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CORRECTING SOME COMMON MISPERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CRISIS IN YUGOSLAVIA  
THE HONORABLE HELEN DELICH BENTLEY  
NOVEMBER 18, 1991

Mr. Speaker:

With the sieges of Vukovar and Dubrovnik monopolizing the current headlines in the media, I thought it imperative that I speak out on a number of things about the conflict in Yugoslavia that are reaching neither my fellow members nor the American public.

The situation in Yugoslavia is much more complicated than the media purports it to be, and so I stand in front of you today in order to correct some common misperceptions, and perhaps fill out a fuller picture of the many forces at work that are perpetuating the conflict.

The media has conveniently labelled the current government in the Republic of Serbia as the last refuge of Stalinism in Europe. This is far from the truth. There are a number of thriving opposition parties in the Serbian parliament. In fact, two weeks ago, Slobodan Rakatic, the Vice-President of the Serbian Renewal Party, the largest opposition group in Serbia, was here in Washington to speak with Members of Congress, Administration officials, and a number of other groups.

In addition, Serbia has a liberalized trade policy, with a large amount of private investment and firms.

I must say, however, that it is simple fact that none of the governments of the Republics of Yugoslavia <sup>15</sup> are truly democratic. Many scholars and specialists on Balkan affairs concur on this.

Serbia's Stalinist label, however, is frequently juxtaposed in the media with the term "democratic" Croatia. "Democratic" is a very unfortunate misnomer when applied to the current regime in Croatia.

*not a sentence*

Franjo Tudjman, President of Croatia, like Milosevic, was elected on a nationalist platform, which I may add, was virulently anti-Serb. Upon gaining power, he placed former communists in the majority of his administration posts, and in fact, has replicated the institutional structure of the former communist government down to the township level. Croatia is a one-party state, with any opposition openly suppressed by the current regime.

Mr. Tudjman, despite having been elected in April of 1990, has enacted very little, if any, democratic reform in the Republic of Croatia; no privatization of business, no viable opposition parties, no independent press. (He, in fact,) has surrounded himself with former communists, with no other interest except to stay in power.

In addition, Mr. Tudjman, upon election, enacted a series of laws redesignating the Serbian minority in Croatia, which it had previously considered an equal, as a national minority. He denied their rights to the use of the Cyrillic alphabet, and while officially denied as government policy, also forced ethnic Serbs living in Croatia to sign loyalty oaths to the Republic of Croatia under threat of termination of employment. *Last year,*

Even today, Serbs living in the metropolitan centers in Croatia are still forced to sign loyalty oaths, and are frequently harassed and discriminated against, their houses and churches subject to vandalism, themselves subject to threats of bodily harm and death. This has resulted thousands of Serbs leaving Zagreb, which had a population of around 100,000 before the outbreak of hostilities.

Compare this to the approximately 100,000 Croatians currently residing in Belgrade, who report very few, if any instances of this type focused towards them as Croatians living in Serbia.