different from Bill Clinton and his hawks.

My arguments were accepted, and Jackson left for Belgrade with a large entourage, about fifteen of them. What we found interesting was that Rod Blagojević, the son of one of our emigrants after the Second World War, was among them. Blagojević contacted me by phone first, without showing a slightest desire to inquire on the ways he could help the country of his origin, considering that he was an influential man in the US House of Representatives; instead, the only thing that he was interested in was how he could get a visa. I sent this delegation to Belgrade in the belief that it would soften the atmosphere and help end the war as soon as possible. Jackson managed to bring those soldiers, first to Germany and then to the United States, and gave a good and pacifying statement upon his return, demanding an end to the bombing. However, this fell on deaf ears, because the political leaders in the United States at the time were impenetrable as a rock in their decision that Serbia should be broken and the will of the New World Order must be imposed on it. That endeavor did not open

the way for political contacts that would lead to a breakthrough. Rod Blagojević, whom I expected to give at least some statement, moved emotionally by the fact that his country of origin suffered at the hands of his new country that adopted him, was completely uninterested and self-absorbed. He continued with his firm attitude towards the authorities in Serbia, which disappointed me quite a bit, although it did not surprise me. He later came into conflict with the US law and ended up in prison. It was one of the episodes of the war, which was, in a way, a small bright moment that could have led to a political breakthrough, but, unfortunately, the hard and uncompromising policy of President Clinton and his belligerent aides, Mrs. Albright, first and foremost, were inaccessible to any reasonable approach.

Q: All that time, there had been no attempts by the relevant parts of the US administration and the Secretary of State to establish any communication with you. However, there were attempts by some other American officials, who tried to make unofficial contacts through intermediaries. One of them was Bill Richardson, the Minister of Energy. Can you say something more about that?

JOVANOVIĆ: Somewhere in the middle of the bombing, after about a month and a half had passed since its beginning, I was contacted by the Mexican ambassador, whom I knew only by sight. He suddenly asked me "Do you know that Richardson is going to your country?". I was surprised because I knew nothing about this. After a short time, the ambassador contacted me again and offered to arrange a meeting with the senior member of the US government, Bill Richardson, at his residence. As I had rewound the memory of our previous meeting, I concluded that he had received instructions to arrange this meeting for Richardson, who was of Mexican background himself, and this was apparently the reason why the Mexican ambassador was tasked with it. We met and had a relaxed conversation at the Mexican residence, and I would say that the meeting was both civilized and pleasant. Of course, Richardson could not promise anything, he was not the one who made the decisions, but he wanted to examine some of our positions and weaknesses, and to confirm some things. I tried to win him over to a peaceful solution, to ending the war, by emphasizing that this unfortunate war must not be the last and most important point in our relations, because it is not in the nature of our relations to have this war imposed as the most important event.

In a way, I expected that, after this meeting, he would see that the war did more damage to the United States than its cessation would, and that they should do something to preserve the value of our relations from the two World Wars, not as to lose us eventually as friends. This was roughly my approach. Richardson told me to call him whenever I wanted to talk to him, he gave me his phone numbers and, in the meantime, he said that he would inform his government about our conversations. Previously, of course, he had checked whether my government agreed to our meeting, which is a common verification. After the meeting, I expected some feedback, which never came. I contacted him twice, he was on a plane, traveling somewhere, but he told me there was no news. After that, the matter was backburnered and the NATO aggression continued in an even fiercer way, which showed that his report did not affect the war mongering leaders of his country. So, unfortunately, the contacts with officials did not bear any fruit. Richardson reminded me that he had been in

Yugoslavia and that he knew the then President of Serbia, Milan Milutinović, from before. I was aware of it and used it to encourage him to go to Yugoslavia again, when it was most needed, and do something important for both sides. Regrettably, it had no impact whatsoever, as he was obviously in the minority in the then belligerent US administration.

Q: We are now coming to the beginning of June 1999. The news about the acceptance of the ultimatum and the preparation of the Kumanovo Agreement caught you on your only trip outside of Manhattan granted to you during that period. Did you have any indications in the official communication with Belgrade that Slobodan Milošević would accept this ultimatum?

JOVANOVIĆ: I had none. On the contrary, I expected that the US side would be the first to give up on the war. In the meantime, pressure was growing in the American and German public, which was demanding that the war must be ended as soon as possible. The public positions that the war was counterproductive, that it caused instability in the countries fighting against Serbia was getting stronger and the administrations of these countries were already thinking about how to get out of this war as soon as possible. The original idea behind the whole aggression was that, after 2-3 days of fierce bombing, Milošević would be scared to death and immediately ask for its termination, that is, accept capitulation. However, this did not happen, the third month passed, there was an erosion of public support, which had dropped sharply, internal problems grew, and the idea of a ground operation against Serbia from the Macedonian and Albanian borders, which was actively considered and proposed by some, was finally considered to be impractical because it implied the danger of the loss of lives of NATO soldiers, which was unacceptable to the Western public. In the end, the political force of an ultimatum was used to force Serbia to end the war under conditions set by the West through its mediators, Strobe Talbot, Martti Ahtisaari and Viktor Chernomyrdin, the Russian representative. While they succeeded in this endeavor, they still had to accept the recognition of Serbia's sovereignty over Kosovo and Metohija under the pressure of the Russian side. This was something that they wanted to eliminate immediately, but they had to accept it and, furthermore, they also had to agree with the request that a small contingent of the Yugoslav army and police would remain in the Province in order to guard the border and Orthodox Christian property. Although these elements were included in the Resolution 1244, the US and its cronies had no intent whatsoever to respect it. They seemingly agreed to it only to pacify the Serbian and Russian sides. Therefore, the provisions on a limited presence of the Serbian military have never been seriously considered. The West even managed to make amendments in the Resolution providing that the decision on the implementation of the aforementioned provisions was to be made by the KFOR commander. This was no longer part of the competence of political bodies, but it was left to the arbitrary will of a single military officer in charge, who, of course, did not want to have the host country's army on the territory he controlled. So, this has remained a dead letter. But this is one of a series of proofs that the Resolution 1244 was not constructed according to the hierarchical value of the issues, it has never been implemented in the part concerning the obligations towards the Serbian side, while the obligations towards the Albanian side have been fulfilled completely. And it is precisely this imbalance in the implementation and enforcement of the Resolution

1244 that shows how biased the aggressive might of the western power was, interested only in the Albanian side and their expectations, for the achievement of their goals, while completely ignoring and neglecting its obligations to the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, including some form of extended Serbia's military presence in this Serbian province.

Q: Unlike other similar situations, the practice of signing a special agreement defining legal and procedural issues related to the UN mission on the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was not followed, while in all other similar situations such a document had been signed. Why was this given up, that is, was the negotiation on such a document officially abandoned?

JOVANOVIĆ: Not only was UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, powerless, but he was also totally obedient in relation to the goals of the then US administration in Kosovo and Metohija. According to international law and practice, any deployment of a United Nations presence in a disputed territory belonging to a sovereign state must be previously agreed to by this state, in this case Serbia, and the United Nations Secretariat. Such an agreement defines the rights of the United Nations, the rights of Serbia, and so on. What was usually done around the world, whenever the United Nations or United Nations peacekeeping forces had a role in settling the situation in a disputed territory, was avoided precisely in order to avoid any kind of recognition of Serbia and to prevent, in every way, any form of its presence in Kosovo and Metohija. I have already said that Serbia's sovereignty over Kosovo was accepted rather reluctantly, under the pressure from Lavrov and Russia. For our part, we could not directly but indirectly, through the Russian side, insist on this important element, but in terms of further forms of Serbia's presence in Kosovo, as I said before, they appointed a representative of the Secretary General, Bernard Kouchner, as well as Richard Holbrooke, to eliminate quickly all forms of the state and legal presence of Serbia from Kosovo. All the laws, all the regulations that Serbia had in Kosovo overnight were replaced with new regulations set by Bernard Kouchner or those made by the Kosovo Albanians. This was part of the policy of the final separation of Kosovo and Metohija from Serbia. From the very beginning, it was planned that independence of Kosovo and Metohija from Serbia be declared by local Albanians in the near future. These were attacks on the United Nations Charter, the UNSC Resolution 1244, and the democratic image of the western powers. This was the brutal use of force in resolving the legal and political issues of a part of the territory of a state, despite its sovereignty over that territory.

Q: You have already mentioned that, after the arrival of both the civilian and military international missions in Kosovo, a large number of crimes were committed against the non-Albanian population. In your memoirs, you made an analogy to the activities of the allied countries in Bulgaria after the breakthrough on the Thessaloniki front. Do you think it was simply a moment when the military was not able to find their bearings or was it something else?

JOVANOVIĆ: First, it was a form of marked hostility of the leading western powers towards Serbia and the Serbian people, which started from the position that everything was allowed against the Serbs: the trampling of international legal and

political instruments and the UN Charter. No form of mercy was shown to the Serbs and Serbia during the entire Yugoslav crisis. This is something in itself that was inhumane and undemocratic. The western world owes a great apology and repentance to history for what they did and what they are still doing to the Serbs. This was done because the Albanians were promised that they would get their own state very soon after the end of the aggression. They mercilessly trampled through Serbian arguments. In order to achieve this more easily, the number of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija had to be significantly reduced, and this could be done with just one lightning-fast move, by allowing KLA terrorist forces, which had fled to Macedonia and Albania under pressure from our regular police and military forces, to return to Kosovo and Metohija overnight with their manpower and weapons, before KFOR forces could deploy. KFOR forces had the task of ensuring peace and security in the province, but not only did they not want to carry out that task, but they also hurried armed Albanian terrorists to enter as soon as possible. Albanian terrorists were allowed to enter Kosovo before KFOR to cleanse ethnically 250,000 Serbs, Roma and Albanians loyal to Serbia, and carry out horrific examples of revenge against civilians, individually and in groups. For these crimes no one has yet been held accountable, no serious investigations have been carried out, leading to the identification of those who committed these crimes, their arrests, and so on. Therefore, the green light was given to the Albanians to settle accounts with the Serbs in a way that would force the Serbs to flee from Kosovo and Metohija to central Serbia. That was inhumane, irresponsible, and it was contrary to the Resolution 1244, which stated that KFOR would be responsible for peace and security in the Province.

Not only did KFOR fail to show any responsibility, but they kept silent and turned a blind eye to atrocities committed against non-Albanian, predominantly Serb population in the Province. In contrast, the ethical attitude of the commanders of western powers in the First World War was that one crime does not justify another crime. Although the Bulgarian army, an ally of Germany and Austria-Hungary, committed horrific crimes against the Serb civilian population, the Serbs, who quickly liberated that part of territory after the breakthrough of the Thessaloniki front, were kept on the border with Bulgaria. They were told that they would not be the ones to enter Bulgaria, but that instead, French units would do so. The explanation was that the Serbs could take revenge because they were furious following the Bulgarian atrocities committed against the Serbian civilian population during the occupation. That was the right thing to do, because it was motivated by humanistic concerns, regardless of the crimes committed by the Bulgarians. This responsible and ethical attitude was not present at all, and even less applied in the case of Kosovo and Metohija. If there were some individual crimes committed on the part of the Serbs against the Albanians, that was not a justification for allowing the Albanians to retaliate with such, and even greater crimes against the Serb civilian population. But that was part of the political goal to cleanse Kosovo and Metohija of as many Serbs from its population, so that it could more easily, in a few years, be declared as an independent state.

Q: All this time, despite all the restrictions imposed, you had lively communication with numerous representatives of the intellectual and political elite in the United States, including Henry Kissinger. What were your impressions of the conversations

with Kissinger? Given that his influence on American politics is still substantive, why do you think that his views were ignored by the then US administration?

JOVANOVIĆ: First, he was a Republican, whereas the Democrats were in power at the time, who were intoxicated by their power since they were heading a country that was the only ruler of the world after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. That power relatively stifled the power of judgment and some of them started behaving mercilessly and policelike brutally towards other states, by starting wars, punishing and bombing other nations, etc.

The political musings of Kissinger, which relied on the richness of history and its lessons, could not find a place in the victorious euphoria that filled the brains of the then democratic leaders in the United States in the post-Cold War world. He was marginalized but had retained his independence of judgment. He was against many of the moves made in the former Yugoslavia, as well as against the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the rapid recognition of the independence of the breakaway republics, as were many other western leaders, including Lord Carrington, Francois Mitterrand, and so on. Many of them warned that this would ignite the fire of civil wars. Kissinger reasoned very intelligently, he was against aggression and called for its end as soon as possible, pointing out the flawed political decisions of the then US administration.

At the same time, since the United States was facing new elections, when the chances of the Republicans were increasing, he said that the new US government under the Republicans would have to take care of the created situation and that they would not be able to make the necessary corrections immediately or if at all. He also warned that Democratic key figures, such as Mrs. Madeleine Albright, Richard Holbrooke and others, would continue to act from the opposition to maintain the situation created under their rule in Kosovo and Metohija, and against Serbia. He logically said that our position would not be much easier with the arrival of the Republicans, precisely because of the continuity of American foreign policy, regardless of the changes at the top. This could only change slowly, it cannot change quickly or abruptly, as it is a process which would last some time and would not be of much use to us.

Nevertheless, Kissinger maintained sympathies towards us, and he was openly against what had happened in Rambouillet as an excuse for the military aggression against the FRY. I have already mentioned the ultimatum of the Rambouillet Conference, when Madeleine Albright said that the bar set for Milošević should be so high that he could never hurdle it. Kissinger assessed her statement as an alibi for an attack and that, practically, the American side was to blame for the war in Kosovo and Metohija. He offered to meet somewhere again if there was a further need for our consultation. However, things developed quickly and the time came for me to slowly end my term of service in New York.

Q: In addition to Henry Kissinger, you also had talks with presidential candidate Pat Buchanan. What impression did he leave on you?

JOVANOVIĆ: He was critical of the aggression, and he publicly declared this. He was a broad-minded man, an independent thinker, freedom loving. I did not rule out the possibility that he could become president, although I did not think that such an outcome was highly likely. But he was one of the presidential candidates and I tried to contact him. He was careful, he did not want our meeting held in a visible and public way, so that it could not be used against him in the presidential campaign. Our conversation was organized at the airport in New York as a chance meeting. However, we talked for an hour or more. I introduced him to our positions and gave him some of our books. Buchanan condemned the aggression, he was strongly against it, and said that, if he won, he would arrange things completely differently. Expectations regarding his success in the election were not realistic and he did not win, but he remained an independent thinker, who did not have too much influence on American public opinion. However, anything was better than nothing, because others were categorically indoctrinated against Serbs and Serbia in every respect. Their denigration had to be total and uninterrupted. Not only were many American political minds engaged in this, but, regrettably, also a large part of the intellectual elite, not to mention the media.

Q: There was an initiative for you to meet with Colin Powell, who, as we know, took over as Secretary of State in 2001, in the new, Republican administration. Why did that meeting not take place?

JOVANOVIĆ: The name of Condoleezza Rice was also mentioned in the context of a possible minister, that is, as a member of the new republican government. I tried to schedule a meeting with her through some of our Republican connections and negotiations went in the right direction, but she could not come to New York because she was busy with the election campaign. So, the already scheduled meeting with her had to be canceled. Then I turned to Powell, who was also considered for a high position in the new government. He accepted the suggestion that we meet, and we tried to agree on how to do it. It was necessary for him to come to New York, since I could not leave Manhattan because of the restrictions I had already mentioned. We were close to an agreement when the political upheaval took place in Serbia and the conversation with Powell about Kosovo and Metohija lost its meaning.

Q: You were personally a critic of the government, which is why you were under attack by Milošević and his closest circle, but you did not respond to recruitment offers to join the opposition. You even sent a personal letter to the President of the United Nations Security Council, criticizing foreign interference in the elections in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. What motivated you to take such a position?

JOVANOVIĆ: First, I have always had democratic convictions and I believed in the OSCE's policy that elections in each of the member states should be free and fair, without foreign interference. I just put it into practice. Since I saw that the United States was publicly interfering in the presidential and general elections in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, not only by providing political and propaganda assistance and support to the opposition parties, but also by sending financial aid, which was not insignificant, through various ways, visible and covert, legal and illegal. I condemned this flagrant interference in the election process of a member state in a letter I sent to

the Security Council without asking Belgrade for clearance. I thought that I did not even have to ask for permission for this, because it was obviously a flagrant violation of OSCE the provisions and democratic standards of the West, and I sent my documented, perhaps harsh letter to the President of the Security Council to be distributed to all members of the Security Council. This was done, but it had no effect, because of the influence of the United States, which led the world after the Cold War and did not pay attention or listen to anyone's reprimands, especially not from the country they bring around in every possible way to their own advantage. As for those attempts, I was approached by various emissaries, my acquaintances from the diaspora and others, who tried to show me the advantages of deviating from my official line. I ignored these offers, and, replying that there were still a few incorruptible Serbs, rejected them without any further thoughts in that regard. They withdrew after that, although the offers sent to me through them were the most profitable in every possible way.

Q: In the Yugoslav Mission itself, there was a mood that it was high time for a change of government due to many developments on the domestic political stage. This was also shown by the vote in the Mission on the day of the elections. After receiving the official election results, you sent a letter to the newly elected President, Vojislav Koštunica, while putting all the Mission's resources at his disposal in order to take advantage of the positive reaction of the international community and to improve the international position of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Did you ever receive a reply to this letter?

JOVANOVIĆ: I did not. I acted in accordance with the standards of international practice and international law, that, after political changes in a country, the entire diplomacy and embassies are put in the service of the new government, even though I personally was not a supporter or a member of the parties that formed the new government; I was neither a member nor a supporter of their predecessors in terms of party membership. I did what every responsible professional does in law-abiding countries, I put myself at the disposal of the new government. I never received a reply to this letter, and I did not even expect one. However, after about ten days, I received an urgent call to return to the country immediately for consultations. Upon return, I contacted the Ministry, they told me that they would get in touch with me, but there was no call and the consultations never took place. I was in Belgrade for ten days when I read in the newspaper that I had been recalled. Such a decision and the way it was made public was fully unnecessary, as I had already met the conditions for retirement, and I could have retired peacefully. But the new government needed a little drama to profile itself as being energetic, so it made a few crude moves, which, in my opinion, were superfluous and unnecessary, because I did not represent any obstacle to the exercise of its power. But this was the way it happened. Unfortunately, that government did not prove itself successful, which is why it was punished by losing power ten years later.

Q: Your contribution during your diplomatic career has left a deep mark in the diplomacy of both the former Yugoslavia and today's Republic of Serbia - regardless of those small dramas, as you described them. You are a very welcome guest at many conferences, scholars often invite you to many discussions and ask for your opinion

and your analysis. And, indeed, the contribution and the impact that you left is still felt today. When you look back at your diplomatic career, after you have been retired for two decades, would you, from this perspective, do something differently? In your eyes, what was the greatest accomplishment that you achieved during your extremely rich career?

JOVANOVIĆ: This is a great question. For me as an individual, as a diplomat, and as a politician, too, the guiding principle was to preserve, above everything else, my independence of thought and judgement. This was so important to me that I was willing to sacrifice faster progress in my diplomatic career, as well as in politics, in order not to bring into question this guiding principle. In the diplomatic service, where everything revolves around contacts, scrutiny, recommendations, I was completely and consistently above all of this. I did my job and tried to improve my knowledge in the diplomatic arena, and I left it to my country and to the events to decide whether I can be used somewhere or not. This was also important to me in the political appointments. I have always had my own consciousness, with only one goal - to be in the service of the independence and freedom of my people and my country, always and to the end. As such, I was an ardent advocate of preserving the former federal state of Yugoslavia, the common state of all peoples. I believed, and still believe, that its disintegration was a crime, not only by the northern republics, Slovenia and Croatia, which were the first secede and set an example for others, but also by the Western powers, which systematically did everything to bring about the end of the common state of the southern Slavs so that they could more easily impose their agenda in the wider Balkan area, in which, unfortunately, they have succeeded. This is being done even today, and the biggest losers and the biggest victims of the Machiavellian moves to destroy Yugoslavia as a common state were and remain Serbia and the Serbian people.

Q:Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much for the time you set aside for our discussion and for your views and memories, which helped examine the events related to the break-up of the former common federal state, from another perspective.

End of interview