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CROATIA AT THE CROSSROADS  
IN SEARCH OF A DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERACY  
Franjo Tudjman

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**CROATIA AT THE CROSSROADS**  
**IN SEARCH OF A DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERACY**

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### The author

Dr Franjo Tudjman, a Major-General in the Yugoslav National Army until his resignation from active service in 1961, wrote his doctoral dissertation on the causes of the crises faced by monarchist Yugoslavia, and joined the editorial board of various academic, political and military journals. His own works include *War against War* (1957); *The Great Ideas and Small Nations* (1969). He was expelled from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and twice imprisoned -- once for giving television and radio interviews in favour of democratic ideas of self-governing pluralism. Today he is President of Republic of Croatia, following the victory in April 1990 of his Croatian Democratic Union Party in the first democratic election held in Croatia for more than fifty years.

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## Preface

Over the past months, the Centre for Policy Studies has developed an increasing interest in the affairs of Central and Eastern Europe. In 1990 John Redwood, now Minister of State at the Department of Trade and Industry, wrote for us the excellent paper entitled *The Democratic Revolutions; Popular Capitalism in Eastern Europe*. Then last Autumn the Centre held a conference in Budapest 'Towards an Open Society' which was attended by delegates from Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia. Committees were set up and reported on the rule of law, the establishment of political parties, the encouragement of voluntary bodies, the framework of small businesses.

These activities reflect the Centre's espousal of the philosophy of individual freedom, free market enterprise and social responsibility -- a philosophy which is now burgeoning in the Eastern countries of Europe and deserves our enthusiastic support.

There are many and great obstacles, not least in Yugoslavia. At a meeting two months ago in Zagreb I talked with President Franjo Tudjman of Croatia; and was most impressed by the vision he held out of a truly democratic, free enterprise society emerging in his country. The difficulties which he faces in a country split by ancient divisions have, as we are all sadly aware, recently led to the menace of civil war.

President Tudjman came to London on May 7 on our invitation. He held useful discussions with the Foreign Secretary and had a long informal talk with Mrs Thatcher. Finally he addressed a meeting especially convened by the Centre; which was widely reported by the National Press and relayed to television programmes throughout Europe.

This paper is a slightly expanded version of the text of his speech.

Lord Griffiths of Fforestfach

## Respect for national differences

It is a great honour for me as a Croatian historian, politician and statesman, to address this renowned English institution and respected international forum.

Allow me to start on a personal note. I began my public life as one of Tito's partisans in the anti-Fascist war (1941-1945). As a young man, I deeply believed in the possibility of creating the utopian dream of the paradise on Earth, or unimaginable human and national liberty and social justice, which the Marxist theory and the Communist movement purported to offer individuals and nations. Later, when I became aware of my theoretical and political illusions, I saw it as my moral duty to devote my life to the aim of democracy for my homeland Croatia. As a result, in 1967, I became an outcast and a dissident. Thereafter I was twice sentenced and gaoled (in 1972 and from 1982 to 1984) because of my academic researches. My writing and imprisonment embroiled me in political activities even though my personal inclinations were always to remain in quiet study behind my desk.

Not only did fate dictate my philosophical views, but my profession as well: that of history, or more precisely, the philosophy of history. By nature, the study of history is characterised, on a scientific and human level, by relativism and scepticism, in spite of the fact that history is rich in examples of transcendence and decline. History teaches us that in this world, there can be no good without evil, and no light without darkness; there can be no heavenly splendour without the baseness of the Devil, and no freedom without repression. Creation is impossible without destruction, and peace cannot exist without war. Finally, there are no gains without losses, and no human courage glows in the absence of human cowardice.

As a historian, I can never assert that the political realities of the world in which I live, even those in which I have perhaps some influence in shaping, express either the greatest or eternal truths. But as a statesman, I also refuse to adopt the fatalistic position that the problems which confront my Croatian nation, as well as others which

have lived under Communism, cannot be solved in a humane and democratic way.

There is one characteristic of contemporary history which we must recognise; and that is the national individuality of even the smallest nations. Everywhere the world community is organising itself into independent nation states capable of accommodating themselves to integration into regional or continental alliances.

In contrast to previous historical experiences, the partial surrender of sovereignty to regional and supranational structures and alliances must now be preceded by voluntary agreements by sovereign nations: *not* by means of artificial ideologies or theories of 'limited sovereignty'. The acknowledgement of the rights of small nations of self-determination is a key contemporary European issue. And a new European order will not be created by the sword, nor by conquest of any supranational ideology, but by removing the cultural and economic barriers between sovereign nations.

In the new European order, smaller nations for the first time can be afforded equality which their larger counterparts have traditionally enjoyed, because a new European framework is creating opportunities for democracy, security and development for all peoples. It is not crucial whether the new European order will have 33 or 44 sovereign states, nor is their size significant. What is crucial is that open societies are evolving based on European traditions of parliamentary democracy, free enterprise, and human and ethnic rights.

History teaches us to look dispassionately on the question of nationalism. The most noble as well as the most disgraceful acts of mankind throughout history have been committed in its name. Influenced by perverted forms of nationalism deriving from the first half of this century, even many political theorists of repute are unable to grasp the significance of recent national movements within European socialist countries.

The nationalism of numerous nations forced into multinational Communist dictatorships has been the decisive factor in the destabilisation of communist regimes and the historical discrediting of Marxist ideologies. The struggle to destroy

Communism and establish political democracy is an integral part of the struggle for national emancipation. We are confronted with a wave of democratic, nationalistic revolution unprecedented in history.

Civilisation is edging forward today neither because of supranational unification nor by disintegration, but because of greater respect for national individuality within the framework of a degree of integration. The creation of the European Community attests to this, based as it is upon principles of respect for national differences among European nations, and not upon development of a new European nation.

Poised on the brink of nuclear and ecological self-destruction, civilisation is determined to uncover new worlds in space, as well as a new order on earth. Because of the historical consequences, we must hope that within such a new order harmonious coexistence of all peoples and nations without regard to race, religion, colour, size or region will be possible.

## The case of Croatia

The Croatian nation, as also other smaller European nations, has had great historic difficulties defending her national and cultural identity, and preserving her traditions. One of the oldest nations in Europe, she managed to survive within a territory continually under threat from Byzantine, French, German, Italian, Hungarian, Turkish and even Serbian imperialism. For centuries, she has been the bulwark of Christianity, has defended and preserved Europe from Turkish oppression, and has enabled present day European democracy and cultural traditions to evolve. In Bosnia, which was occupied by the Turks for over four centuries, Croats implemented a specific type of ecumenical coexistence with Catholicism, Orthodox and Islam, in defence of their own traditions and survival.

Only by adopting a political philosophy based on a measure of integration achieved by Christendom could the Croatian nation survive. Not even at the height of her mighty kingdom, during the Middle Ages, did Croatia initiate wars of conquest. Based on the historical tradition of Croatian statehood, the Independent State of Croatia was established during World War II within the frame of Hitler's New European order. At the same time, the Croatian people created the federal republic-state, within the framework of Tito's anti-fascist movement, in order to safeguard national existence and Croatian statehood in the Yugoslav federation which was meant to be a community of equal states.

Continuously endangered by neighbouring aggressors, Croats were inclined to defend themselves instead of conquering foreign territories, and this prompted the adoption of integrationist and pacifist ideas. The concept of panslavism - mutual aid between equal Slavic nations - was the brainchild of the Croatian Dominican Juraj Krizanic in the 17th century. The abuse of this idea in the interest of Great Russian Orthodox expansionism caused disillusionment resulting in staunch advocates of Austro-slavism among the Croatian people. But Austro-Hungarian empire's recalcitrance in implementing nationalistic demands strengthened Croatian proponents of the South Slavic idea.



Croatians were, among the Yugoslav nations, the greatest contributors in the war against fascism, possessing by 1945 five of eleven army corps of Tito's Yugoslav antifascist forces. Then the division of power in Europe and Stalinistic imperialism motivated Josip Broz Tito, himself a Croatian, to lead the struggle against Soviet hegemony and to form a political movement based on the political emancipation of small colonised nations, and the coexistence of diverse states and ideologies.

History will not only remember 'Titoism' as an authoritarian system, unsuccessful in its attempt to reform communist socialism, and to build a federation of equal peoples based upon the constitution of 1974, but also as the first courageous and successful resistance to Stalinist hegemony.

Today, in light of the failure of the Yugoslav idea, initially introduced as a socialist federation, and later transformed under a one-party Communist totalitarian regime into a hegemony by the most populous (Serbian) nation, which suppressed national individuality in the name of proletarian internationalism, Croatians - true to their historical traditions, remain dedicated adherents to the peaceful integration of sovereign nations with Europe.

Croatia has effected the non-violent and dignified transformation of a one-party Communist totalitarian regime into a parliamentary democracy, reinforcing her place within the free Western world. True to her traditions, and after a landslide victory in the first free election, she proclaimed a new democratic Constitution which secured the Republic of Croatia a position among the free countries of the western world. But in the Eastern regions of Yugoslavia, we are confronted with the ominous manifestations of neo-Communism.

Croatia does not wish to bear the consequences of Yugoslavia's violations of human rights in Kosovo and the terrorism perpetrated against other nationalities in Yugoslavia, nor to engage in a possible war of Serbian expansionism against Croatian and all non-Serbian peoples. We aspire to our own political, cultural and international identity in the European community, if it were possible, within the framework of a confederation of sovereign republics of the present Yugoslav community.

Croatia opposes the neo-communist unitarian-hegemonistic scenario which endangers her democracy and sovereignty. The terrorist actions of a small part of the Serbian population within the newly democratic Croatia is inspired by and organised from the outside. This rebellion was intended to destabilise the sovereign and democratically elected Croatian government to provoke a war and a military coup against the democratically elected governments in Croatia -- and also in Slovenia.

### Great Britain and Croatia

The allied powers, in the course of the first world war, entertained no idea of dissolving the Austro-Hungarian empire; they wished only to decrease its size. The creation of the Yugoslav state as a resolution of the 'Yugoslav question' entered into the general war plan only at the end of the war. The London agreements of 1915 between the Allies and the Italians led to bitterness in Croatia and gave impetus to the idea of South Slavic unification. As a result, until 1917, two different concepts evolved about resolution of the 'Yugoslav question'. One was offered by the Serbian leadership, the other by the South Slav committee, a political body composed of representatives of the South Slav nations of the Austro-Hungarian empire, with its headquarters in London. The Serbian recommendation was based on Serbian territorial expansionism at the expense of Croatia, which had been part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. The South Slav concept supported the creation of a (con)federalist state of Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia and Montenegro, one in which the rights of all South Slav nations would be guaranteed.

In one of the studies on these issues, which I wrote over twenty five years ago, I documented the support given to the concept of the South Slav committee and its Croatian members by leading British experts of that time, among them Wickham Steed, managing editor of *The Times*, and Professor Sir Hugh Seton-Watson. Acting on their appraisals, the British leadership exerted pressure on Belgrade to oppose Serbian expansionism in favour of the resolution recommended by the South Slav committee; as a result, the Corfu and Geneva declarations of 1917 and 1918, which dealt with the unification of future organisation of the new state, were signed. Unfortunately, the issue of national equality, was not resolved by the Corfu or Geneva declarations. That was because the signatories were present only because of pressure exerted by British and other allied forces and not because of any sincere desire on the part of the Serbian leadership to abandon Serbian expansionist goals.

The unification of December 1, 1918, therefore, of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, (in 1929 renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) represented only

the perpetuation of Serbian aspirations, denying to the Croatian nation political equality and the opportunity for normal social and economic development.

Twenty years later, at the outbreak of the Second World War, the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was forced once again to intervene in Yugoslav politics. In 1939, growing tensions between the nationalities, especially between the Serbs and the Croats, threatened to tear the country apart, and to let Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy achieve their expansionist goals. Because of this, the President of the Kingdom's government, Cvetkovic, and Macek, the Croatian political leader, reached an agreement establishing the Banovina of Croatia, a legislative and political region, which included the largest part of her national territory, in which Croatia was guaranteed a state autonomy. Under the conditions, this was deemed a satisfactory resolution for the Croatian nation. But once again, the agreement was concluded not because Serbia recognised the political wisdom of granting greater Croatian autonomy, but because of pressure from the British and French governments. Realising the dangers inherent in the disintegration of Yugoslavia, due to her failure to satisfy the desires of the Croatian as well as other non-Serbian nations (and because of pressure by the Axis powers) the British government reached the same conclusion as in 1917; that is, that Yugoslavia could survive only if all nations living within her territory were afforded equal status.

In spite of these monumental efforts, the majority of Serbian politicians remained in opposition. Thus, the chain of events leading to the Second World War was forged. Intra-national turmoil led to a rapid Yugoslav military and political defeat, enabling her occupation by the Axis powers, which ultimately led to the creation of the Independent State of Croatia under the auspices of Hitler's 'New Order'. The majority of the Croatian nation, however, did not wish to place its fate in the hands of Hitler and the Axis powers, and so joined forces with Tito and his anti-Fascist Partisan movement. Participation was so large and well organised that the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, on the basis of information received from English intelligence sources communicating with both Partisan and Chetnik forces -- and also from his own son, Randolph -- announced that Serbia was under control of Draza Mihajlovic and the Chetniks, and that Croatia was Partisan. I mention Churchill's remark mainly to

expose the anti-Croatian propaganda still being put about by the Serbians, and to discredit false indictments against the Croatians about their role and participation in the Second World War.

Winston Churchill was deeply aware of the irreconcilable national, as well as the cultural and social division, within Yugoslavia. Based on the experience of the British in Balkan politics, an agreement was reached with Stalin in 1944, negotiating a fifty-fifty division of the spheres of influence in this geopolitical region. This agreement by itself acknowledged the deep historical, political, and cultural divisions between the two areas: on the one hand, the Western-oriented, Christian, Croatian-Slovenian region and on the other hand, the Eastern-oriented Byzantine and Orthodox regions of Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia.

Tito, however, rejected this proposal, choosing rather to attempt to create harmony among the South Slav nations through Communist ideology, the federalisation of Yugoslavia and guarantees of national equality. Unfortunately, Tito's Yugoslavia demonstrated that brute force and hard-line Communist doctrine could not surmount the differences between the nations nor undermine the Serbian goals of domination in the Balkans.

Today, therefore, seventy three years after the establishment of Yugoslavia, her nations are still alienated from one another, and their mutual distrust and animosity are greater than ever before. Yugoslavia is once again on the verge of disintegration and civil war. The Croatian nation continues to be oppressed, her democratic systems violated, her territorial integrity and her very national existence endangered.

At the end of January of this year, the British government joined the United States once again to intervene diplomatically in Yugoslavia, warning her government against the use of military force and urging that the national and democratic rights of the Croatian and other non-Serbian nations be respected. The intervention brought temporary respite; but meanwhile the situation has worsened and Croatia now finds herself on the brink of war in defence of her democracy and state sovereignty.

If any generalisations, or lessons can be learned from the collective historical events I have briefly delineated here today, they are that it is incumbent upon Great Britain and other democratic powers to continue to apply pressure on Belgrade, on the Serbian and Yugoslav governments, to recognise the right of self-determination of the other nations within Yugoslavia.

In spite of the recent formal recognition of such an appeal, the Serbian hegemonistic attitude which has never accepted Yugoslavia as a confederation of equal nations but only as an extension of Great Serbia, remains powerful. The one possible historically and politically just way to resolve the continual crises besetting Yugoslavia is to acknowledge that her nations have been living divided for centuries, that they differ not only by nationality but that they belong to separate civilisations, and that the concept of Yugoslav statehood is historically ill-conceived, based as it is on the geopolitical disparities between two worlds and civilisations. Because of the same considerations with which Yugoslavia is confronted, the Roman Empire was divided from East to West. Centuries later, along religious lines, at the crossroad of civilisations, Croatian dissident priests evolved their creeds. Similarly, in this century, we saw the emergence of Tito's heretics within the communist regime. This division replicates the concept explored by Churchill and Stalin's 'spheres of influence' which today divide the Western, democratically influenced regions from the Eastern areas of Serbia and Montenegro where, even after pluralistic elections and the sound defeat of Communist socialism, its proponents remain in power.

A final historical comparison: at the time of the Ottoman invasion upon Christian Europe, plundered Croatia received recognition as the *antemurale christianitatis*. Today, still defending freedom and democracy, she remains the bulwark of European democracy against attempt at restoration Communism.

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