

Croatian issue 'puts Europe to the test'

by Umberto Pascali

"I believe that the dire conflict in Yugoslavia is putting Europe to the test. The European Community is now faced with the necessity of translating its often projected aim of common security policy into concrete practice. Europe's politicians will have to demonstrate what significance they attach to the principle of self-determination, democracy, and human rights. And Europe will have to show whether it can take care of its own security." Thus, Alois Mock, the foreign minister of Austria, wrote on Nov. 11 in the *Wall Street Journal*. The minister stressed that "the declarations of independence [of Slovenia and Croatia] on June 25 were based on democratic decisions by the people of those republics, and are a convincing expression of the right to self-determination."

The public intervention by the head of Austrian diplomacy is being viewed by international observers as the beginning of a change of strategy vis-à-vis the ferocious war the Greater Serbians are waging against Croatia. Until now, the policy of the European Community (EC) to seek unanimity, has led to total impotence. At this point, it is possible that Austria, Germany, and other European countries will recognize Croatia and Slovenia even if Great Britain or Holland does not. To understand to what extremes of injustice and indecency the politics of "unanimity" has brought Europe, it is worth analyzing the "sanctions against Yugoslavia" approved by the EC on Nov. 8. The sanctions were imposed against both the aggressor and the victim. The Netherlands Foreign Minister Van den Broek stressed that he equally blamed Serbia and Croatia. In reality, the sanctions hit Slovenia and Croatia the hardest, given that the two republics are by far the larger exporters to the EC.

Carrington, Vance exposed

But the low point of hypocrisy was reached during an emergency foreign policy debate on Yugoslavia in the Canadian Parliament on Nov. 18. There, Foreign Minister Barbara McDougall revealed that she had been convinced by the western "negotiators," Peter Lord Carrington and Cyrus Vance, not to recognize Croatia! Under violent attacks from every party, McDougall refused to recognize Croatia.

"Our government," McDougall said, "continues to receive calls for recognition of those republics which have unilaterally declared independence and know this is a sensitive point. We shall continue to resist such pressures. . . . I have discussed this personally, both with [U.N. mediator]

Cyrus Vance and with [EC mediator] Peter Carrington. Recognition of Croatia and Slovenia at this time would signal the end of the negotiated process and would leave force and violence to settle the issue."

When Member of Parliament Bob Horner asked why Canada does not simply recognize Croatia now, McDougall insisted that the civil war in Yugoslavia would then become a foreign war and that would take away leverage for solving the crisis! The search for "unanimity" has forced western countries to swallow the line of Carrington and Vance that Croatia must be left to the fury of the Yugoslav Army.

The sacrifice of Vukovar

If the mafia-like complicity were to be broken over the next days, no force in the world would be able to stop the process of recognition of these democratic republics, and the credit would go to a large extent to the heroic Danubian town of Vukovar. Its name has become in many nations a household word and a synonym for love for freedom. The town has been under a ferocious siege for three months. About one-third of the whole Yugoslav Army has been deployed against Vukovar. Now the media are saying that Vukovar has surrendered. Up to the moment we go to press, however, there is still resistance. But whatever happens in the next days, a few thousand fighters and civilians were able to block the Serbs and probably prevent the conquest of the whole of Croatia. According to reports from the field, the Croatian forces have started a counterattack in the countryside around Vukovar.

The reality of the genocide is more and more difficult to hide. On Nov. 11, the Archbishop of Zagreb, Cardinal Franjo Kuharic, spoke to the U.S. National Conference of Bishops meeting in Washington. "This war is attempting to destroy all freedom and democracy," he said, "and is striking at the culture as well as history of the Croatian people. . . . This is a war of aggression being waged by the federal Army under the leadership of Serbian generals who are in league with the extremist movement which seeks now to create a Greater Serbia. This war is further fueled by the communist ideology. . . ."

"Many of our Croatian cities and countless more villages are under constant attack by heavy artillery, tanks, missiles, and planes. Many villages have been totally wiped away. . . . A large number of towns and cities are threatened with total annihilation, among them Dubrovnik and Slunj. . . . Vukovar is entirely demolished. . . . More than 200 church buildings, monasteries, and rectories have been completely destroyed or severely damaged. More than 180 parishes in Croatia have been totally obliterated. . . . There are known incidents where older persons refused to leave their homes and were massacred and set on fire in their own dwellings." Cardinal Kuharic concluded: "The greatest step towards bringing this war to an end. . . . would be the recognition of a free Croatia and Slovenia where the people voted by a 95% majority in favor of freedom and independence."