

The vain attempts of the European Community to mediate in Yugoslavia

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The vain mediation attempts of the European Community

Faced with the crisis, the 12 countries of the European Community made it clear that they would prefer the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which had signed a Cooperation Agreement with the EEC in 1980, to remain intact. They feared that disputes over borders would constitute a dangerous precedent in Central and Eastern Europe and decided not to recognise the independence of Slovenia and Croatia. Then, when the fighting started in June 1991, they had to deal with the problem, since the UN deemed the Yugoslav crisis a domestic affair, while the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in which the USSR was supporting Serbia, paralysed by the unanimity rule, had simply empowered the European Community to intervene.

On 29 July 1991, after attempting to secure a ceasefire and the suspension of declarations of independence, the Twelve declared the inviolability of the Federation's internal frontiers, a declaration that was rejected by Slobodan Milošević and the Croatian Serbs, who refused to be involved in an independent Croatia. Fighting intensified in Croatia, where Serbs were carrying out fierce bomb attacks on Vukovar. The Twelve organised a peace conference in The Hague which began on 7 September 1991 under the chairmanship of Lord Carrington, formerly British Foreign Secretary and Secretary-General of NATO. However, because of discord amongst the Twelve, they managed neither to force an end to the fighting nor to agree on a political solution.

In September, in an attempt to halt the fighting, the Netherlands Presidency of the European Community, supported by France and Germany, proposed sending a Western European Union (WEU) intervention force to the region, but the United Kingdom, backed by Denmark and Portugal, was opposed to any commitment of troops. The EEC Member States, unable to reach agreement on sending a European intervention force, called on the UN Security Council to intervene in November 1991. Moreover, France then called for a United Nations Emergency Force to be dispatched, but the Security Council did no more than impose an embargo on the supply of arms to Yugoslavia. However, its effect was to hamper the resistance efforts of the Croats and the Bosnians against the Serbs, who were already extensively equipped.

On the ruins of the Yugoslav Federation, Serbia and Montenegro proclaimed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (27 April 1992), in which the Serbs wanted to integrate the Serb-populated enclaves of Croatia and of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The UN and the EEC decided not to impose a military solution and cooperated to try to find a peaceful settlement in the former Yugoslavia. Following the continuation of the civil war in the former Yugoslavia and as a result of the ethnic cleansing which was being carried out, a United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) with some 15 000 members was created on 21 February 1992. UNPROFOR was initially only deployed in Croatia, since Milošević was opposed to the inclusion of Bosnia, where Serb militia, assisted by the Federal army, were beginning to besiege Muslim towns and cities, Sarajevo in particular, and to carry out raids to purge them of their Muslim population. A 6 000-strong UNPROFOR II was sent to Bosnia only in October 1992; it struggled to enforce the truce and to protect humanitarian convoys.

With regard to resolving the conflict, the Carrington-Cutileiro Plan, submitted in February 1992 as a result of the peace conference held since September 1991 under the auspices of the EU, aimed to prevent war breaking out in Bosnia. The European proposal took into account the desire for independence already expressed by Slovenia and Croatia, and, subsequently, by Macedonia (15 September 1991) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (15 October 1991), abandoned the continued existence of a Yugoslav Federation but made recognition of the Republics conditional upon a general agreement on minority rights, guaranteed by a Court of Justice, upon the special status of certain regions and upon a common customs policy. Milošević refused the plan since he already controlled one third of Croatian territory. For him, the creation of UNPROFOR had the advantage of 'freezing' Serb conquests. And, above all, the Twelve were divided on the issue of recognition. German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, under pressure from the German public, wanted to move quickly on Slovenia and Croatia because of the affinity between these countries and German-speaking Europe, whilst France, fearing the extension of German influence and better disposed towards the Serbs, preferred to maintain some degree of Yugoslav unity; this feeling was shared by Spain, which was dealing with Basque and Catalan uprisings, and Great Britain, preoccupied with Northern Ireland.

On 16 December 1991, keen to demonstrate their solidarity in the run-up to the signing of the Treaty on European Union in Maastricht, the Twelve decided to recognise every Republic that wanted to be recognised as such, on condition that it respected human rights, minority rights and the right to arbitration. Proceeding in this manner, however, had the drawback of eliminating the previous global agreement between the parties that had been the subject of the peace conference. On 23 December 1991, Germany unilaterally recognised Slovenia and Croatia. It was followed, on 15 January 1992, by its partner countries after the conference's Arbitration Commission had decided that these two Republics satisfied the requisite conditions. In the case of Bosnia, the Commission suggested that a referendum take place. That was duly held on 29 February and 1 March: the Muslim and Croat majority voted for independence, the Serbs abstained and declared a 'Serbian Republic of Bosnia', intensifying the war. Bosnia was recognised on 6 April. As a result of Greek opposition, however, Macedonia was not recognised until December 1993, under the name of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Even if the principles of the Carrington-Cutileiro Plan were accepted by the three ethnic groups of Bosnia and Herzegovina in April 1992, the proposals included in the peace plan were finally refused by the Bosniak leader Alija Izetbegović. From this point on, the conflict in Bosnia worsened.

As regards the Yugoslav crisis, which was a particularly complicated issue, the European Community had not managed to pursue a coherent policy, mainly because of divergences of opinion between the Member States, which augured ill for the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) to be established by the Treaty on European Union. The Community was forced to appeal to the UN, which, henceforth, played the leading role in the Yugoslav crisis, although not entirely satisfactorily. The peace conference became a joint enterprise between the EEC and the UN and was held in Geneva from September 1992 onwards as a permanent centre for negotiations, but to no avail. In January 1993, United Nations Special Envoy Cyrus Vance and European Community representative Lord Owen took over from the 'European' Carrington-Cutileiro duo. But on 18 June 1993, Lord Owen pronounced the Vance-Owen Plan — which provided for the division of Bosnia into ten semi-autonomous regions — 'dead'. Vance, who resigned from his post in April, was replaced on 1 May by the Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg. The two mediators acted under United Nations mandate. From that point on, the European Community was excluded from the core of the negotiations. It was on the initiative of the Owen-Stoltenberg duo that UNPROFOR's mandate was extended to include Bosnia. The number of UN peacekeepers (or 'blue berets') was subsequently increased. However, the Owen-Stoltenberg Plan was rejected on 29 August 1993 by the Bosniaks.

Finally, in November 1993, the European Union regained some sort of cohesion by adopting, on the initiative of France and Germany, an action plan for the former Yugoslavia (the Juppé-Kinkel Plan) which would underpin European diplomacy until the peace accords of 1995: territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and territorial concessions between the communities. The European Union provided most of the humanitarian aid, but it did not have its own autonomous military capacity. It was the European Member States, on an individual basis, that provided the contingents required for the UN peacekeeping forces and participated in the military action taken by NATO that forced the Serbs to yield. A 'contact group' made up of Germany, the United States, France, Italy, the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation was created in February 1994. On the initiative of this group, the negotiations for peace made rapid headway. However, Slobodan Milošević hampered the good progress of the negotiations by imposing an embargo on the River Drina. The Bosnian Serbs refused to continue with the negotiations in October 1994.

At the instigation of French President Jacques Chirac, the UN voted a resolution on 16 June 1995 creating a Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) tasked with supporting the UN peacekeepers in Bosnia. This provided the stability required to secure a cease-fire in October 1995 across the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It was the intervention of the Americans that eventually proved decisive; by assisting the Croatian army, they established a balance with the Serb forces in Bosnia, and their diplomatic intervention led to the peace conference which met in Dayton (Ohio) from 1 to 21 November 1994 and reached an agreement that was concluded in Paris on 14 December. The Dayton Agreement was a peace agreement that preserved the entity of the Bosnian state within its international recognised frontiers, with a reunified Sarajevo as its capital and

comprising two entities: one Muslim-Croat (51 % of the territory), the other Serb (49 % of the territory). In order to ensure compliance with this agreement, President Clinton secured the Senate's backing to send 20 000 American soldiers to Bosnia. On 20 December 1995, UNPROFOR was replaced by IFOR (Implementation Force), a 63 000-strong multilateral force under the command of NATO, which included 20 000 US soldiers and was responsible for keeping peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The western Balkans would nevertheless continue to be a powder keg, but the presence of a multilateral Stabilisation Force (SFOR, which replaced IFOR) under US command, which was set up in November 1996 and renewed in July 1998, brought peace to Bosnia.

Yet other provinces of the former Yugoslavia descended into civil war. This was particularly the case for Kosovo, historically a Serb 'cradle' whose population consisted of 90 % Muslim Albanians who were in favour of independence or incorporation into Albania. Clashes in Kosovo between Albanian separatists and Serb forces increased in 1998. With mediation attempts proving unsuccessful, the European Union imposed sanctions and NATO launched a retaliation operation against Serbia in June 1998.