
Interview: Stipe Mesic

'The Serbian model must not be allowed to succeed'

Stipe Mesic is president of the Croatian parliament. Together with Josip Manolic, president of Croatia's lower house of parliament, he launched a new party, the HND (Croatian Independent Democrats), on April 20 in the Croatian capital of Zagreb. The party includes 17 parliamentarians of the ruling HDZ party (Croatian Democratic Union). Both Mesic and Manolic were founding members of the HDZ in 1989, and have been critics of the current government of President Franjo Tudjman for its policy toward Bosnia. Mr. Mesic was the last president of the presidency of the Yugoslav state. Elke Fimmen and Helmut Böttiger interviewed him in Zagreb on April 18.

EIR: You have been actively present on the political scene of the sovereign nation of Croatia from its start. Could you recapitulate the main factors leading to the declaration of Croatian independence?

Mesic: I have been in politics for a very long time. I ran for Croatian parliament for the first time in 1964. I was the only person elected into the Croatian parliament as an independent candidate; everyone else at the time belonged to the Communist Party. So, even at that time I was an independent. In 1971, I became a member of the so-called Croatian Spring. For that reason I had to suffer certain consequences, of course. But I got included into political life in 1989 again with the establishment of the Croatian Democratic Union. During the formation of the party, I was its secretary general. In other words, I got to know quite a lot about relations in former Yugoslavia. I believe it may be true—and that is also what I believed at the time—that Yugoslavia cannot be kept together, and this has proven to be correct. Yugoslavia used to have three integrating factors: Tito, with his charisma; the Communist Party, which was generally the Yugoslav party; and the Yugoslav army. Tito passed away, the Communist Party was destroyed by the Serbian party, by Slobodan Milosevic, and the army came down on the side of Serbia and stopped being a Yugoslav army. When that became completely obvious, we realized that we could only be kept to-

gether as a nation, as a people, if we were there to protect our own interests.

In order for us to protect our interests, we have to individualize ourselves. We thought it would be feasible through a confederation model. We offered that concept, but Serbia did not respond; to this very day, it has given no reply to the idea.

It actually did give a reply, and it was the war option. By the war, it wanted to convince the world that it was fighting for Yugoslavia; but facts may corroborate that in the war against Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia was drawing the lines of new borders, of a Greater Serbia. What is going on right now, is that Serbia has finally realized that it will not be able to keep hold of parts of Croatia; but it believes it is still possible to retain those parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina that are covered by its army.

With the turmoil of the disappearance of Yugoslavia—and at that time I was the president of the presidency of Yugoslavia—I believed that the war could be avoided, provided that international forces were deployed between the war-mongering, rebellious Serbia and the rest of the republics. The international community, had they done that, would have manifested their determination, showing that there would be no changes of borders. Also there would have been no logistical support coming for the Serbian army from Serbia. The Serbian army had been preparing itself for the war. And next, it started engaging in it, conducting it in parts of Croatia, and in all of the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Both England and France were opposed to this idea, and as you can see, I have failed in this respect. Now I think the same solution is called for, namely, the deployment of forces along the borders.

EIR: Concerning Croatia, it seems we are back to 1991, when Cyrus Vance and Lord Carrington were asking Croatia to give territory to Serbia and establish so-called green zones as demarcation lines like in Cyprus. That leads to the question: What are your current perspectives for Croatia, given the negotiations

with the Serbians and the U.N.-prolonged and -increased mandate, which practically makes it impossible to get back the 30% of the territory which belongs to Croatia?

Mesic: The problem lies in what you have just stated. Serbia wanted to seize somebody else's territory, of course—parts of the territory of Croatia and most of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian territory as well. This is what I was telling both Vance and Carrington. I even went to address the United Nations on that account. I talked to [then-U.N. Secretary General Javier] Pérez de Cuellar about the same issue. All of them believed that the war could be averted if Croatia, for the sake of peace, really decided to make concessions on part of its territory. I asked Pérez de Cuellar what territory he had in mind. He said, "The territory that is closer to the border, and also where there is a majority Serbian population." So I said, "Well, on that territory that you are now talking about, we have a majority Croatian population." Ilok, which is right on the border, had a 95% Croatian population. The Serbs were 500 kilometers away from that area in Knin, and for that reason, I told him, war was going to break out. Because Milosevic would carry out genocide, he would engage in "ethnic cleansing" in order to join one enclave together with the Serbs.

They failed to understand that point. They may not have even wanted to see such a Serbian action effected; but they failed to understand. So Serbia did launch the war adventure. In a way, [Vance and Carrington] gave their agreement to it. Excluding Pérez de Cuellar, those two gentlemen, Vance and Carrington, and later on Lord Owen, concentrated their efforts on drawing maps. They thought that by drawing new maps, they could stop the aggression. Of course, that is impossible, because in such a way, the aggression would have been rewarded. Croatia cannot accept the annexation of parts of her territory to Serbia, because she would be left too incapacitated. It would be impossible to organize transport, traffic, the economy. So, if a Greater Serbia were to be established, that would mean drowning Croatia, or, to be literal now, making Croatia suffocate.

EIR: To draw the line a little bit further and return to the outside forces which were encouraging Serbia: In 1989, Admiral Mamula went to London to discuss the situation there, including with [wartime British intelligence operative] Fitzroy Maclean. Shortly after that, very strong attacks in the Serbian and the British press against the reunification of Germany appeared. What do you think about the analysis of the American politician Lyndon LaRouche, that this war in the Balkans was launched to destroy a potential European competitor, both economically and politically?

Mesic: By defeating the socialist bloc, there was no longer left behind here a force between two opposing blocs. It was former Yugoslavia that played such a role. Through it, messages were sent from the East to the West, and the other way

around. That part of history is past. Milosevic, in a self-assured way, embarked on the project of destroying Yugoslavia. No doubt he must have been well accepted by certain circles, because had he not been so, he would not have shown so much determination, haughtiness, and self-confidence in pursuing his policies.

Let us now go back into history just a couple of years. In the years 1988-89, Milosevic organized mass meetings in Belgrade of people who said they would be going to Slovenia and that sort of thing. He wanted to obtain support for what he had been doing in Kosova, and it became pretty obvious what he was after. But it was also obvious that he must have had support. If you observe the kind of slogans he projected, he said: "Serbia should remain whole," and "It cannot consist of three parts." So he abolished the autonomy of Kosova, as well as that of Vojvodina, and he practically annexed Montenegro to Serbia. At that time, he was saying that Serbia could go by itself. He said that it was just being harmed by Yugoslavia. As soon as he had done that—and the year was already 1989—never again did he continue to say that Serbia could go it alone. After that, he started saying that "Serbia wants Yugoslavia" and "Serbia has been fighting for Yugoslavia." That's the trick that he used against certain naive people in Europe. Some were not all that naive; so they actually acted as if they had not known what was really going on. Obviously, he wanted to exert influence on as much territory as possible from one center. So if there was going to be no more Yugoslavia, Serbia should become as big as possible.

Now, we have touched on European relations. [The] Maastricht [Treaty] has provided solutions for the future. After all, what is projected from Maastricht, is a kind of futurism, but one in which many European peoples have found their place, and they believe it is a way out; namely, that borders should be linking European nations, rather than pulling them apart. In other words, rules of operations should be the same for all of Europe, meaning that the economy should have equal possibilities in all European states. In such a way, Europe would be united.

Therefore, this war is an absurd war. Actually, it means undermining Maastricht and undermining a united Europe, because it brings Europe back into a division of spheres of influence, in the area concerned as well as the rest of Europe. Stopping a unifying trend for Europe, is throwing Europe back half a century, and Milosevic looks like a player in this context, breaking down European integration processes. He is the player for those who aim at seeing such processes breaking down. On the one hand, the ambition of establishing a Greater Serbia comes to life—the ambitions that were not accomplished by Serbian generals in 1914. And by the same token it is kind of a slap in the face for those who would not want to see a powerful Germany within a united Europe. It is simply forgotten that at present Germany is probably a

country with the most highly developed democracy, and one should not have fears of such a Germany. One should pull forces with it into such a united Europe.

EIR: You mentioned that history is being put back 50 or even 100 years by what Serbia is doing. The same can apply to the old game of geopolitics by the British, especially.

Mesic: Absolutely. Look at this kind of logic. The most naive politician in the world or in Europe sees clearly that Serbia has taken over what used to be the Yugoslav army. Serbia has appropriated all the reserves, all the arms and weapons, all the arms manufacturing plants, and is conducting a war of aggression with all this—whereas the international community has decided that the victims should be prohibited from buying weapons for themselves. In other words, whoever has made such a decision, absolutely wanted a victory of Serbian arms and weapons. That is pure mathematics. So, if Owen is to say now, “If we were to allow the Croats and the Muslims to acquire weapons, that would make the war escalate still further,” that is amazing. If somebody else made such a statement, he would be called a lunatic who should have nothing to do with politics. In other words, [Owen et al. argue that] only those without arms and weapons should be losing their lives. So you have besieged cities; they are being destroyed, and so on and so forth. . . .

EIR: After the recent agreements between the Croats and the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, how do you view the further perspective for Bosnia, especially given the dramatic escalation around Gorazde and the return of Lord Owen? Do you see the sanctioning of the division of Bosnia into two parts?

Mesic: Probably yes. If Serbia were allowed to take Gorazde, it would mean that the card is being played in order for the Serbs to acquire those parts that are more adjacent to the border. However, I believe it is a faulty calculation from the outset, because in such a way, the aggression would be rewarded. The world mechanisms are completely wrong in this connection—the United Nations and Europe. I have the feeling that those politicians have been suffering from amnesia. They have simply forgotten what happened during the Second World War. The aggressor, the one who takes up the arms, should not be rewarded. No concessions will satisfy him. The French have a saying: “By eating, you develop your appetite.” The same with an aggressor. If the partitioning of Bosnia were to be successful, following the Serbian model of “all Serbs should live in one state,” then one should ask a question, “Why should just the Serbs be privileged in such a manner?” There are 500,000 Serbs in Croatia and 1,300,000 in Bosnia, which adds up to 1,800,000. There are 2 million Hungarians in Romania, 500,000 in Slovakia near the border, 500,000 in Vojvodina, 100,000 in Croatia, and approximately 100,000 in Austria. Why shouldn’t all the Hungarians be living in one state? [Russian populist leader Vladimir]

Zhirinovsky may apply the same formula, saying, “Well, all Russians should be living within one state.” A Pandora’s box gets opened; namely, their model is to create new realities, and then they would have negotiations. In no time, if this were realized, another aggressor would appear. Then Europe would not have 2 million refugees and displaced persons; it would have between 50 and 60 million. Three states in the former Soviet Union even have the nuclear bomb.

In other words, what I am saying is that Bosnia-Herzegovina has to remain intact. The Croats and the Muslims have signed an agreement, but many Croats from so-called Herceg-Bosna still think they can block the agreement. They think they can play tricks in connection with it and that they can annex those parts to Croatia. Some Muslims have even started thinking of establishing a state of their own, however small, and the Serbs are counting on annexing most of it to Serbia.

To stop this all, the international community should deploy forces along the borders. The problem cannot be resolved in Sarajevo, in Gorazde or in Jaize, or in Bihac. It gets resolved on the border. If it were resolved in such a way, nobody would be shooting at U.N. soldiers. These are fairy tales, that the Serbs would start attacking U.N. soldiers. If their forces were enforced along communication lines, it would really mean something. Bridges, railway lines, roads—they should monitor air space as well. In such a way, there would no longer be logistical support, and all parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina would get seated around the conference table. There they would then try to solve as many of their problems as possible. They would realize that there is no more war.

However, if things continue the way they are going now, the war will escalate and it will be a never-ending affair. I have fears about Lord Owen in particular, because he is clearly for the pro-Serbian option. He does not keep it secret. I have never seen concern on his face for Croatian or Muslim casualties. Either he is a fantastic actor, or something else.

EIR: “A psychiatrist.”

Mesic: He has a colleague on the other side.

EIR: What is the role of the United Nations in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina?

Mesic: Whenever you have the U.N. devising the right sort of answers, results have been okay. An aggressor who takes up arms and resorts to force, does not believe in any other solution but force. Had he believed in something else, he would have used some other ways and means. If he just believes in force, it is by force that you have to respond. This is convincing enough for the aggressor. You have to shoot down his aircraft, destroy his command posts—but not just any command posts, pertaining to small military units; in order to be efficient, you have to destroy his central headquarters, from which commands are issued to the entire army. Then things would be brought to an end very quickly.

EIR: That would have to be done by NATO.

Mesic: Absolutely. A strike against the command post would destroy the nervous system of the aggressor, and then there would be no more warfare.

EIR: There is a lot of pressure on Croatia by the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations basically to accept Serbian-U.N. control of the occupied territories. There is obviously also blackmail concerning financial aid to Croatia. That means it is a boxed-in situation for the Croatian government. What is your perspective, since there is also a lot of unrest in the country?

Mesic: The problem obviously lies in the fact that people aren't looking into the causes at all, but instead are trying to justify the Serbian aggression. Supposedly, the Serbian minority has to win protection. The Serbian army actually got those rebels armed with all possible arms and weapons, even including missiles, heavy artillery, and what not, and Serbia keeps on arming them; they have even been given military units. In the areas concerned, where there are talks concerning Serbian Krajina, you have only a one-third Serbian population. In other words, the Serbian problem cannot be resolved in such a way. Rather, the borders of a Greater Serbia are being drawn.

As far as Croatia is concerned, we accept any international supervision and monitoring provided to protect any national minority in Croatia. How come there is no other national minority rising in revolt? I can even state that all the rest of the national minorities are in jeopardy, with the danger coming from the Serbian national minority. This means the international community has failed to realize the causes of the conflict. The aggression has to be stopped. The current negotiations can last for quite a long time, as long as Serbia has possibilities to give logistical support to its army in Croatia and Bosnia. As long as it is still doing that, the war is going to continue. Now their effect is to accelerate the war being brought to an end. But how? By the Serbs coming out victorious.

Milosevic can see that Serbia is in an economic collapse. He can endure warfare for, say, four or five months, but then Serbia will find itself in the same economic situation it faced in 1945. Therefore, they will probably try to accomplish their goals within a short time-span. If they solve the problem in Bosnia, then Croatia can in no way resolve the problem of Krajina, because it will get annexed to Serbia.

When Milosevic launched the aggression, he followed the model of Cyprus. He applied brutal force to drive out all the non-Serbian populations from the area, and he believed that we would be so naive that we would drive Serbs out of Croatia. So he would obtain a line, where on the one side there would be Serbs, and on the other side everybody else. A Greater Serbia would thus be established. However, this is not what we did. We did not drive the Serbs out, and we are now morally entitled to see our Croats getting back to

their homes.

Individuals can play tricks in politics, but the United Nations ought not do so. So, since you cannot change borders, if you have prohibited the victim from defending himself, then you have to protect the victim. This is the entire logic, or else the United Nations is no longer needed; or we have to say that the United Nations has supported the aggression. . . . In other words, whoever has force at his disposal can succeed, with a little bit of sacrifice and a bit of patience. It doesn't sound optimistic, does it?

EIR: It sounds realistic.

Mesic: In the final analysis, Serbia cannot come out victorious as far as this war is concerned. Even if it were to solve the problem in Bosnia in a way, and retained those areas there, and even if by force it managed to retain parts of Croatia, its main generator of crises will still be intact, namely Kosova. If all the Serbs should be living in one state, then all the Albanians should be in Albania. That is the logic of space. Some 92% of the population of Kosova are Albanians. Those who are playing the Serbian card will be faced with a new problem, a bloody war, and the problem will become internationalized next. It will include Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, parts of Greece and Bulgaria. Macedonia by all means. So there will be another war going on there, even fiercer than the current one. In the end, Serbia will go down in flames, and it will be smaller than ever before. The best solution [for Serbia] is to draw back and choose to stay within its borders. But then the regime would be toppled, which no one should feel too sorry about.

EIR: Can you comment on the Russian involvement in the Balkans? The West should be rather afraid of Russian bases on the coast.

Mesic: One hundred and twenty years ago, there was a Croatian politician named Ante Starcevic, who said that the Croatian people should take care, as far as their political orientation was concerned, that they should always keep in mind that Russia, whatever regime was in power, would like to reach the Mediterranean. Especially when certain crazy politicians such as Zhirinovskiy use the Russian nationalism card—if they are to say, "All the Russians should be living in one state." There are 15 million Russians in Ukraine, Belarus as well, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan; those areas have large Russian populations. So if they are to use such a card in order to create the empire of Greater Russia, then they will want to obtain a way out to the Mediterranean.

Serbia, too, would find itself within such a sphere of influence. Russia would then, of course, like to see that Serbian space as big as possible. Again, it is in conflict with the idea of a united Europe. No longer is it just one of our problems; it turns out to be a worldwide problem, a European problem. Any way you look at it, the Serbian model should not succeed.