

Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU)
Memorandum 1986

[The President of SANU at this time was Dobrica Cosic]

There is deep concern in Yugoslavia because of stagnating social development, economic difficulties, growing social tensions, and open inter-ethnic clashes. A serious crisis has engulfed not only the political and economic arenas, but Yugoslavia's entire system of law and order as well. Idleness and irresponsibility at work, corruption and nepotism, a lack of confidence in and disregard for the law, bureaucratic obstinacy, growing mistrust among individuals, and increasingly arrogant individual and group egoism have become daily phenomena. The resulting blow to moral values and to the reputation of leading public institutions and a lack of faith in the competence of decision-makers have spread apathy and bitterness among the public and produced alienation from all the mainstays and symbols of law and order. An objective examination of Yugoslav reality suggests that the present crisis may end in social shocks with unforeseeable consequences, including such a catastrophic eventuality as the fragmentation of the Yugoslav state. No one can close his eyes to what is happening and to what may happen. Certainly, our nation's oldest institute of scientific and cultural creativity cannot do so.

In these fateful times, the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences feels obliged to express its views on society's condition in the conviction that this will help us find a way out of our present troubles. The nature of this document, however, obliges us to limit ourselves to the key issues of Yugoslav reality. Regretfully, these issues include the undefined and difficult position of the Serbian nation, a position brought to the fore by recent events.

In order to understand the primacy of ethnicity in the present practice of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia it is necessary to consider the influence of the Comintern on the Communist Party of Yugoslavia between the two world wars. The Comintern's strategy during that period derived from the conclusion that following the failure of the proletarian revolution in Western Europe, the Communist parties of Eastern, Central, and Southern Europe had to depend on national movements, even though they were expressly anti-socialist and based on the idea of national rather than class unity. Stalin engaged in crushing all opposition to such a strategy (as, for example, in the case of Sima Markovic, one of the founders of the Yugoslav Communist Party). In this spirit, the solution to the national question was formulated and developed theoretically by Sperans (Kardelj) in his book "Razvoj slovenskoga narodnoga vprsanja" (The Development of the Slovene National Question), which generally served as the ideological model for Yugoslav development in the direction of a confederation of sovereign republics and autonomous regions, which was finally achieved by the Constitution of 1974.

The two most developed republics, which achieved their national programs with this Constitution, are now the most ardent defenders of the existing system. Thanks to the political position of their leaders at the centers of political power, they have held (both before and after the decisive years of the 1960s) the initiative in all matters affecting the political and economic system. They modelled the social and economic structure of Yugoslavia to suit their own desires and needs. Nothing would seem more normal that they now defend the structure that they stubbornly took so long to build, a structure that represents the attainment of most of their national programs.

No one needs convincing that separatism and nationalism are active on the social scene, but there is insufficient understanding of the fact that such trends have been made ideologically possible by the Constitution of 1974. The constant reinforcement of and the competition engendered by separatism and nationalism have driven the (ethnic) nations further from one another to a critical degree. The manipulation of language and the confinement of scientific and cultural professionals within the ranks of the republics and regions are sorry signs of the growing power of particularism. All new ethnogeneses are unfortunate products of locally closed, regional ideologies and shackled logic, and they are also symptomatic of a retreat from a common past, a common present, and a common future. It is as if everyone wished to flee as fast and as far as possible from a collapsing house. Mental attitudes warn us that the political crisis has reached the critical point, threatening the complete destabilization of Yugoslavia. Kosovo is the clearest expression of this.

No form of political oppression and discrimination on the basis of nationality is properly acceptable in modern society. The Yugoslav solution to the nationalities question could be considered at its inception an exemplary model of a multinational federation in which the principle of the unity of the state and state policy was successfully joined with the principle of the political and cultural autonomy of nationalities and national minorities. During the past two decades the principle of unity has become progressively weaker and the principle of national autonomy is stressed, which has in practice changed into a sovereignty of the parts (republics, which are not ethnically homogenous as a rule). The weaknesses that were present in the model from the beginning became more and more visible. All nations are not equal: the Serbian nation, for example, did not obtain the right to its own state. Unlike national minorities, portions of the Serbian people, who live in other republics in large numbers, do not have the right to use their own language and alphabet, to organize politically and culturally, and to develop the unique culture of their nation. The unstoppable persecution of Serbs in Kosovo in a drastic manner shows that those principles that protect the autonomy of a minority (Albanians) and not applied when it comes to a minority within a minority (Serbs, Montenegrins, Turks and Gypsies in Kosovo). Considering the existing forms of national

discrimination, present-day Yugoslavia cannot be considered a democratic state.

. . .Yugoslavia is seen less as a community of citizens, nations and nationalities all equal before the law, and more as a community of eight equal territories. But even this variety of equality does not apply to Serbia because of its special legal and political position which reflects the tendency to keep the Serbian nation under constant supervision. The guiding principle behind this policy has been "a weak Serbia, a strong Yugoslavia" and this has evolved into an influential mind-set: if rapid economic growth were permitted the Serbs, who are the largest nation, it would pose a danger to the other nations of Yugoslavia. And so all possibilities are grasped to place increasing obstacles in the way of their economic development and political consolidation. One of the most serious of such obstacles is Serbia's present undefined constitutional position, so full of internal conflicts.

The Constitution of 1974, in fact, divided Serbia into three parts. The autonomous provinces within Serbia were made equal to the republics, save that they were not defined as such and that they do not have the same number of representatives in the various bodies of the federation. They make up for this shortcoming by being able to interfere in the internal relations of Serbia proper through the republic's common assembly (while their assemblies remain completely autonomous). The political and legal position of Serbia proper is quite vague - Serbia proper is neither a republic nor a province. Relationships in the republic of Serbia are quite confused. The Executive Council, which is a body of the republic's assembly, is in fact the Executive Council for Serbia proper. This is not the only absurdity in the limitation of authority. The excessively broad and institutionally well established autonomy of the provinces has created two new fissures within the Serbian nation. The truth is that the proautonomy and separatist forces insisted on increasing autonomy, but this would have been difficult to achieve had they not received moral and political support from those republics in which separatist tendencies have never died out.

Relations between Serbia and the provinces cannot be reduced solely or even primarily to a formal legal interpretation of two constitutions. It is primarily a matter of the Serbian nation and their state. A nation that has regained statehood after a long and bloody struggle, that has achieved civil democracy, and that lost two and half million kinsmen in two world wars underwent the experience of having a bureaucratically constructed party commission determine that after four decades in the new Yugoslavia it alone was condemned to be without its own state. A more bitter historic defeat in peacetime cannot be imagined.

The expulsion of the Serbian nation from Kosovo bears spectacular witness to its historic defeat. In the spring of 1981 a very special, but nevertheless open

and total war, prepared by administrative, political, and legal changes made at various periods, was declared against the Serbian people. Waged through the skilful application of various methods and tactics, with a division of functions, and with the active, not merely passive, and little concealed support of certain political centers within Yugoslavia (more pernicious than the support coming from outside), this open war, which has yet to be looked in the face and called by its proper name, has been continuing for almost five years. It has thus lasted longer than the entire Yugoslav war of liberation (from April 6, 1941 to May 9, 1945). The Balli (anti-communist nationalist) uprising in Kosovo and Metohija that broke out just before the end of the war with the participation of fascist units was broken militarily in 1944-45, but it appears not to have been broken politically. Its present form, disguised with a new content, is proceeding more successfully and is moving towards a victorious outcome. A final showdown with neo-fascism did not materialize; all of the measures so far taken have only removed the expression of this aggression from the streets and in fact, its racially motivated and unretracted goals, which are being sought after by all means and at all costs, have only been reinforced. Deliberately drastic sentences are even pronounced on young offenders in order to incite and inflame inter-ethnic hatreds.

The physical, political, legal and cultural genocide perpetrated against the Serbian population of Kosovo and Metohija is the greatest defeat suffered by Serbia in the wars of liberation she waged between Orasac in 1804 and the uprising of 1941. Responsibility for this defeat falls primarily on the still living Comintern heritage in the nationalities policy of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and on the acquiescence of Serbian communists in this policy and on the exorbitant ideological and political delusion, ignorance, immaturity, and chronic opportunism of an entire generation of post-war Serbian politicians, always on the defensive and always more concerned with the opinions others have of them and of their hesitant explanations of Serbia's position than with the true facts affecting the future of the nation that they lead.

Kosovo is not the only region in which the Serbian nation is being pressured by discrimination. The absolute (and not merely relative) fall in the number of Serbs in Croatia is sufficient proof of this assertion. According to the 1948 census there were 543,795 Serbs in Croatia (14.48% of the total). According to the 1981 census their number has been reduced to 531,502 or only 11.5% of the total number of inhabitants in Croatia. Over 33 peacetime years the number of Serbs in Croatia has declined, even in relation to the immediate post-war period when the first census was taken and when the effects of the war on the number of Serbian inhabitants in Croatia was well known.

Lika, Kordun, and Banija have remained the most underdeveloped regions of Croatia and this has greatly encouraged the emigration of Serbs to Serbia and migrations to other parts of Croatia where the Serbs, being newcomers, are a minority and socially inferior group, greatly exposed to assimilation. In any

case, the Serbs in Croatia are otherwise exposed to a sophisticated and quite effective policy of assimilation. One component of this policy is the prohibition of all Serbian associations and cultural institutions in Croatia, which had had a rich tradition dating from the Austro-Hungarian and pre-war Yugoslav periods, and the imposition of an official language that bears the name of another nation (Croatia), thus giving concrete shape to national inequality. A constitutional provision has made this language obligatory for the Serbs in Croatia, and nationalistically inclined Croatian linguists are distancing it systematically and by well-organized actions from the language used in the other republics of the Serbo-Croatian language area, and this is helping to weaken the ties

binding the Serbs in Croatia to other Serbs. Such action is gladly undertaken at the cost of interrupting language continuity among the Croats themselves and of eliminating international terms that are invaluable for communicating with other cultures, particularly in the field of science and technology. But the Serbian community in Croatia is not just cut off from their homeland culturally; that homeland cannot keep itself informed of their circumstances or of their economic or cultural situation anywhere near the extent to which it is possible for some nations in Yugoslavia to maintain contact with their compatriots in other countries. The integrity of the Serbian nation and its culture in Yugoslavia as a whole is an issue vital to its survival and progress.

With the exception of the Independent State of Croatia from 1941- 45, Serbs in Croatia have never been as persecuted in the past as they are now. The solution to their national position must be considered an urgent political question. In so much as a solution cannot be found, the results could be disastrous, not just in relation to Croatia, but to all of Yugoslavia.

The question of the Serbian people's position is given considerable weight by the fact that a large number of Serbians live outside of Serbia, especially Serbia proper, and that their number is larger than the total number of people of some other nations. According to the census of 1981, 24% of the Serbian people (1,958,000) live outside of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, which is considerably more than the number of Slovenians, Albanians, Macedonians and taken individually, almost the same as the Muslims. Outside of Serbia proper there are 3,285,000 Serbs or 40.3% of their total population. In the general disintegration process which has taken over Yugoslavia, the Serbs are hit with the most intense disintegration. The present course which our society in Yugoslavia has taken is totally opposite from the one that has moved for decades and centuries until the formation of a unified state. This process is aimed at the total destruction of the national unity of the Serbian people.

Having borne for over half a century the stigma and handicap of being the jailer of the other Yugoslav nations, the Serbian nation was incapable of deriving support from its own history. Many aspects of this history itself were even

brought into question. The democratic bourgeoisie tradition for which Serbia had struggled successfully in the 19th century has remained in the shadow cast by the Serbian socialist and labor movement until quite recently because of narrow-mindedness and lack of objectivity on the part of official historiography. This so impoverished and restricted the true picture of the contribution made by Serbian bourgeoisie society to law, culture, and statesmanship that, deformed in this manner, it could not provide mental or moral support to anyone nor could it serve as a foothold for preserving or reviving historical self-confidence. The brave and honorable efforts at liberation exerted by the Serbs of Bosnia-Herzegovina and by all Yugoslav youth, which included Young Bosnia, experienced a similar fate and were pushed into the historical background by the contributions of a class ideology whose proponents and creators were Austrian Marxists, confirmed opponents of movements of national liberation.

Influenced by the ruling ideology, the cultural achievements of the Serbian people are undergoing alienation, being usurped by others or denigrated, or they are ignored and retrogress; the language is being displaced and the Cyrillic script is gradually being lost. In this connection, the realm of literature is serving as the main arena for caprice and anarchy. The cultural and spiritual integrity of no other Yugoslav nation is so roughly challenged as that of the Serbian nation. No other literary and artistic heritage is so disordered, ravaged, and confused as the Serbian heritage. The political criteria of the ruling ideology are imposed on Serbian culture as being more valuable and stronger than scientific or historical criteria.

After the dramatic interethnic conflicts of the world war, it had appeared that chauvinism has lost momentum was even on the road to oblivion. This appearance has proven deceptive. It was not long before nationalism began rising up once more, and every change in the constitution served to promote its growth. Nationalism has been promoted from above; its chief proponents have been politicians. The fundamental cause of this multi-dimensional crisis is to be found in the ideological defeat of socialism at the hands of nationalism, which has produced the centrifugal processes that have brought the Yugoslav community to the brink of ruin and which has destroyed the old system of values.

Its roots lie in the ideology of the Comintern and in the nationalities policy of the pre-war CPY. The revanchism directed at the Serbian nation as an "exploiting" nation that was built into this policy has had far-reaching consequences for inter-ethnic relations, the social organization, the economic system, and the fate of moral and cultural values since the Second World War. The Serbian nation has been encumbered with a feeling of historical guilt and has remained the only nation not to solve its national problem and not to receive its own state like the other nations. Therefore, the first and foremost action must be to remove this burden of historical guilt from the Serbian

nation, to categorically deny the contention that it enjoyed a privileged economic position between the two world wars, and to refrain from denigrating Serbia's liberation-oriented history and contribution in creating Yugoslavia.

Complete national and cultural integrity of the Serbian people is their historic and democratic right, no matter in which republic or province they might find themselves living. The attainment of equality and an independent development have profound historical meaning for the Serbian people. In less than fifty years, over two successive generations, the Serbian nation has been exposed to such severe trials—twice exposed to physical extermination, to forced assimilation, to religious conversion, to cultural genocide, to ideological indoctrination, and to the denigration and renunciation of their own traditions beneath an imposed guilt complex, and thereby disarmed intellectually and politically, that they could not but leave deep spiritual wounds that cannot be ignored as this century of the great technological takeoff draws to a close. In order to have a future in the international family of cultured and civilized nations, the Serbian nation must have an opportunity to find itself again and become a historical agent, must re-acquire an awareness of its historical and spiritual being, must look its economic and cultural interests square in the eyes, and must find a modern social and national program that will inspire this generation and generations to come.

The present depressing condition of the Serbian nation, with chauvinism and Serbophobia being ever more violently expressed in certain circles, favor of a revival of Serbian nationalism, an increasingly drastic expression of Serbian national sensitivity, and reactions that can be volatile and even dangerous. We must not overlook or underestimate these dangers for a moment under any circumstances. But a principled struggle against Serbian chauvinism cannot be based on the reigning ideological and political symmetry in historical guilt. The rejection of this symmetry, fatal to the spirit and morale, with its trite falsehoods and injustices, is a precondition for mobility and effectiveness on the part of democratic, Yugoslav, humanistic awareness in contemporary Serbian culture.

The fact that ordinary citizens and the working class are not represented in the appropriate councils in the Federal Assembly cannot simply be ascribed to favoritism for ethnic nationalisms; it is also the result of an attempt to place Serbia in a position of inequality and thereby weaken her political influence. But the greatest calamity is the fact that the Serbian nation does not possess a state like all of the other nations. True, the first article of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Serbia contains a provision to the effect that Serbia is a state, but the question immediately arises: What kind of a state is one that lacks authority within its own territory and lacks the means to protect the personal property of its citizens, to prevent genocide in Kosovo, and to prevent the emigration of Serbs from their ancient homeland? This position underlines the political discrimination against Serbia, especially when one remembers that the

Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has imposed internal federalism on Serbia, creating a permanent source of conflicts between Serbia Proper and the provinces. The aggressive Albanian chauvinism in Kosovo cannot be contained until Serbia ceases to be the sole republic whose internal relations are ordered by others.

The Federal Constitution has formally established the equality of all the republics but this has been rendered worthless in practice by forcing the Republic of Serbia to renounce many of its rights and powers in favor of the autonomous provinces, the status of which is regulated by the Federal Constitution to a considerable extent. Serbia must openly state that this is an imposed arrangement. This is especially true in regard to the position of the provinces, which in reality have been promoted to republics and which regard themselves far more as constituent elements of the Federation rather than as parts of the republic of Serbia. Besides failing to consider a state for the Serbian nation, the Yugoslav Constitution also created insurmountable difficulties to the establishment of such a state. In order to satisfy Serbia's legitimate interests, a revision of that constitution is unavoidable. The autonomous provinces must become true integral parts of the Republic of Serbia by granting them a degree of autonomy that would not destroy the integrity of the Republic and would make it possible to act in the common interests of the wider community.

The unhappy matter of Serbian statehood is not the only deficiency that must be corrected by constitutional amendments. The 1974 constitution turned Yugoslavia into a very unstable state community, prone to consider alternatives other than the Yugoslav alternative, as has been made clear in recent statements by public figures in Slovenia and the earlier positions taken by Macedonian politicians. Such considerations and fragmentation lead to the notion that Yugoslavia is in danger of further corrosion. The Serbian nation cannot meekly await the future in such a state of uncertainty. Therefore, all of the nations within Yugoslavia must be given the opportunity to express their wants and intentions. Serbia would then be able to declare and define her own national interests. Discussions and agreements in this vein must precede an examination of the Constitution. Naturally, Serbia must not take a passive stand in all this, waiting to hear what others will say, as she has done so often in the past.

The position of equality that Serbia must strive for presupposes the same initiative in deciding on key political and economic issues as enjoyed by others. Four decades of Serbian passivity have been bad for Yugoslavia as a whole by failing to contribute ideas and critical appraisals based on her longer state tradition, enhanced feeling for national independence, and rich experience in struggling against home-grown usurpers of political freedom. Unless the Serbian nation within Serbia participate on an equal footing in the entire process of decision making and implementation, Yugoslavia cannot be strong--

and Yugoslavia's very existence as a democratic, socialist community will be called into question.

An entire period in the development of the Yugoslav community and of Serbia has clearly ended in a historically worn-out ideology, overall stagnation, and ever more obvious regression in the economic, political, moral, and cultural spheres. Such a situation imperatively requires a profound and well-thought out, rationally grounded, and decisively implemented reform of the entire governmental structure and social organization of the Yugoslav community of nations, and speedy and beneficial integration into the modern world through social democracy. The human resources of the entire country must be involved to the utmost extent in social reform in order that we may become a productive, enlightened, and democratic society capable of existing on the fruits of our own labor and creativity and able to make our fair contribution to the human race.

The Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences is taking this occasion to express once again its willingness to promote this portentous undertaking and the historical aspirations of our generation with all the resources at its disposal.