

# *Recognition by all twelve European Community countries of Croatia and Slovenia,*

following a period of fragile UN-backed ceasefire, marks the end of the Yugoslav federal state, though not of Serbia's aspirations or, necessarily, the fighting. Events in Yugoslavia over the last few years had been watched by the outside world with growing dismay, bewilderment and exasperation. From Slovenia up in the North West to Kosovo in the South East, where Albanians still clamour for autonomy, Yugoslavia has shaken itself to pieces. Serbia and Croatia were effectively at war from the summer of 1991, despite innumerable cease-fires. After EC peace missions repeatedly failed, the United Nations

put its authority behind a settlement aimed at preventing the Serbian-led Yugoslav federal army from devastating Croatia.

Serb and Croat politicians alike have played on the crudest emotions of jingoism, ancestral grudge and religious bigotry. Under the leadership of the Serbian Communist Party, a million people gathered in 1989 to honour the dead of the Battle of Kosovo, six hundred years earlier, as the mortal remains of Duke Lazar, one of the fallen heroes, were brought to the church of Gracanica, next to the battlefield. The following year in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, the cathedral bells pealed as a crowd brought back to the main square the equestrian statue of Governor Jelacic, a Croatian general loyal to Austria, who had helped to crush the Hungarian revolution of 1848. Strangest of all, because its significance remains unknown to the outside world, is the claim of a Marian apparition at Medjugorje in Herzegovina. Few foreigners among the twenty million pilgrims said to have visited Medjugorje during the last ten years have any idea of the region's dire and atrocious reputation in modern Yugoslav history.

Outside observers like the Americans, the British, friends or foes in the European Community, and the right or left in politics, all tend to misunderstand Yugoslavia for different reasons, having to do with their own beliefs or preoccupations. The United States, whose former President Woodrow Wilson could be seen as the founder of Yugoslavia, regards the present mess with particular disappointment. The Fourteen Points, which Wilson put to the peace-makers at Versailles after World War 1, were intended to turn the old central Europe of empires into nation states, with parliamentary constitutions based on the principles of the French and American revolution that reason must conquer over the loyalties of race, class, clan, religion and history. Modern Americans know that such differences do not easily boil away in the melting pot; yet they still grow impatient when faced with the squabbles of Europe. Impatience, together with bafflement and a poor grasp of history, appear in this *Washington Post* editorial (18 May 1991):

"The inability of the Serbs, Slovenes, Croats and others to accommodate their ethnic differences constitutes a failure of Yugoslavia - of the 70 year old idea of making a single nation out of the South Slav tribes liberated in the World War I break-up of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires."

There are no ethnic differences between the Serbs, Slovenes and Croats. The Serbs had liberated themselves from the Ottoman Empire long before World War I, while many Slovenes and Croats regretted the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and now would like to see it restored.

The English, Scots, Welsh and Irish, who have been fighting each other for more than a thousand years, feel much affinity with the Yugoslavs; for instance, Irish Catholics and Croats tend to see eye to eye. The British were closely involved with Yugoslavia during World War 2 when they gave assistance first to the Serb Chetnik guerrillas and then to Tito's Communist Partisans. The left admired Tito for his heroic struggle against the Germans. The right continue to say that Winston Churchill betrayed the Chetniks and put the Communists in power. In one issue of the *Sunday Telegraph* (12 May 1991) two different writers, John Zametica and Christopher Booker, denounced Churchill in separate articles, the first for 'facilitating Tito's rise to power', the second for 'ensuring that one of the warring factions came out on top.'

In fact, Britain had little influence on the frightful events of 1941-45 in the Independent State of Croatia, where Germany had installed the Ustasha terrorist leader, Ante Pavelic. The massacre by the Ustasha of at least 30,000 unarmed Serb men, women and children shocked even the German SS who also, correctly, blamed it for the success of the Partisans. It was the Ustasha, not the British, who guaranteed that Tito came to power as the only man who could end the fratricide.

Yugoslavia has also become involved in the argument over the future of Europe. The collapse of Communism, the re-unification of Germany, and the rapid erosion of sovereignty in the member states of the European Community, have called into question the national boundaries laid down by the

Versailles Treaty after World War 1, and the Yalta and Potsdam agreements during World War 2.

It has taken a bloody civil war and much pushing from Germany for the EC to come to terms with the idea of a disintegrating Yugoslavia, which also poses another embarrassing question: If one country of 24 million people, cannot survive as a federation, what hope can there be for a federal community?

The pro-European London *Times* struggled to answer this in a leading article 'No to Balkanisation' (8 May 1991):

"Yugoslavs used to describe their country as a poor Switzerland. That was an aspiration rather than an accurate description, though the model is not inapposite. The country is miles from discovering the formula for living peacefully with a degree of linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity which makes Switzerland look positively homogeneous."

That is just poppycock. The South Slavs, or Yugoslavs as they call themselves in Serbo-Croat, and the two closely related languages of Slovenian and Macedonian, are ethnically homogeneous. The national minorities such as Albanians, Hungarians and Italians, speak Serbo-Croat as a *lingua franca*. The Yugoslavs are much more homogeneous than the inhabitants of the British Isles, including those who read the *Times*.

Anti-Europeans welcome the break-up of Yugoslavia, which they regard as an artificial state like the European Community. The most influential of these is Norman Stone, Professor of Modern History at Oxford, a witty newspaper writer and polemicist. He is perhaps the world's leading historian of central and eastern Europe. Professor Stone therefore carried some weight when he called for the recognition of independent Croatia many months before the reality (London *Sunday Times* 12 May 1991):

"Zagreb, Croatia's capital [is] a splendid city, a little Vienna. If you are a Croat, brought up in European fashion, you do not greatly like modern Yugoslavia. Your chances of a job in the state machine are not very good. The language may be more or less the same, but the mentality of Serbs, the

dominant people, and Croats is very, very different."

Professor Stone insists that the Croats and Slovenes should join the European Community in association with Austria.

In advocating the breakup of Yugoslavia Professor Stone was not expressing nostalgia for the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Others pine for it. Romantics and reactionaries, especially if they are Roman Catholics, have never been reconciled to the 'Versailles' states, whose very names were objects of ridicule in the 1920s. GK Chesterton often lamented that there was no more Bohemia, only Czechoslovakia, while Evelyn Waugh in his trilogy *Sword of Honour*, would not call that state by its modern title. In the third of these novels, *Unconditional Surrender*, Waugh drew on his own experience as an officer with the British Military Mission in Yugoslavia. Needless to say, he detested the Communists and their leader, whom he described as a female impersonator, till Tito asked Waugh to his face why he thought him to be a woman.

Since Waugh did not approve of Versailles states, he would not support them even against the Soviet Union. At the time of Tito's visit to Britain in 1953, Waugh wrote to his friend Nancy Mitford:

"I am becoming a Russian imperialist, a reaction to the politicians. What is wrong is not Russia but Communism. Our policy is to bribe all the small states to remain communist but quarrel with Russia. If they are going to be communist it's much better Russia should rule them. Great Empires never seek war; all their energies are taken up in administration. Our trouble now comes from Clemenceau destroying the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The one certain way to start a Third War is to establish half a dozen atheist police states, full of fatuous nationalism and power hunger."

A modern British Roman Catholic writer on Central Europe, Richard Bassett, is unashamedly Habsburg in his sympathies, making a hero of Governor Jelacic. He even gives him the Austrian spelling.

"For nearly a hundred years, Jelacic Square has been at the heart of Zagreb, epitomising in its name the aspirations,

loyalty and courage of the Croat nation, then ruled by the Hungarians. At the centre of the square stood the bronze equestrian statue of Croatia's greatest governor and Ban: Baron Josef Jellacic von Buzim (1801-59)...

"A portrait of the Ban, resplendent in the Imperial white, the Grand Cross of the Order of Maria Theresa proudly displayed on his chest, shows an intelligent and not insensitive face. A gifted poet... a love of languages... soldierly courage and statesman-like oratory..."

Soon after this book was published, the Jelacic statue came back to the square from which the Communists had removed it in 1947. The bells of the cathedral tolled; choirs in traditional costume sang hymns in praise of Jelacic to music by Johann Strauss; horsemen and horsewomen in the uniform of hussars pranced jauntily through the crowd, which refreshed itself with new white wine from barrels in the square.

The return of the Jelacic statue may have delighted those like Richard Bassett who hanker after the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It would have flabbergasted and horrified the international left, which had once believed in Yugoslav National Communism. As recently as 1985, a British publisher brought out *The Rough Guide to Yugoslavia* as part of a highly-successful series aimed at young people holding then-fashionable left or progressive views on politics and society. The guide said of Zagreb:

"Once a hotbed of Croat nationalism and capital of the wartime puppet state of Pavelic, it's now widely regarded as the cultural and artistic heart of Yugoslavia, *and although all Serb-Croat differences have long since been resolved*, there's a Croat disdain of Belgrade that still persists."

The words in italics were taken out in later editions but serve to remind us how persistent was the illusion of Yugoslav National Communism.

It was Tito himself who conceived the idea when he told the British during the war that he was a Yugoslav patriot first, and a Communist only second. Churchill did not believe him, but many did, especially when Tito quarrelled with Stalin in 1948. After Stalin's death in 1953, and Krushchev's

denunciation of Stalinism, the international left warmed to the theory of Titoism. Fidel Castro, the Sandinistas and Nicolae Ceaucescu were all in their time admired as National Communists.

By the 1960s, western writers had started to make an analogy between Yugoslavia and Communist Vietnam, between Tito and Ho Chi Minh. As Tito had told the British that he was fighting to free his country from Nazism, so Ho Chi Minh had told the Americans that he was fighting French colonialism. Like Tito he played down Marxist dogma, and when he addressed a crowd in Hanoi was careful to quote the American Declaration of Independence. The historian, Barbara Tuchman, in *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam* published in 1984, revived the idea that the US State Department in 1945-46 could have turned Ho Chi Minh into a Tito for Indochina:

"In Indochina, choice of the alternative would have required imagination, which is never a long suit with governments, and willingness to take the risk of supporting a Communist when Communism was still seen as a solid bloc. Tito was then its only splinter, and the possibility of another deviation was not envisaged."

In fairness to the State Department, it has to be pointed out that in 1945-46 Tito had not emerged as a 'splinter' and was still a devoted Stalinist, as Ho was to be till the end of his life. Indeed Stalin's portrait with peaked cap, big moustache and tunic fastened at the neck, was still on show in Hanoi in 1982. But the persistent analogy between Tito and Ho proves the potency of the belief in Yugoslav National Communism.

It was all along an illusion. There had never been any such thing as Yugoslav nationalism, any more than a Yugoslav nation. Yugoslavia was an artificial state created, like Czechoslovakia, after World War 1, from the wreck of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Although the Serbs and Croats who formed the great majority in this state were alike in blood and language, they had been divided for more than a thousand years by religion, culture and sense of nationhood. The Serbs, the Montenegrins and the Macedonians had evolved under



Byzantium and then for five centuries under Turkish rule; the Croats and the Slovenes under the Roman Church and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Enmity between Serb and Croat came near to destroying Yugoslavia even before the Axis invasion of 1941 and the setting up of the Independent State of Croatia. The Communists, who had opposed the very idea of Yugoslavia, stood above this quarrel of Serb and Croat and came to power by offering ideology as a substitute for nationalistic rage. They united the Serbs and Croats in common loathing or love of the Party.

Aleksa Djilas, whose father the statesman Milovan Djilas wrote the classic account of the communist years, has set out to explain the complex but not incomprehensible problem of Yugoslav nationality in *The Contested Country, Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution 1919-1953* (Harvard University Press). It is a bold, clear-headed and very original book that upsets most received ideas about Yugoslavia. Djilas assumes in his readers a basic knowledge of modern Yugoslav history and the rise to power of the Communists; what has been lacking was not knowledge but comprehension.

Although, as an academic thesis, *The Contested Country* is not a book for the general reader, it should and must be read by all those politicians, journalists and historians who offer their views on Yugoslavia. Although the text of his book is analytical in its style and sparing of detail, Djilas has added voluminous footnotes and an invaluable bibliography. He has given a framework and the materials for the much-needed popular history of his country.

In a note to the opening paragraph of *The Contested Country* Djilas explains what he means by Yugoslav nations:

"American media use the term 'nation' to describe the people in the territory of one state, under one government. In this book the term 'nation' means a community of people with territory, culture and identity based on historical memories. This is also how Serbs, Croats, and so on see themselves... they never describe themselves as ethnic groups."



Incidentally the British media also confuse the nations of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland with their respective states, the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. However in sporting events like the football World Cup, the British Isles field no less than five national teams, the Scots-Irish of Northern Ireland also claiming a separate identity.

The ancestors of the Serbs and Croats, who started to come to this region during the sixth century AD, did not for a long time think of themselves as a separate people. According to Djilas:

"Non-Slav observers did not distinguish between Croats and Serbs until the ninth century. These two names became established when the first forms of political organisation appeared. The Croatian and Serbian tribes, though identical in ethnic and linguistic origin, developed distinct political organisms. The formation of separate polities was, from the beginning, an important differentiating force between Serbs and Croats. But in later centuries and even today foreign visitors and observers have frequently been confused by the absence of observable differences between Croats and Serbs..."

A foreigner learning the principal South Slav language hears little difference between what is spoken in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Serbs use the Cyrillic script while the Croats adapt the Latin script so that *c* is pronounced 'ts', *c* is 'ch' and *c* is 'tch'. While Serb has retained a few Turkish words, the Croats have slavized German and other foreign imports, so that the month *Oktobar* in Serb is *listopad*, literally 'leaf-fall', in Croat. Bread is *hleb* in Serb and *kruha* in Croat. In the blasphemous and obscene oaths that punctuate conversation in Yugoslavia, the word for vagina is *picka* in Serb and *pizda* in Croat.

The Serbs and Croats continue to speak the same language in spite of more than a thousand years of cultural and political separation. The Croatian state was a kingdom from 924 till 1102, when its noblemen pledged their allegiance to Hungary, keeping their own feudal parliament, the Sabor, and their Ban, or Governor. The first Serbian state had become by

the fourteenth century an enormous empire stretching from the Danube to include most of what is now Greece. From the time of their first conversion, thirteen centuries ago, the Croats and Serbs came under the separate influences of the Latin and Greek churches and civilisations, which formally split apart in the schism of 1054. The religious and cultural division takes physical shape in the great Gothic cathedral of Zagreb, still intact after the earthquake, Tartar attack and Allied bombing during World War 2, and, far to the south, the tiny Serbian monastery at Gracanica.

This was built in the fourteenth century by St Milutin the King, who is shown with his Queen Simonida in the stupendous frescoes, the elongated and graceful figures seeming to float in space, like some of the works of El Greco, another genius from the Byzantine school. The same South Slav people settled in Bosnia-Herzegovina, between the mediaeval states of Croatia and Serbia. At times independent, at times under the rule of Hungary, Bosnia-Herzegovina was proselytised by both the Greek and Roman churches. Many centuries later, those who were Orthodox came to be called Serbs and the Catholics, Croats. Mediaeval Bosnia-Herzegovina was also a stronghold of the Bogomils, a sect that followed the Manichean belief in the dual power of good and evil, of God and the Devil. The Franciscans were prominent in the work of trying to crush this heresy by fire and the sword as fifty years ago they were prominent in far greater atrocities, and now are prominent in the extraordinary scenes at Medjugorje. After the Turkish occupation, the Bogomils all converted to Islam, but some historians think that their influence lives on even in the modern Yugoslav passion for violent, extreme creeds and hatreds. The British author Stephen Clissold even claimed that Milovan Djilas was influenced by the Bogomils:

"The crimes and follies of mankind suggested that here below it was the Devil rather than God who has the upper hand...

Djilas felt the appeal of this Manichean concept which seemed to explain so many things, both historically and philosophically. It accounted for the legacy of rival fanaticisms disputing possession of that troubled borderland, the militancy

of the normally meek Franciscans striving there as missionaries, the activity with which the heretics embraced Islam rather than submit."

Clissold points out that when Milovan Djilas was re-imprisoned by Tito in 1962, he made the first Serbo-Croat translation of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a work often accused of exalting Satan.

The course of history in central and south-east Europe was changed on St Vitus' Day, 28 June, 1389, when the Serbs and Turks met at Kosovo Field in the biggest battle yet fought between Christian and Muslim armies. The Serbs went down to defeat, and the Turks continued their march to the very gates of Vienna. During the next five centuries under Turkish rule, the Serbs never forgot the Battle of Kosovo. Bards sang of it to the tune of a one-string fiddle; painters and sculptors depicted the deeds of valour and treachery; churchgoers prayed for the souls of the fallen. Six centuries later, the Serbs are enraged and mortified by the realisation that ninety per cent of the people in Kosovo now are Muslim Albanians, themselves demanding autonomy. However this modern problem of Kosovo does not bear on the far more serious matter of Serb-Croat relations, which is the theme of Aleksa Djilas' book.

By the early sixteenth century, the Turks had over-run most of the Kingdom of Hungary including the South Slav lands of Bosnia-Herzegovina and eastern Croatia. The Croat nobility turned for help to the Austrian Emperor Ferdinand, who, in 1552, established what came to be known as the Military Frontier, in German *Militargrenze* and in Serbo-Croat *Vojna Krajina*. This was a broad buffer zone or *cordon sanitaire* extending along the borders of Turkish occupied lands from the Adriatic Coast to the Danube. The Military Frontier, which grew to be almost as big and populous as civilian Croatia, comprised a network of fortified villages, block-houses, watch towers and entanglements, run from the specially built town of Karlstadt, now Karlovac.

Although the military Frontier was ruled and officered by the Austrian Empire, it depended upon an army of soldier settlers, known as the *Grenzer* or frontiersmen, almost all of

whom were Orthodox refugees from Turkish-occupied Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In return for perpetual military service, the settlers were granted allotments of land, the right to choose their captains and freedom to practise their own religion. Although these frontiersmen were known at first as Uskoks, escapers, or sometimes as Vlachs, they later came to be seen as Serbs, that is South Slavs of the Greek Orthodox faith.

The Military Frontier, or *Krajina* as it has come to be called, is the key to an understanding of Yugoslavia's problems during the twentieth century, especially the dire events in the Ustasha's Independent State of Croatia. It explains why the descendants of those frontiersmen, the Serbs in modern Croatia, called for an Autonomous Region of Krajina.

The historian Gunther Rothenberg has compared the Military Frontier to the Russian Cossack force, created in 1524, to keep off the Turks and their Tatar allies. The *Grenzer* of southern Croatia lived in terror of sudden death, as we learn from a seventeenth century chronicler:

"Whenever a man was working in the fields, he always carried his arms with him and kept a saddle horse beside his plough. When the Turks approached he immediately mounted to give combat, or if their number was too large, to ride and give alarm."

As long as the Turkish army threatened, civilian Croatia accepted the Military Frontier, but when the danger receded, complaints arose. Croat national pride would not accept that the Military Frontier lay outside the control of its Sabar and Ban. The Croat nobility resented the fact that the *Grenzer* were free peasants without feudal obligation. The Roman Catholic Church disapproved of the toleration shown to 'schismatics'. Distrust of the *Grenzer* increased in the nineteenth century when it was thought that they sympathised with their fellow Serbs under Turkish rule.

As the Turks retreated, so the Military Frontier extended south and east, increasing in power and population. Austria came to regard the *Grenzer* as crack troops to employ against Prussia and France, and then increasingly against

liberal-national movements. In the nineteenth century, the *Grenzer* acquired the same reactionary and repressive name as the Russian Cossacks, although they were not employed in pogroms against the Jews.

In the revolutionary year of 1848, the *Grenzer* were used to suppress liberal and national risings in Italy, Hungary and in Austria itself. The Commander of the Military Frontier, Colonel Jelacic, was also elected Ban or Governor of civilian Croatia, and in that dual capacity he invaded Hungary. Although the invasion failed, for Jelacic was a second-rate general, his *Grenzers* went on to take Vienna and squash the rebellion, for which he received the statue now at Zagreb. Although the *Grenzer* troops were known throughout Europe as 'the Croatsians', they were in fact, almost all Orthodox Serbs, under Austrian, Italian or German officers. One of the few weak points in Aleksa Djilas' book is the scant attention paid to 1848 and to Governor Jelacic, who makes an appearance only in a footnote.

After 1848, the Austrian Emperor ruled as virtually absolute monarch, helped by his *Grenzer* who were to the end *kaisertreu*, or loyal to his person. But after the Empire's defeat by Prussia in 1866, Hungary and the other nations won concessions including the winding up of the Military Frontier, in 1881. Its *raison d'être* was gone now that Turkey was seen as the 'sick man of Europe'. An international treaty of 1878 gave Austro-Hungary a mandate to govern Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was annexed in 1908. After a series of risings against the Turks, both Serbia and Montenegro had gained independence in 1875, under their own kings. In the first of two Balkan Wars, in 1912-13, Serbia won back Kosovo from the Turks, the whole army kneeling to kiss the ground. In the ensuing excitement, some Serbs started to dream of liberating their fellow South Slavs under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Neither in Serbia nor in the Habsburg Empire was there popular agitation for Yugoslav unity. The Serbs traditionally looked east and south towards Byzantium, and dreamed of obtaining some of the land now held by Bulgaria, which they had twice invaded before World War 1. Although the Serbs

looked to Russia for diplomatic support against the Ottoman Empire and later against the Habsburgs, they looked to France for their cultural and their political education. They felt some affinity with their fellow Orthodox Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Hungary north of the Danube, but never felt close to the Roman Catholic Croats. Moreover, as Djilas points out:

"The crucial difference for the Serbs in Serbia in relation to the Croats was the absence of a threat to their national identity. The Serbian peasant revolution of 1804 against Ottoman feudalism created conditions for their national cultural awakening, as well as for the development of an autonomous national political identity."

The Croats, on the other hand, were conscious of their subordinate role in an Empire containing the culturally more developed Austrians, Hungarians and Italians. Even Governor Jelacic was unhappy about Croatia's place in the empire he had served so well:

"I would prefer to see my people under the Turkish yoke than to live under the complete control of its educated neighbours... Educated people demand from a people over whom they rule also their soul, that is to say their nationality."

It was the Croats, not the Serbs, who saw in Yugoslavia a means of finding their own identity. The Yugoslav idea began when Napoleon Bonaparte conquered Venice and its Dalmatian lands, the city-state of Ragusa (now Dubrovnik) and then in 1809, all of Slovenia and most of Croatia including the Military Frontier. The French called this conquered territory *les provinces illyriennes*, after the name it bore in the days of the Roman Empire. They freed the peasants from forced labour and feudalism, revived trade and industry under a new administration, and built what remain the best roads in Yugoslavia. The French civilian and military officials were servants of Empire but, as Djilas says:

"They were veritable commissars of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. They regarded both the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empires as archaic political creations lacking



any real legitimacy. Likewise, all crucial elements of the Croatian and Serbian individualities, their traditions, loyalties, historical memories, and their different confessions (Roman Catholic and Serbian Orthodoxy) also seemed irrelevant and archaic. In no way could, for instance, the Sabor of the Croatian nobility, preserving the continuity with the Croatian mediaeval state, appear to the French officials as a parliament of *la nation*. The sooner (such things) were eliminated, together with the social groups (nobility and clergy) that had sustained them, the sooner would appear the 'real people', out of which a nation could be built. These 'real people' were the peasants, and in the Croatian and Serbian lands they spoke one language and exhibited deep ethnic similarities. Precisely because of their abstract and rationalist method of thinking away history, tradition and religion, the French were among the first to see the important unifying similarities among the South Slav in general, and among the Croats and Serbs in particular."

In fact, Illyrianism or Yugoslavism made little appeal to these peasants, the 'real people'. The most famous Croat champion of the idea in the nineteenth century was the scholar and historian Bishop Josip Strossmayer, who founded a Yugoslav Academy in 1867. As Djilas says, Strossmayer and his supporters refrained from creating a Yugoslav political programme, judging Croatia too weak and provincial. In any case, Strossmayer was really seeking the country's spiritual re-unification by ending the schism of 1054. At the First Vatican Council, Bishop Strossmayer delayed to the last moment giving assent to the doctrine of papal infallibility, because of the great offence he knew it would give to the Orthodox Church.

Other Croat writers rejected this Yugoslav idea and propagated dislike of the Serbs. The most important of these, because he inspired the Ustasha terrorist movement, was Ante Starcevic, who claimed that Bosnia-Herzegovina and even Serbia proper were part of Croatia. He also claimed that the word *Slavoserbi*, used in Austro-Hungary to describe the Serbs, derived from the Latin words *sclavus* and *servus*, both meaning



slave. This was bunk, of course.

As Djilas points out, Starcevic was clever at twisting his own racial theories:

"Paradoxically, Starcevic both included all Serbs in the Croat nation and proclaimed them to be an inferior and evil race. His idea of Greater Croatia encompassed all Serbs as long as they were ready to abandon their own national consciousness and become Croats. But the moment they showed their own consciousness, they became Slavoserbi."

Aleksa Djilas sets out clearly the origin and development of the Yugoslav idea from its beginning as Illyrianism up to its militant phase just before World War 1. It was from the start a rational, intellectual concept, founded on the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and taking fresh vigour from nineteenth century ideas like nationalism, liberalism and socialism. Djilas neatly sums up the basic flaw in Yugoslavism:

"Whereas both Croatian and Serbian nationalism were turned too much towards the past, the Enlightenment and Yugoslavism were excessively turned towards the future. Croatian and Serbian national consciousness were largely based on exactly those things that the Enlightenment was unable to see: history, tradition, religion."

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a generation of Serbs and Croats grew up with a dream of destroying the Austro-Hungarian Empire and building a Yugoslav state based on radical and progressive ideas. These tightly-knit groups of what the historians now call 'the revolutionary youth' were, as Djilas remarks, the prototype of the future Yugoslav Communists, putting the Party above Serb or Croat sentiment. The most famous or infamous of these groups was Young Bosnia, joining together Serbs, Croats and Muslims. It was a Serb from Young Bosnia, Gavrilo Princip, who shot dead the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, on St Vitus' Day, 28 June 1914.

Modern historians now tend to exonerate Serbia from organising the murder. Nevertheless Austria-Hungary issued an ultimatum and started the First World War by shelling Belgrade. Serbia fought gallantly against the imperial troops, a

high proportion of whom were Croats or Slovenes like Sergeant Broz, the future Marshal Tito. Serbia's courage was rewarded after the war when Alexander Karadjordjevic became King of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, under the Treaty of Versailles, signed on St Vitus' Day, 1919.

After a brief and frequently bloody spell of parliamentary democracy, the new Yugoslavia became in effect a royal dictatorship, with a largely Serb army, police and bureaucracy bossing resentful Croatia. The Belgrade government had the support of some of the Slovenes and Bosnian politicians, as well as much of the Serb population, but most of the Croats supported the opposition Peasant Party. Although it is fair to call the regime a 'Serb hegemony' it was never as cruel and oppressive as, for example, Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union. The Serbs were as ever boastful, bumptious and proud of their valour in fighting the Turks and the Austro-Hungarians but they were free of the grievance that makes for national hatred. Having never accepted Turkish rule, they retained their pride and spirit of independence. The Croats, on the other hand, had been uneasy within the Habsburg Empire, patronised by the over-bearing Austrians and Hungarians. The Croat capital Zagreb may be grander than Belgrade, but nevertheless seemed dull and provincial compared with Budapest, Prague or Vienna. Croatia after World War 1 was like a poor, country girl who has been brought up with a rich woman's family and now is reluctant to marry a man from her own village.

Two small but ruthless factions were bent on destroying the new Yugoslavia. The Communist Party wanted to replace this 'bourgeois' state with red republics joined to the Soviet Union. Aleksa Djilas gives a detailed analysis of the Communist attitude to the nationalities question. His father, Milovan Djilas, who had been one of Tito's trusted lieutenants before and during World War 2, was typical of those Communists who put the Party above their national feeling. A Montenegrin Serb married the second time to a Croat (Aleksa's mother), Milovan Djilas had always striven for friendship between the two nations. Yet as we know from his own

splendid works of autobiography, Djilas retains and admits to some of the Montenegrin characteristics, such as implacable obstinacy.

The little Communist Party posed no threat to prewar Yugoslavia. Far more dangerous was the Ustasha, formed in 1929, to establish a separate Croatia by violence and terror. Like the Nazis, the Ustasha looked on terror as more than a means to an end. It steeled the Ustasha spirit and ruled out compromise with the Serbian enemy. The Ustasha leader, Ante Pavelic, and his colleagues were living in exile in Austria, Hungary and Mussolini's Italy, all of which countries had claims on Yugoslav territory. The Ustasha won fame in 1934 when one of its agents murdered King Alexander during a state visit to France. When the Axis countries invaded and conquered Yugoslavia in April 1941, they split up the country, annexing the border regions, installing a puppet regime in a rump Serbia, while handing most of Croatia and all Bosnia-Herzegovina into the care of Pavelic and the Independent State of Croatia, or NDH.

Most historians of the war in Yugoslavia have focused attention upon the Chetniks, the Serb guerrillas, and then on the Communist Partisans, who led the struggle against the Germans. Virtually nothing is known in the West of the far more terrible happenings in the NDH, which preceded and largely created the Chetnik and Partisan movements. The one book in English wholly devoted to this episode is Edmond Paris's *Genocide in Satellite Croatia, 1941-45 A Record of Racial and Religious Persecutions and Massacres* (Chicago 1961). It later appeared as a paperback from the anti-Catholic Chick Publications under the title *Convert... or Die*, with a blood-red cover showing a man with a gun at his back, kneeling in front of a priest. Whatever his own bias, Paris gives printed references for most of his claims. There is a summary of the same events in Stella Alexander's excellent *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1979). Aleksa Djilas gives an up-to date bibliography of recent books on the subject in Serbo-Croat and German, as well as fresh insight into the ideology of the Ustasha.

The Poglavnik Ante Pavelic had explained his policy to the nearly two million Serbs in the NDH:

"Convert a third, expel a third, kill a third."

On 22 June 1941, the NDH's Education Minister reiterated this programme during a speech at Gospic, reported in *Hrvatski Narod*. The Ustasha government did not allow the conversion of educated Serbs such as teachers, doctors, lawyers and Orthodox priests, who would have to escape or die.

The killings began in April throughout the Krajina or formerly Military Frontier. In Bjelova, the schoolmaster and 250 Serb peasant men and women were forced to dig a ditch in which they were buried alive. At Otecac, the Orthodox priest said prayers as 331 Serbs, including his young son, were hacked to death. The Ustasha killers then turned on the father, tore out his beard and hair, gouged his eyes out, and tortured him to death, one of the first of 171 Orthodox clergymen killed in the NDH. The Ustasha also killed 47 rabbis. Although several leading Ustasha, including Pavelic, were partly Jewish or married to Jewish women, they followed the Nazi policy. They treated Slav Muslims as Croats. There is a grisly catalogue of massacre in the district of Knin, where the Serbs more recently took up arms and proclaimed themselves 'the autonomous province of Krajina'.

To frighten the Serbs and harden their own men, the Ustasha killed with the utmost cruelty. They herded whole villages into the Orthodox church and either hacked the people to death or set fire to the building. They sometimes impaled and flayed their victims alive. As a Partisan officer, Milovan Djilas witnessed the aftermath of an Ustashan massacre and learned how their men amused themselves with the local girls.

"When they shook hands with them during walks, they would place human ears, fingers or noses in their hands just like village toughs who get a kick out of offering tobacco pouches with snakes in them."

The behaviour of the Ustasha shocked even the German SS, whose reports describe such 'appalling atrocities' as the spearing to death of 250 Serbs in their own church. The SS also perceived that the terror drove Serbs into joining the Partisans:

"The atrocities perpetuated by the Ustasha must be regarded as the most important reason for the blazing up of guerilla activity. The Ustasha units have carried out their atrocities not just against male orthodox of military age but in particular in the most bestial fashion against unarmed old men, women and children..."

The SS reported that the massacres were directed by Ustasha men from Zagreb, many of whom were former exiles. Its ideology appealed to some intellectuals, including the world-famous sculptor Ivan Mestrovic and the fine poet Vladimir Nazor who, before changing sides and joining the Partisans, had hymned the Ustasha state:

"This is no time for music or mandolines  
Now is the time for each of us.  
To live as wolves and lions  
in other words, as Croats"

The charge of collaboration with the Ustasha has lain most heavily against the Catholic Church and in particular against the Franciscans, who formed a third of the clergy in the NDH. Bitter argument still surrounds the behaviour of Archbishop, later Cardinal, Aloysius Stepinac, who was jailed after the war but is now being advanced for beatification. Although Stepinac privately denounced the Ustasha crimes, and helped save the lives of Serbs and Jews, he was a purblind nationalist who at first welcomed the NDH. To understand the behaviour of Stepinac, we have to imagine that Hitler had conquered the British Isles and installed an IRA puppet regime in Ireland. Might not an Irish Archbishop, imbued with republican rage against England, have welcomed the opportunities for his faith and country?

Unlike Bishop Strosmyer in the previous century, Stepinac was intolerant of the Serbian Orthodox Church:

"In the end, the Croats and Serbs are two different peoples, a north and south half which cannot be joined except by a miracle from God. Schism is the greatest curse of Europe, almost greater than Protestantism. Here there is no morality, no principle, no truth, no justice, no honesty." (Stepinac's diary. 27 March 1941.)

On 14 April 1941, while the Yugoslav army was still battling hopelessly against the Axis invaders, Stepinac offered congratulations to Pavelic, who had 'come to realise the greatest task of his existence'. At a banquet that evening in the Archbishop's palace, he was photographed exchanging toasts with the Ustasha leaders. As the prosecution pointed out at his trial after the war, these actions of Stepinac constituted high treason against the Yugoslav state. The official Croatian Catholic journal *Nedelja* on 27 April 1941 pronounced:

"Glory be to God, our gratitude to Adolf Hitler, and infinite loyalty to our Poglavnik, Ante Pavelic."

In a recent biography, Stella Alexander shows Stepinac as a good, even saintly man but limited by his ignorance of and indifference to everything outside Croatia.

Some of the worst Ustasha atrocities took place in Bosnia-Herzegovina where the Franciscans who had persecuted the Bogomil heretics, now turned their wrath on the Orthodox Serbs. The novelist Evelyn Waugh, who was a captain in the 37th Military Mission, wrote of the friar in one report:

"For some time the Croat Franciscans had created misgivings in Rome for their independence and narrow patriotism. They were mainly recruited from the least cultured part of the population and there is abundant evidence that several wholly unworthy men were attracted to the Franciscan order by the security and comparative ease which it offered. Many of these youths were sent to Italy for training where Ustasha agents made contact with them and imbued them with Pavelic's ideas... Sarajevo is credibly described as having been a centre of Franciscan Ustashism"

Medjugorje, the scene of the Marian apparitions, was one of the hot-beds of Franciscan Ustashism. Three friars there, including the parish priest, are listed among its most zealous supporters. The massacre in Herzegovina began on St Vitus' Day, 28 June 1941, and were promptly denounced by the Bishop of Mostar, Alois Misic, the only senior churchman brave enough to defy the Ustasha. He instructed his priests to tell their congregations from the pulpit that those who murdered would not receive absolution. Two months later, he



wrote to Archbishop Stepinac, deploring the massacres:

"At one time it seemed that a large number of schismatics would be converted... however the (Ustasha) officials have abused their position with the result that a war of terror has come about. They are captured like animals, they are slaughtered, murdered, living men are thrown off cliffs... At Ljubinje, in a single day, 700 schismatics were thrown into their graves. From Moster and from Capljina a train took six carloads of mothers, young girls and children... to Surmanci... they were led up to the mountains, and the mothers together with the children were thrown off the precipice. In the town of Mostar itself they have been bound by the hundreds, taken in wagons outside the towns and then shot down like animals."

The present Bishop of Moster, Pavao Zanic, detests the Franciscans at Medjugorje. In a pamphlet published in 1990 he says that of the hundred secular priests in Herzegovina, not one believes in the apparitions. He accuses the Friars of having used the visionaries as a means to slander him, and names one Friar who continues to celebrate Mass although he has been expelled from the order and now has a second child by his mistress, a nun at Medjugorje.

A Franciscan, Father Filipovic-Majstrovic, was commandant of Jasenovac death camp, the largest of many set up by the Ustasha. 'Brother Devil' was an assiduous butcher of Serbs, as survivors testified at his trial after the war:

"Brother Devil caresses his revolver with one hand and his knife with the other... He went off to conduct the slaughtering every night and came back every morning, his shirt covered with blood."

Although expelled from the order, Brother Devil continued to celebrate Mass and was photographed doing so.

The Italian occupation troops were especially outraged by what the Franciscan Ustasha did in the name of the Saint of Assisi. The general commanding Italians at Knin was approached by the Franciscan Father Simiv, who said he was taking over the civil authority in the district in order to 'kill all the Serbs in the shortest possible time'. The Italian said he was horrified 'that a priest, a Franciscan should come forth with



such an announcement'.

Reports on the crimes of the Franciscan Ustasha even appeared in Fascist Italy, the ally of the NDH. The Bologna newspaper *Il Resto del Carlino*, protested on 18 September, 1941:

"The first Brother of Assisi spoke with the birds and fishes, calling them brothers and sisters, but their disciples and spiritual heirs massacre the people in the Independent State of Croatia... they kill and bury people alive. They throw their victims into the rivers, the sea and into the crevices. Curzio Malaparte, who reported for the NDH for *Il Corriere della Sera* describes in his post-war book *Kaput* how Ante Pavelic, during an interview, had shown him a bucketful of human eyes. Most reviewers outside Yugoslavia could not believe this story.

The behaviour of the Ustasha Franciscans, which so enraged Italian soldiers and journalists, does not appear to have greatly troubled the Vatican. Although Cardinal Eugene Tisserant complained in private that the Franciscans in Bosnia were behaving 'abominably', the Vatican never uttered a forthright, public denunciation of these crimes. The Vatican has been roundly attacked for not having protested more forcibly against Hitler's treatment of the Jews; still odder was its apparent indifference to a persecution carried out in the name of the Roman Catholic Church. In the preface to *The Silence of Pius XII*, the Italian historian Carlo Falconi observes:

"Only in Croatia was the extermination of at least half a million human beings due more perhaps to hatred of their religion than of their race, and was sacrilegiously bound up with a campaign for 're-baptism'."

Most historians would agree with Falconi's estimate of at least half a million Ustasha victims. Official Serbian Orthodox sources give 750,000, the same estimate made by Hitler's roving diplomat in the Balkans. Stella Alexander says cautiously:

"One of the most reliable historians of the period (J Tomasevic) estimates a minimum of 350,000 and this may be too low."

Until a few years ago, the question of numbers did not much matter in talking about an atrocity on so vast a scale, but there is now a campaign on the part of Croat historians, if not to excuse the Ustasha, at least to downplay the enormity of their crimes. One such historian, Franjo Tudjman, deserves to be studied with special attention since he is also today the President of Croatia, elected in April 1990.

The Serb minority in the Old Military Frontier, or Krajina, accuse Dr Tudjman of being a neo-Ustasha and wanting to rebuild the Independent State of Croatia. Unfortunately, they have grounds for their worry. In his election campaign, Dr Tudjman demanded that all Bosnia-Herzegovina should once more be joined in Croatia, basing this claim on the false notions of Starcevic and Pavelic. In his book *Nationalism in Contemporary Europe*, Dr Tudjman states that although the Orthodox Serbs make up 44 per cent of the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina, they are still a minority when compared with 'the ethnically largely identical Catholic and Moslem population.' Again he says:

"An objective examination of the numerical composition of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot ignore that the majority of the Moslems is in its ethnic character and speech incontrovertibly of Croatian origin." Anyone who has read Aleksa Djilas will see this as a nonsense.

In the same book, Dr Tudjman tries to suggest that although the Ustasha did commit massacres, not without provocation, these have been grossly exaggerated:

"Year after year, for decades now, the assertion has been rammed into the heads of the Yugoslav and world public... that during the NDH, in just one camp at Jasenovac, there were at least 700,000 men, women and children killed and that they were mostly Serbs."

It is a line of argument often employed to downplay, or even justify Hitler's massacre of the Jews.

However many Serbs they killed, the Ustasha brought about the very two things they feared and detested: a Communist government and a united Yugoslavia. First the Serbs in the Krajina and Bosnia Herzegovina, then millions of

Croats and Slovenes as well, saw the Communists as the only party standing above internecine hatred. Aleska Djilas is probably right to say that the Communists could have won the election of 1945, even without the intimidation of their opponents. The collectivisation of land, the secret police terror and the religious persecution, eroded but did not destroy the popularity of the Communists and their undeniably great leader, Tito. Then on St Vitus' Day, 28 June 1948, the news broke of Yugoslavia's rift with the Comintern and the Soviet Union. Serbs and Croats joined in defiance of Stalin as during the war they had joined in defiance of Hitler and his repulsive ally, Ante Pavelic. Serbs and Croats also united in claiming territory to the west, including the port of Trieste, handed to Italy in October 1953.

That same year, 1953, also witnessed the start of a movement away from rigid Marxism towards a more free and tolerant society. It was then that Milovan Djilas began to publish the thoughts that would lead to political downfall, prison and disillusionment with his old beliefs. He was the first man to prophesy, many years ago, that Communism would not survive the century. That same year, 1953, could also be seen as the high point of belief in Yugoslavia.

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## **YUGOFAX**

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