

Yugoslav crisis may be heading toward civil war

by Konstantin George

A catastrophic economic situation and a wave of ethnic conflicts that is fast going out of control are driving Yugoslavia toward the end of its existence as a federal state, one way or another. The prospect of one of three tragic endings is growing with each passing week:

1) A Serbian military coup d'état and Army-enforced central rule, ending the power of the non-Serbian republics.

2) A civil war between Serbia and the western republics of Croatia and Slovenia.

3) A breakdown into chaos and fragmentation along ethnic lines.

The Yugoslav crisis threatens to serve as the trigger for a general crisis in the Balkans, history's "powder keg of Europe," and could well lead to a full-blown international strategic crisis should Moscow or any of its satellites begin to "fish" in troubled Balkan waters.

A Serbian power plan

The drive toward a Serbian power play, under Serbian party leader Slobodan Milosevic, the would-be "strong man" who has the tacit support of most of the Army, began in August and went into full swing at the beginning of September. Serbia is demanding the revision of the Yugoslav Constitution to place under Serbian rule the province's two autonomous regions, Kosovo with an 85% Albanian majority, and the Vojvodina with a Serb majority and a large Hungarian minority. The constitutional revision would also strip Yugoslavia's other republics of much of their present autonomy. The Serbian plans, which would make Yugoslavia de facto a "Greater Serbia," are anathema to Slovenia and Croatia. In short, there is a pre-civil war mood inside the country.

The Serbian mobilization erupted Sept. 2-3 with mass demonstrations involving tens of thousands each in the town of Smederovo, 25 miles south of Belgrade, and in the town of Crvenka in the Vojvodina. Such mass demonstrations had been occurring throughout August, both in Serbia proper, the Vojvodina, and in one case, a rally of 30,000 in Titograd, the capital of the Republic of Montenegro. This round, however, was qualitatively different. Beyond the now regular demands for direct Serbian rule over Kosovo and the Vojvodina, and "guns for the Serbs and Montenegrins" in Kosovo for use against "Albanian terrorists," the Sept. 2-3 rallies marked the launching of the campaign to install Slobodan Milosevic in power nationwide as the "savior" of Serbia.

In Crvenka and Smederovo, the huge crowds chanted: "Now we know who is the second Tito. His proud name is Slobodan. As long as Slobodan walks the earth, the people will not be slaves to anyone. Slobodan, we are with you."

These manifestations are merely the overture. So far, the mass demonstrations have been confined to the territory of Serbia and Montenegro, or, in "friendly" territory, to use the current jargon.

The mass Serbian rallies will next be moving into "enemy" territory. On Saturday, Sept. 10, thousands of Serbs plan to rally in the town of Jajce in the Bosnian Republic. Bosnia, in central Yugoslavia, sandwiched between Serbia and Croatia, contains a Muslim majority (Slavs who converted to Islam during the five centuries of Ottoman occupation) and a large Serbian minority.

The Bosnian authorities have warned that they "will not tolerate" any Serbian protests, and major clashes could occur with unpredictable consequences. In that event, there could

be a dramatic explosion of the Yugoslav crisis almost overnight. Should that not occur, then an explosion is all but ensured by the fact that Serbian demonstrations are planned for September in the capital of every Yugoslav republic: the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo; the Croatian capital of Zagreb, and the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana. In addition, an enormous show-of-strength rally is planned for mid-September in Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia and of the Serbian Republic. Any one of these events could provide the trigger for the eruption of civil war.

The near civil war atmosphere is no longer just a matter for private conversation. The public taboo on the matter was broken on Sept. 4 by Draza Markovic, the moderate former President of Serbia. In an open letter to Yugoslavia's party leadership, Markovic denounced Serbia's current party leader, Milosevic, for orchestrating the crisis to make a bid for personal power in Yugoslavia. Markovic minced no words in warning what the implications are of the course adopted by Milosevic: "Where is all this leading to? Aren't we already at the brink of an abyss?" He concluded that as a result of Milosevic's policies, Yugoslavia is moving "either to a coup d'état or a civil war."

Yugoslav-Albanian confrontation brewing

The Yugoslav crisis is already assuming dangerous international dimensions, first by taking the form of a rapidly growing confrontation between Yugoslavia and Stalinist Albania. This side to the crisis began in late August, when the Albanian leadership broke a years-long silence on Kosovo to denounce the Yugoslav government and party leadership in strong, provocative language.

Albanian party leader Ramiz Alia issued what amounted to a political declaration of war on Yugoslavia Aug. 29 in a speech in the Albanian town of Peshkopi, near the border with Kosovo. Alia denounced the Yugoslav leadership as a gang of "Serbian chauvinists," pursuing a policy of "severe oppression" against "the Albanians" in Yugoslavia, whom Belgrade was making the scapegoat for "the economic and social problems" gripping the country. The speech, broadcast by Albanian Radio, was heard by Yugoslavia's 2 million Albanian inhabitants, living in Kosovo and the western part of Macedonia adjoining Albania. The result was all too predictable.

On Aug. 30, riots of Albanians occurred in western Macedonia for the first time. Thousands demonstrated in the western Macedonian town of Kumanovo, threw stones at police, and demanded the creation of a separate Albanian-language school system. Albanians make up almost one-third of Macedonia's population. Since mid-1987, informed sources have been telling *EIR* that Macedonia would erupt into a "second Kosovo." That has now come to pass. The Albanian riots in Macedonia went on for several days; new eruptions in the near future are all but certain, and it is only a matter of time before a counter-movement by outraged Ma-

cedonians takes shape, forming an eastern Yugoslav alliance with the Serbs and Montenegrins.

A crisis in Yugoslav Macedonia is more than an expansion of the Kosovo unrest. Albania has never abandoned its claims to both Kosovo and western Macedonia, to create a "Greater Albania" from the wreckage of Yugoslavia. Similarly, Soviet satellite Bulgaria has never abandoned its claims that Yugoslav Macedonia belongs to a "Greater Bulgaria."

Furthermore, in contrast to Albania's official isolationist policy, the one defense pact Albania has maintained is its 1948 mutual defense treaty with Bulgaria, a treaty directed against Yugoslavia. To date, the Bulgarian media have kept strict silence over the Serbian demonstrations and the Albanian riots in Macedonia. How long that official silence will persist is anybody's guess.

Serbia answers Albania

On Sept. 5, the leadership of the Serbian Republic returned Albania's political declaration of war. Serbian President Gen. Peter Gracanin, addressing a combined session of the Serbian party and government leadership, charged Albania with plotting to create a "Greater Albania," by using "Albanian nationalists" in Kosovo and western Macedonia to destabilize the situation. The outcome of the Albanian plot, he said, was to be an Albanian annexation of both regions.

Gracanin, with the full backing of the Serbian leadership, declared, "Terror reigns in Kosovo," and denounced "the continual mishandling and degradation" of the Serbian minority there. The Albanian terror "now threatens to turn into a large-scale settling of accounts" between Albanians and Serbs "and direct national [ethnic] conflicts."

Gracanin announced that the "special forces" of the Interior Ministry sent to Kosovo months ago will now be used against any Albanian disorders, and will "guarantee the security and property" of the Serbian and Montenegrin minorities.

Gracanin and the Serbian leadership also endorsed the demand of the mass Serbian protests for the creation of "armed auxiliary units" drawn from the Serbian and Montenegrin population of Kosovo to "maintain order." These "auxiliary units" will now be created, he announced.

A very hot autumn for Yugoslavia is ensured. Beyond the near civil war ethnic conflicts, a new strike wave began in early September, provoked by the collapse of living standards under the burden of Yugoslavia's enormous foreign debt. The economic situation, with a 200% inflation rate alongside an officially enforced wage freeze, is unbearable. The shortages of food and consumer goods are the worst since the early postwar years, and with the massive fuel shortages, this winter will be the most bitter in decades.

Most of Europe's population still lives in ignorance of the fact that a Balkan crisis of tragic dimensions not only exists, but is fast moving out of control. Events will soon lift, abruptly, that veil of ignorance.