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Report to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Visit to Albania and Yugoslavia
March 29 - April 6, 1991

Senator Claiborne Pell

ALBANIA

I travelled to Albania to observe the March 31 parliamentary election, the first democratic, multi-party election held in that country since the 1920's. Since my visit was brief (2 1/2 days) and limited to the area in and around the capital city of Tirana and central Albania, my observations are necessarily incomplete and my judgments tentative. Organizations such as the National Democratic Institute, the National Republican Institute and the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe had observers in the country for a longer period both before and after the election; so their reports will be more conclusive than mine. Nevertheless, I do not believe that my impressions will differ greatly from theirs.

The voting procedures were orderly, and the ballot counting took place with an apparently low incidence of fraud or procedural irregularities. The physical set-up and manning of each polling place that I and my staff visited conformed with all of the Central Electoral Commission's requirements, including the presence of poll watchers from at least one opposition party. What few irregularities we heard of occurred mostly in rural areas.

Nevertheless, the appearance of orderliness on election day masked defects in the campaign that preceded the actual voting, prompting the leader of the main opposition party to declare afterward that the election was unfair. The principal problems that were drawn to our attention are as follows:

-- Foreign observers were not permitted to enter the country until the closing week or so the campaign, making it difficult for them to play the kind of role they played, for example, in the Nicaraguan election.

-- The election was called on short notice, depriving the opposition parties of sufficient time to make their case to the voters.

-- The Communists (officially the Party of Labor) had an organizational advantage, having headquarters buildings and staff in virtually every city, town and village. They also had more transportation assets, and printed material. In a country where private ownership of automobiles and trucks has been banned for years and the few vehicles that do exist are owned and controlled by the state, transportation becomes a critical determinant in a political campaign.

-- There were reports that in some instances maps of electoral districts were not available, and voter registration lists were not posted at polling places until a day or two before the election. That made it difficult for the opposition to target its activities. Also, it was not known until after the election that the number of voters in each district varied widely; many rural districts were one-half to one-third the size of urban districts.

-- There were reports of harassment of opposition rallies and threats made to entire villages and collective farms of the negative consequences of opposition victories in those areas. It was not clear, however, how widespread such overt intimidation was.

Even if overt intimidation was minimal, powerful psychological forces were at play that benefited the Communists. In many respects, the Albanian election was similar to those held last year in Romania and Bulgaria.

Many voters in Albania's rural areas, with limited access to the media and international observers, probably did not believe that this was a truly free election and that opposition candidates would be allowed to win. They probably also feared retribution, even if it was not threatened. So they may have voted Communist out of habit or self-generated fear. In addition, workers on collective farms were reported to fear the consequences of privatization, and those fears were probably played on by Communist candidates.

In addition, the isolation from the outside, especially Western, world has been so powerful that many Albanians, especially in rural areas display an almost childlike ignorance of the basic concepts of democracy and free enterprise. Rural voters told our party that the ideas espoused by the democratic opposition were "fantasies" and even "craziness." Thus, for these voters, there was no conceivable alternative to the Party of Labor's program.

Nevertheless, it was encouraging that the opposition overcame these obstacles in the cities. It was remarkable, in fact, that in Tirana, the President and Foreign Minister were defeated; and they accepted the victories of their opponents. The Communists, however, won at least two-thirds of the seats in the new parliament. Yet, this may be the last election that they can win unless they revert to totalitarian practices.

In this connection, it was deeply disturbing that on April 2, during opposition protests of the election results announced that day, riot police reportedly killed four men,

including one prominent opposition party leader, while breaking up a peaceful demonstration in the northern city of Shkoder. The Democratic Party of Albania, whose demonstration was the target of this police action, has demanded a full and objective investigation.

The next political milestone will be the writing of a new constitution. We were told that it would guarantee a wide range of political and individual rights and form the basis for economic reform. Two legal experts will be sent to the United States to gather ideas.

It is expected that the new constitution will provide for a strong presidency with broad emergency powers. It will also likely provide for the indirect election of the president by the parliament and for presidential appointment of cabinet members. Thus, President Alia and Foreign Minister Kapllani are expected to remain in office despite their defeat in parliamentary elections.

In meetings that I held with these and other officials prior to the election, I was told of the government's firm commitment to political and economic reform. State enterprises would be phased out in favor of cooperatives and private enterprises. Foreign investment will be encouraged, and repatriation of profits will be permitted (given Albania's small foreign currency reserves, however, this may be easier said than done)

I was told that Albania is particularly eager to attract foreign investment in the energy and mining sectors. Promising oil and gas deposits reportedly exist in coastal and offshore areas, and the application of modern technology could greatly increase the production and profitability of extracting such minerals as copper and chromite. The income, foreign exchange and investor confidence that activities in these areas could generate might just provide the jump start that the backward Albanian economy needs.

President Alia and his senior advisors went to great lengths to assure me that Albania wants to become a part of Europe and is determined to meet European political, economic and human rights standards. Albania has applied for full membership in CSCE, and the government hopes that an early favorable decision on membership will be made.

I was further told that although Albania is deeply concerned about the treatment of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia in Yugoslavia, the government rejects the notion of a Greater Albania, as Albania accepts the sanctity of borders enshrined in the Helsinki Accords. Albania would,

however, use CSCE as a forum to press for an improvement in the treatment of Yugoslavia's ethnic Albanians.

The Albanian officials with whom I spoke appeared to realize that a complete break with Albania's Stalinist past is required if the country is to improve its dilapidated economy. If the governing Party of Labor has truly rejected the option of reverting to repression, the party will have to evolve into a genuine social democratic party in order to remain in office; and it will have to deliver on its economic promises. That will not be easy.

Recommendations

-- The United States should press the Albanian government for a full and objective investigation of the killings that occurred in Shkoder on April 2 and for appropriate action against those found responsible. The United States should also seek assurances that all complaints of electoral fraud and procedural irregularities will be investigated and adjudicated.

-- The United States should utilize the opportunities provided by the resumption of full diplomatic relations to encourage political and economic reform in Albania and a dialogue between the government and the opposition regarding the future of the country.

-- The United States should support Albania's application for CSCE membership, provided that Albania unequivocally accepts all of the obligations of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and subscribes to the objectives set forth in the Document of the June 1990 Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE.

-- If Albania becomes a CSCE member, the United States should use the CSCE forum to monitor and encourage Albania's compliance with its CSCE obligations.

-- The United States should be responsive to Albanian requests for medical and other forms of humanitarian assistance, which should be provided as much as feasible through private voluntary organizations. Other economic assistance and economic relations should be related to Albania's progress in making political and economic reforms and in improving its human rights performance.

-- The Administration should encourage and support programs of the National Democratic and Republican Institutes to assist in Albania's democratic development. It should also expand Albanian language broadcasting to Albania and

ensure that the new Embassy in Tirana has a strong information program.

YUGOSLAVIA

The national divisions that threaten to tear Yugoslavia apart or plunge it into civil war are deepening. Efforts to reach an agreement to restructure and preserve this federation of six republics and two autonomous regions are at an impasse, and the prospects for success are not encouraging.

The unity and stability of Yugoslavia are foundering on the Serbian Republic's dogged persistence in preserving an almost Stalinist political and economic system and its refusal to accept economic reform, the restoration of political and human rights in the Serbian Autonomous Province of Kosovo and any loosening of federation ties with its increasingly democratic sister republics. Four of Yugoslavia's six constituent republics have elected non-communist governments dedicated to economic reform. They have also issued declarations of sovereignty, which they threaten to act on if the federation is not restructured to provide greater political and economic autonomy to the individual republics.

The northwestern republics of Slovenia and Croatia have taken the lead in pressing for change, and Slovenia is the closest to declaring itself an independent state. Slovenia held a referendum last December during which 90% of the population voted in favor of independence if federal constitutional changes were not agreed to by June 23. The President of the Federal Executive Council (Prime Minister), Ante Markovic, is struggling to keep alive his program of economic reforms, which have been so widely praised in the West, and to find some acceptable formula for political reform that could preserve a unified country. In this daunting task, he has few tools beyond personal good will; and he seems to conspicuously lack any political mandate or following that can counter the immensely powerful nationalist sentiments in the republics.

The roots of Yugoslavia's current crisis go back to the Tito years, when the dictator from Croatia denied Serbia the pre-eminence that it enjoyed during the two pre-World War II decades. In 1974, Tito wrote a new constitution to guide the country after his death. It provided for a balance of power among the various republics, but created weak national institutions, including a collective presidency with almost no powers. Most galling to the Serbs was the creation of two autonomous provinces within Serbia -- Kosovo in the south and

Vojvodina in the north, each having virtually all of the attributes of republic status except the name.

After Tito's death in 1980, Serbia saw an opportunity to recover the dominant position it enjoyed during the pre-war period. Serbian security forces brutally broke up student demonstrations in 1981 in Kosovo, where the population is 90% ethnic Albanian, and began a systematic campaign to reassert Serbian political, economic and social dominance in the province.

The Agony of Ethnic Albanians.

Serbian nationalism gained momentum in 1988 when Slobodan Milosevic wrested control of the Serbian League of Communists, charging his predecessor with being too soft on Kosovo and insufficiently aggressive in asserting Serbia's rights nationwide. In March 1989, the Serbian constitution was amended, withdrawing virtually all of the autonomous powers previously enjoyed by Kosovo and Vojvodina. In June 1990, the Kosovo Assembly met to repudiate the Serbian actions and declare its determination to seek republic status for Kosovo. Serbia responded by arresting members of the Assembly, closing down all of the Albanian language media, occupying the university and declaring martial law.

The people of Kosovo responded with passive resistance, including symbolic strikes, and a boycott of the December 1990 Serbian elections. The Slovenian and Croatian governments strongly condemned the Serbian actions, citing them as one of their reasons for seeking a fundamental restructuring of the Yugoslav federation.

On April 2, I met in Macedonia with the principal ethnic Albanian leaders of Kosovo. They painted a grim picture of Serbian repression, which they said was getting worse every day. Some examples are as follows:

-- Arbitrary arrests, torture and searches are an everyday occurrence, and some 90 Albanians were killed during peaceful demonstrations in 1990.

-- Serbian administrators have been appointed in 70% of Kosovo's industry, and some 53,000 Albanian workers have been dismissed.

-- Albanians are being forced out of their apartments, and land is being taken away from farmers.

-- Albanian language instruction in schools has been drastically curtailed. Many schools remain closed, as are the Albanian language media.

-- Albanian political parties are not allowed to operate normally, and many party leaders have been jailed.

Kosovo's Albanians see these acts as part of a concerted campaign to make life so unpleasant for Albanians that they will leave and be replaced by Serbs. Many Albanians have emigrated; but despite encouragement from the Serbian government, few Serbs have taken their place. The Albanians also fear that Serbia hopes to provoke a violent reaction to its oppression so that a bloody crackdown can be ordered.

Kosovo's political leaders have been successful to date in their campaign of non-violent resistance, but they fear that an explosive reaction could occur at any time despite their efforts. I was told that if a conflict occurs, it would be a massacre.

In response to my question about the Albanian opposition's objectives, I was told that after ten years of repression, Albanians would not be satisfied with a restoration of their autonomous status within Serbia. They want republic status equal to that of the six existing republics, and they hope to achieve that through dialogue with Serbia and with full respect for the rights of Serbs in Kosovo. So far, however, Serbia refuses to engage in any dialogue. I was told further that Kosovo wants to remain within a united, democratic Yugoslavia, but if the country breaks up, Albanians would not live in a rump "Serboslavia".

I also met with leaders of the Albanian community in Macedonia, where Albanians comprise somewhere between 20% and 40% of the population. While the treatment of Albanians is better in Macedonia than it is in Kosovo, there are problems.

Unlike Albanians in Kosovo, Macedonia's Albanians voted in last year's republic elections, which produced a government with a non-communist majority. The Albanians had high hopes for democracy in Macedonia, but they feel that conditions for them have been far worse than they had hoped for under democracy.

I was told that ethnic Macedonian parties held well over two-thirds of the seats in the new parliament, and they seem to take a united front in opposition to Albanian interests. For example, legislation enacted in March requires secondary school records to be written only in the Macedonian language using the Cyrillic alphabet, even in schools where the language of instruction is Albanian. In some areas, Albanian communities have been prohibited from having Albanian language schools even though unemployed Albanian teachers have offered to teach for free.

There is an across-the-board tightening of Albanian language instruction. In 1981, for example, there were 39 Albanian secondary schools in Macedonia; now there are only five. Albanians are also not allowed to give certain Albanian names to their children or to use Albanian geographical names in areas where they are a majority. Finally, in two municipalities where Albanians had won a large majority in local elections, they have not been allowed to form local governments because of opposition from the Macedonian minority.

I asked whether Albanians in Macedonia wanted autonomous status, and I was told that they did not, that they only wanted equal treatment. In this regard, my Albanian interlocutors complained that Albanians had more cultural rights in Macedonia under the Turks and Communists than they do under democracy. They lamented that much of the recent recognition of Macedonia's ethnic identity has been at the expense of Albanians.

The Situation in Macedonia

In this latter connection, Macedonians complained of decades of abuse from Serbia, which, until Tito gave republic status to Macedonia, refused to respect Macedonia's separate cultural and linguistic identity. They also complained of discriminatory treatment of Macedonians in Greece. We were told, for example, that Macedonian cultural centers were forbidden, that expatriate Greek Macedonians were not permitted to return for visits, and that Greek census takers would not permit Macedonians to register their ethnic identity. Macedonians also fear that in the event Yugoslavia breaks up, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria will conspire to divide the republic among themselves. I received a shocked reaction when I responded that there might be greater sympathy for Macedonians if they treated ethnic Albanians better.

In meetings with senior members of the Macedonian government, it was clear that they were exasperated not only by Serbian intransigence but also by what they considered to be irresponsible behavior on the part of the Slovenian and Croatian leadership. The Macedonians strongly support Prime Minister Markovic and believe that the most constructive way to reach a solution for the future of Yugoslavia was not by trying to resolve the issue of whether the country should be a federation or a confederation, but rather by seeking to reach agreement on the specific elements that a joint Yugoslav association should have. Discussions have been held on such specific elements, but their view is that these discussions have always broken down because of Croatian or

Slovenian insistence on the importance of nomenclature issues.

Macedonia wants very much to keep Yugoslavia together; and the new government issued a declaration of sovereignty only because it felt that that was necessary for Macedonia to be an equal player in negotiations over Yugoslavia's future. The Macedonian view is that Macedonia would stay in Yugoslavia as long as no one forced it out.

The Serbian Point of View

In Belgrade, I met with Slobodan Milosevic, the President of the Republic of Serbia. Most of our conversation centered on the situation in Kosovo. Milosevic described Kosovo as the heart of Serbia, where many Serbian monasteries, cultural monuments and cemeteries are located and that consequently Kosovo could never be separated from Serbia. He was convinced that the Albanians in Kosovo are secessionists determined to become a part of a Greater Albania, despite the fact that both the government in Tirana and the leaders of all of Kosovo's political parties and human rights groups firmly deny any interest in creating a Greater Albania.

I expressed strong concern about Serbian human rights violations in Kosovo, adding that many respected international organizations shared my view. Milosevic denied that there were any violations of Albanian human rights in Kosovo and said that the photographs of torture victims I had been shown in Skopje were fakes. Another Serbian official who was present in the meeting with Milosevic falsely stated that the European Parliament recently gave Serbia a clean bill of health regarding the treatment of Albanians in Kosovo. In fact, the European Parliament's report confirmed all of the violations described to me by Kosovo's Albanian leaders and called upon the Serbian government "to abandon forthwith its repressive policy in Kosovo which is clearly aimed at destroying the cultural identity, the economy and the democratic rights of its Albanian inhabitants," adding that the Kosovo situation placed Yugoslavia in violation of its CSCE obligations.

I said that I wanted to visit Kosovo on this trip but had concluded that if I had gone there the same abuse that occurred during Senator Dole's August 1990 trip might be repeated. Milosevic replied that no one suffered during Senator Dole's trip; Albanian separatists had portrayed his visit as a rescue mission and consequently demonstrations had to be banned for reasons of public safety. When I asked if there would be any objection to the establishment of a U.S. cultural center in Pristina, Milosevic said, "why not? Serbia would welcome such a center, and it would be good."

In our discussion of the Yugoslav unity question, Milosevic said that Serbia wants to resolve the problem in a peaceful and democratic fashion, but there are some in Yugoslavia who want to use the tactics of force and pressure. The best solution, he said, would be for all Yugoslav peoples to live together. Those peoples that wish to leave Yugoslavia should be able to do so, but only in a democratic fashion and on the basis of procedures that are the same throughout Yugoslavia. The most democratic and direct way would be through a referendum.

In response to my question about how this would apply to Serbs in Croatia, Milosevic said that where they lived in a compact mass, they could vote on the basis of their ethnic preference; others would become a national minority in a state with redrawn borders (something the Croatians said they would never accept). Milosevic did not address the inconsistency between his advocacy of separating Serbian enclaves from Croatia and his refusal to allow a similar choice for Albanians in Kosovo.

Milosevic also mentioned the possibility of a voluntary exchange of peoples among republics. When I asked whether he knew of any voluntary exchanges anywhere in the world that could be considered as successful, he offered none, saying only that some kind of "corrective measures" would be desirable.

The Travails of Prime Minister Markovic

While in Belgrade, I also met with the federal Prime Minister, Ante Markovic. Markovic said he deeply appreciated President Bush's letter of March 28, which expressed (a) support for Markovic's political and economic reform program, (b) U.S. opposition to the use of force or intimidation to resolve Yugoslavia's problems, and (c) U.S. support for Yugoslavia's unity (adding that the U.S. "will not encourage or reward those who would break the country apart"). I registered my strong support for the President's message and for Markovic's reform program.

Markovic lamented that his once successful economic reform program was now a shambles, because the individual republics had negated it with irresponsible actions of their own. He said he would not give up, however, and still saw a chance to revive his political and economic program. While admitting that there was a dangerous impasse, he drew hope from the fact that all of the competing ideas from the republics had been stalemated.

Regarding political reform, Markovic said that Yugoslavia could not exist as a "unitary" state (presumably one in which

republican boundaries would disappear or be rendered meaningless and in which Serbia would dominate); nor was a confederation (as advocated by Croatia and Slovenia) possible. Instead, he argued for a confederal/federal synthesis. I asked whether the Swiss model could be adapted to Yugoslavia's situation, but Markovic thought it would inevitably fail.

As the meeting drew to a close, I asked how the United States could be of help. Markovic responded by saying that the U.S. should continue to give support to his reforms, but that more than words would be required. Specifically, he asked for U.S. support for his request to reschedule the \$648 million in arrearages owed to Paris Club creditors. He added that his highest immediate priority was an IMF standby arrangement.

What the Croats and Slovenes Want

The final segment of my program in Yugoslavia was a visit to Croatia, where I met with both Croatian and Slovenian leaders. I was told that Croatia insisted on redefining Yugoslavia, because Serbia would always seek to dominate a federal state. Croats saw no prospect of designing any federal safeguards that would work against the Serbs, given their history and outlook. Other points made to me were as follows:

-- Croatia already sees itself as a sovereign state and is anxious to negotiate a new arrangement with the other republics. It could never, however, accept Serbia's referendum concept, because it would lead to a Serbian-dominated federal state. The Croatian solution is a union of sovereign states with agreed upon common services and respect for current internal and external borders.

-- Croatia will respect the rights of Serbs and other minorities. An overwhelming majority of Serbs in Croatia accept the legitimacy of the new government and do not feel threatened. The dissident Serbs in the Krayina region are only 20% of Croatian Serbs and should not be threatening a democracy of 4.5 million. If they will just tell us what they want, we will give it to them; all we ask is that they agree to be part of Croatia. Everything else is negotiable.

-- Economic reform is not solely dependent on Markovic. Croatia supported Markovic's program but objected to his compromises to placate Serbia. Croatia rejects charges that it is moving, not to a free market, but to a state-controlled economy, Croatia is committed to a Western-style free market system, but feels it has a better privatization plan than Markovic.

The Slovenian spokesmen echoed many of the Croatian views, but were stronger in expressing determination to go it alone as an independent state if the negotiations on redefining Yugoslavia failed. They pointed out that in a December 1990 referendum, 90% of Slovenians voted for independence if a new Yugoslav arrangement could not be negotiated in six months. That would make June 23, 1991 independence day.

I was told that the Slovenian government is bound by this plebiscite and must respect the results. To that end, the government is preparing the legal framework for an independent Slovenia, and everything will be ready by June 23 or even earlier. The Slovenes, however, do not seem to have thought through how they would fare economically outside of Yugoslavia, but they are so hopeless about the future of Yugoslavia that they appear willing to run whatever risks are involved in independence.

These Slovenes consider Serbia so different from Slovenia and Croatia that even a democratic Serbia would be a problem. Co-existence with a Milosevic-led Serbia, however, is out of the question, I was told; and the situation in Kosovo was cited as an example of Milosevic's attitude toward other nationalities.

As these Slovenes see it, Milosevic is presenting two unacceptable alternatives. One is a centralist, Serbia-dominated "Serboslavia". The other is a Greater Serbia. In their judgment, Milosevic has given up on the former and is now concentrating on the latter, which would entail efforts to absorb parts of Bosnia and Croatia.

In the view of these Slovenes, there are only two acceptable options for them: a confederation, which Milosevic has rejected out of hand, and negotiations between Slovenia and the rest of Yugoslavia. According to this latter approach, Slovenia would step aside and wait for the other five republics to develop a unified position and then Slovenia would negotiate with them as a group.

When I asked whether Slovenia didn't consider that violence would be inevitable if it pulled out of the federation, I was told that Slovenia was already independent in all but name and that there will be bloodshed regardless of Slovenia's status. I was also told that there was a problem with President Bush's letter of March 28, which is perceived in Slovenia as emphasizing Yugoslav unity over democracy; such an ordering of priorities has been used by centralist forces and the army to conclude that they had Western support for

intervening and restricting the rights of the peoples of Yugoslavia.

These Slovenian representatives also expressed annoyance with U.S. pressure to remain in Yugoslavia in order to spread the "germ of democracy." Their response is "what's in it for us?" They added that Slovenia doesn't have the means to continue its missionary work, and in any event Serbs express resentment about preaching from Slovenia. Finally, they emphasized the uniqueness of Slovenia's situation, saying that the Yugoslav problem was basically a conflict between Serbia and Croatia; and in this latter connection, they suggested that the CSCE Conflict Resolution Center in Vienna might be helpful.

Recommendations

-- The President's letter of March 28 is a sound basis for U.S. policy toward Yugoslavia, but future statements should make it clearer that among Yugoslavia's nationality problems is the suppression of human rights in Kosovo. Since Serbia considers ethnic Albanians to be a "national minority" rather than a "nationality", a narrow interpretation of the President's letter could convey the impression that Kosovo is outside the area of U.S. concern.

-- In this connection, the U.S. Information Agency should establish a cultural center in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo. Albanians constitute the third largest ethnic group in Yugoslavia, and renewed violence there could be the spark that ignites a wave of separatism throughout Yugoslavia. It is essential, in my view, that the United States have a permanent presence in Kosovo.

-- Although the preservation of Yugoslav unity is desirable, at some point U.S. support for unity may prove to be incompatible with U.S. support for democracy, human rights, reform and the peaceful settlement of disputes. The United States should not expect republics such as Slovenia and Croatia to wait forever for Serbia to accommodate them. Consequently, it is not too early for the Administration to begin to formulate policy options for dealing with a disintegrating Yugoslavia.

-- U.S. economic policy toward Yugoslavia should be focused on strengthening Prime Minister Markovic in his pursuit of political and economic reforms. In this connection, serious consideration should be given to Markovic's request for support in obtaining debt rescheduling and IMF standby assistance.

-- U.S. economic policy toward Yugoslavia should also have a strong human rights element, particularly with regard to the situation in Kosovo. In this connection, the United States should make every effort to encourage development projects in Kosovo under which ethnic Albanians would obtain a proportionate share of the benefits. In addition, U.S. influence should be used to ensure that funds from non-Yugoslav sources for development projects in Serbia are channeled through the federal government or through non-government-controlled Serbian entities that do not discriminate against non-Serbian ethnic communities.

-- The Administration should pursue the Slovenian suggestion of involving the CSCE Center for Conflict Resolution in the resolution of nationality disputes in Yugoslavia, including in Kosovo.