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Benedetto Zaccaria

A Failed Transition: Ante Marković, the European Commission, and the End of the Cold War (1989–1990)

Introduction

Famously, the European Community (EC) was the major international organization to be directly involved in the first, unsuccessful attempts to manage the Yugoslav crisis of the early 1990s.¹ This chapter explores the EC's views on Yugoslavia during the crucial biennium 1989–1990, marked by the deterioration of the internal situation in the federation against the background of the reforms promoted by Ante Marković (who held the presidency of the Federal government between March 1989 and December 1991),² and a changing international setting determined by the fall of the Berlin Wall and Belgrade's consequent search for closer integration with the EC. The goal here is to identify the major international determinants which made the EC the main reference point of the Yugoslav federal leadership in the last attempts to reform the country. The EC's involvement in the Yugoslav crisis has been the object of several scholarly works, which have mostly limited their analyses to the Community's mediation during the last months of the state crisis (from mid-1990 to late 1991),³ focusing on the paradoxical coincidence between the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the launching of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union.⁴ Most contributions tend to underrate the EC's diplomatic and economic involvement in Yugoslav affairs during the Cold War and fail to consider that – as shown in this chapter – it was the Yugoslav authorities themselves who, in the late 1980s, urged the

¹ See Josip Glaurdić, *The Hour of Europe: Western Powers and the Breakup of Yugoslavia* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2011).

² I refer to Yugoslavia's Federal Executive Council (*Savezno izvršno veće*).

³ Rafael Biermann, "Back to the roots. The European Community and the Dissolution of Yugoslavia – Policies under the Impact of Global Sea-Change," *Journal of European Integration History* 10 (2009): 29–50.

⁴ Francesco Privitera, "The Relationship Between the Dismemberment of Yugoslavia and European Integration," in *Reflections on the Balkan Wars: Ten Years After the Break Up of Yugoslavia*, ed. Jeffrey S. Morton et al. (Basingstoke–New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 35–54; Sonia Lucarelli, *Europe and the Breakup of Yugoslavia: A Political Failure in Search of Scholarly Explanation* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2000).

EC to mediate on the very basis of this tradition. Within this framework, a special relationship was established between the Yugoslav federal government and the European Commission, in view of the latter's direct competence in coordinating Western economic and financial strategies towards Eastern and Central Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The chapter also argues that the end of the Cold War did not imply Yugoslavia's declining strategic importance for its Western European partners. On the contrary, before the collapse, the Yugoslav federation was fully included in the Community's efforts at stabilizing the whole Eastern and Central European scenario through political, economic and financial means.

The chapter is structured around three sections. The first covers the EC's perception of centrifugal tendencies in Yugoslavia and the relationship between the Federal government and the individual republics in the late 1980s. The second section addresses the consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the crisis of the European socialist regimes on the course of EC-Yugoslav relations. The third considers Brussels' views on the reformist approach developed by Marković to favor the country's closer association with the EC. As most documents from former Yugoslav archives (including the *Arhiv Jugoslavije* in Belgrade) covering the state crisis have not yet been declassified and made available for research, this chapter is mostly based on archival sources from Community archives, focusing on the EC's viewpoint on internal events in Yugoslavia.

The EC and the Evolution of Yugoslavia's Balance in the Late 1980s

In April 1980, a few weeks before the death of Josip Broz Tito (4 May 1980), Yugoslavia's leader since 1945 and the very symbol of the federation, the EC and Yugoslavia signed a cooperation agreement which, in view of Tito's death, aimed at expressing the will of the EC to support the country's stability. The 1980 agreement was grounded on a solid political rationale which had previously been agreed upon by the parties in the so-called Belgrade Declaration of 2 December 1976. The latter recognized Yugoslavia as a non-aligned, developing, Mediterranean country. Although the EC had expressed its intentions to help Yugoslavia recover from the dangerous spiral of trade deficit and foreign indebtedness which it had entered since the early 1970s, Brussels and Belgrade had also agreed to keep a well-defined distance: beyond this declaration lay the firm will of the Yugoslav authorities to exclude any prospect of political association with

the Community, which would alter the country's non-aligned stance.⁵ The limits imposed by the 1976 Declaration were to affect the evolution of relations between the parties throughout the 1980s, despite the rapid deterioration of Yugoslavia's internal economic balance.

Within the Community framework, it was the Commission which was primarily concerned with the Yugoslav question, by virtue of its exclusive and direct competences in the commercial field. In 1985, the Commission representation in Belgrade – which had been established after the conclusion of the 1980 cooperation agreement – reported that the federation's status quo after the death of Tito was preserved, but that several other factors were undermining it: the low productivity of internal investments, rising inflation, and mounting republican opposition against the federal center.⁶ The year 1985 also marked the end of the commercial protocol established by the 1980 agreement, and the European Commission was deeply engaged in its renewal and improvement. For its part, the Yugoslav government requested the rapid conclusion of negotiations, to safeguard the volume of bilateral trade and, even more importantly, to face the challenge stemming from the launch of the Single Market project by the European Commission led by Jacques Delors. The deepening of integration among the EC member states was indeed a challenge to the Yugoslav government, which feared its isolation and marginalization from the expanding Western European market. Negotiations proceeded swiftly. Delors visited Belgrade in July 1987 to set the seal on the renewal of the commercial agreement and on the conclusion of a financial protocol between Yugoslavia and the European Investment Bank.⁷ The enforcement of the 1980 Cooperation agreement stemmed from the shared belief by the EC member states' representatives in Belgrade that Yugoslavia's political stability was in their strategic interest.⁸ Indeed, in a joint report prepared in April 1987, the ambassadors of the twelve EC member states (hereafter, the Twelve) had noted the rising instability in the country and recommended the

5 See Benedetto Zaccaria, *The EEC's Yugoslav Policy in Cold War Europe, 1968–1980* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). On Yugoslavia's internal balance see Marie-Janine Calic, "The beginning of the End – The 1970s as a Historical Turning Point in Yugoslavia," in *The Crisis of Socialist Modernity. The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the 1970s*, ed. Marie-Janine Calic, Dietmar Neutaz and Julia Obertreis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 66–86.

6 Historical Archives of the European Commission (HAEC), Bruxelles Archives-Commission (BAC)/347/1991/185, Extrait du bilan du début d'année de la Délégation de la Commission des Communautés Européennes à Belgrade, relative à la situation politique, Bruxelles, 18 April 1985.

7 HAEC, BAC/230/1993/27, Briefing note for President Delors's visit to Yugoslavia from 23 to 25 July 1987 on the political situation in Yugoslavia, 13 July 1987.

8 HAEC, BAC/347/1991/185, Coopération politiques – situation en Yougoslavie, Belgrade, 30 April 1987.

Community's assistance "for a gradual and peaceful evolution towards a democratic, pluralistic political system and a real market economy. These two evolutions are closely linked in the Yugoslav context." This recommendation stemmed from the consideration that Yugoslavia was "entering a period of heightened potential for change without, for the time being at least, having been able to establish any mechanism for realizing that potential." The ambassadors observed that the crisis was chronic, not acute, although a series of episodes highlighted the decline in internal stability. Beyond the flawed economic system, the rise in both inflation and strikes and the internal political balance was closely scrutinized, with a special focus on the internal situations in Serbia and Slovenia. As regards the former, the ambassadors of the Twelve reported the publication of the notorious 1986 Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, which "criticized the LCY [League of Communists of Yugoslavia] for its monopoly of power and political interference in the economy" and complained of the government's inaction over Serbian problems. The ambassadors also noted that "despite official denunciation, very few academicians have distanced themselves from the Memorandum." Instead, in the case of Slovenia, the Ambassadors observed that the party leadership had shown great tolerance of dissent and that "alternative movements" had been allowed to flourish. This had led to open opposition to "such fundamental issues as the validity of Yugoslavia's revolution and the development of Yugoslavia since the Second World War." "These examples — the ambassadors also reported — reveal the extent to which a movement towards greater democratization has been allowed to take root in Slovenia. Politicians elsewhere in the Federation, including in the armed forces, would like to compel the Slovene authorities to take a more repressive line, but do not yet, apparently, see how." However, they concluded that, despite the tendency of the single republics to run their affairs in their own way had increased since the death of Tito, "no significant elements of the opposition are working for the break-up of the Federation."⁹

The ambassadors' report — which was meant to prepare the ground for further discussion within the intergovernmental framework of the European Political Cooperation — was therefore proposing the EC's support for a gradual process of internal change, whereas the dissolution of the federation was not contemplated. Yugoslav expectations for enhanced economic relations with the EC were boosted by the adoption, at the Cooperation Council meeting in December 1987, of a political resolution which committed both sides to strengthening, deep-

ening and widening their cooperation by fully exploiting the potential of the 1980 agreement.¹⁰ It is no wonder, then, that the EC's policy towards Yugoslavia between 1988 and late 1989 did not change from its traditional support to the federal center — as openly requested by Yugoslav authorities — with no clear signs of encouragement to centrifugal tendencies.¹¹ The Community's pro-federal stance was confirmed by the crisis undergone by the Yugoslav government led by the Bosnian Branko Mikulić — which had attempted a first round of market-oriented economic reforms but had resigned collectively in December 1988 due to the climate of increasing non-confidence in the country — and the appointment of a new government in March 1989 led by Ante Marković, a 65-year-old engineer who had built his reputation as director of the firm *Rade Končar*, and who was President of the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Croatia.¹² Since the beginning of his mandate, Marković had started to advocate a programme of democratization and political pluralism, market-oriented reforms and further integration of Yugoslavia within the Common Market.¹³

The Community's support to the federal center was also influenced by rising internal tension in the federation. Special concern focused on the manifestation organized by the Serbian republican authorities on 28 June 1989 to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. The Head of the Commission delegation in Belgrade, Marc Janssens, noted that the ambassadors of the Twelve had not taken part in the manifestation, as their presence might have been interpreted as support for an "unclarified situation, especially on the plan of human rights." Indeed, the situation in the autonomous province of Kosovo — a hotbed of tensions between the Albanian majority and the Serb minority — had attracted the attention of Community observers since the early 1980s, due to broader implications about the political stability of the federation. When compared with the reports sent by the Commission and member-states' representatives in previous months, this was the first to address in clear-cut terms Serbia's nationalist attitude and Slobodan Milošević's cult of personality. Janssens argued that: "The ceremony was a triumph for Serbia and primarily for its President, Slobodan Mi-

¹⁰ HAEC, BAC/347/1991/185, Note à l'attention de Monsieur Jean Durieux, Belgrade, 5 April 1989.

¹¹ For instance, no such signs emerge in HAEC, BAC/347/1991/185, Tel. 009 of 7 April 1987, From Belgrade to Brussels, Visite du Premier Ministre Mikulić en R.F.A.

¹² HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Note for the attention of Mr. J. Durieux, Belgrade, 2 January 1989.

¹³ HAEC, BAC/381/1991/34, Tel. 005 of 11 April 1989, From Belgrade to Brussels, Situation en Yougoslavie; HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Note à l'attention de M. Abel Matutes, Belgrade, 8 November 1989.

⁹ HAEC, BAC/347/1991/185, Coopération politiques — situation en Yougoslavie, Belgrade, 30 April 1987.

losevic [sic], who has been frenetically acclaimed and whose portraits are everywhere."¹⁴

Instead, the attitude of Slovenia and Croatia was depicted as one of prudence: "They are opposed to this agitation and they think that it is better to invite the population to work rather than manifest in the streets."¹⁵ Ljubljana and Zagreb were described as being in favor of "political liberalism," whereas Serbia was considered to be the expression of the traditional "political centralism" and the main opponent to Marković's "pro-Western and pro-Community attitude."¹⁶ Although the traditional EC support to the Federal center was confirmed, so were the traditional political limitations of EC-Yugoslav relations. However, in April 1989 Janssens reported the "airing of views about the option of full membership of the Community, possibly following a period of association."¹⁷ In this regard, particular interest was manifested by Yugoslavia's foreign minister, the Croat Budimir Lončar,¹⁸ and the Slovene republican authorities – in particular, the President of the Republic, Janez Stanovnik, and the President of the Executive Council, Dušan Šinigoj, during Janssens's visit to Ljubljana in September 1988.¹⁹ And yet, until November 1989, these views were not made explicit at official level.

The Fall of the Berlin Wall and Its Consequences on EC-Yugoslav Relations

The appointment of a new reformist government in Yugoslavia was the outcome of several internal and international factors which will not be addressed here in detail. In brief, Yugoslavia's dealing with international financial institutions, *in primis* the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to solve its trade deficit and for-

14 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Note à l'attention de M. A. Matutes, Situation politique en Yougoslavie, Belgrade, 6 July 1989.

15 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/34, Note à l'attention de Monsieur Claude Cheysson, Situation en Yougoslavie, Belgrade, 28 September 1988.

16 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Note à l'attention de M. A. Matutes, Situation politique en Yougoslavie, Belgrade, 6 July 1989.

17 HAEC, BAC/347/1991/185, Note à l'attention de Monsieur Jean Durieux, Belgrade, 5 April 1989.

18 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Note à l'attention de M. A. Matutes, Situation politique en Yougoslavie, Belgrade, 6 July 1989.

19 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/34, Note à l'attention de Monsieur Claude Cheysson, Situation en Yougoslavie, Belgrade, 28 September 1988.

eign indebtedness, were compelling the country to adopt structural reforms.²⁰ The latter were also intended to favor the launch of genuinely federal programmes to counter inter-republican rivalries and face internal economic crisis and public discontent.²¹ However, Marković's government came into force at a troubled historical juncture, marked by the legitimacy crisis of the Eastern European socialist regimes under the weight of internal discontent, trade deficit and foreign debt problems.²² And yet, internal change was slower in Yugoslavia, where a single, nation-wide opposition movement was not in place. Belgrade was therefore an attentive spectator of the evolution of events in the region. Although we still lack primary archival evidence of the attitude of the Yugoslav leadership vis-à-vis the gradual crisis of Communist regimes throughout 1989, we now know much more about the effects of this geopolitical turmoil on relations between Yugoslavia and the EC. The Western European integration question, which had been generally absent from Yugoslavia's public debate throughout the 1970s and early 1980s – it was treated as a technical question and only discussed at governmental level – also revived as an echo of the government's new activism towards the EC issue and the federation's relationship with it.²³ In February 1989, the Serb Oskar Kovač, a professor at the University of Belgrade and a member of the Federal government, publicly endorsed Yugoslavia's further integration with the EC as a way to modernizing and "Europeanizing" the country.²⁴ On 24 September 1989 Belgrade's main newspaper *NIN*, published two interviews to the Slovene Janez Drnovšek, the then Head of the Collective Presiden-

20 See Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995).

21 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Note for the attention of Mr. J. Durieux, Belgrade, 2 January 1989.

22 For a general overview, see Jacques Lévesque, "The East European revolutions of 1989," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 3: Endings*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 311–332.

23 Duško Lopandić, "Mjesto EEZ u institucionalnom sistemu razvijenih zemalja i perspektive odnosa s Jugoslavijom," *Međunarodni problemi* 2 (1987): 343–347; Ljubiša S. Adamović, ed., *Jugoslavija i Evropska ekonomska zajednica* (Belgrade: Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, 1988); Radovan Vukadinović, "Evropski izazovi i jugoslavenske opcije," *Politička misao* 27 (1990): 88–106. On the debate on European integration in Yugoslavia during the 1970s, see Benedetto Zaccaria, "From Liberalism to Underdevelopment: Yugoslav élites facing Western European integration in the long 1970s," in *European Socialist Regimes' Fateful Engagement with the West: National Strategies in the long 1970s*, ed. Federico Romero and Angela Romano (London: Routledge, 2020), 221–248.

24 *Nedeljni Dnevnik*, 26 February 1989, translated and quoted in HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Boudreau de Transmission, Belgrade, 21 March 1989.

cy, and Mihajlo Crnobrnja, Yugoslavia's ambassador to the EC.²⁵ Both expressed the hope for the success of Yugoslav internal reforms as a means of fostering the country's rapprochement to the EC. While the prospect of association was not mentioned, Crnobrnja observed that "Europe will not wait for us, nor will she adjust herself to us. It is our task to transform the practical consequences of this bitter fact into an effective action as soon as possible."²⁶ This attitude was a consequence of the similar political evolution in Hungary and Poland, and the declaration by the Madrid European Council in June 1989 that the EC would actively encourage regime change in Eastern Europe.

However, it was the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and the absence of any Soviet reaction to this event that signaled to the Yugoslav leadership the definitive end of the bipolar Cold War order, and freedom of maneuver for Moscow's (now) former satellites in their dealings with Western Europe. For socialist Yugoslavia — whose foreign policy had been conditioned by the Cold War since its constitution in 1945 and the successive split with the USSR in 1948 — this meant a radical foreign policy re-orientation. Non-alignment changed its *raison d'être* and, as far as the EC was concerned, the political limits set by the 1976 Declaration became anachronistic. It is therefore not surprising that Lončar officially requested his country's association to the EC on the occasion of the first Cooperation Council meeting with the EC held after the fall of the Berlin Wall, on 27 November 1989.²⁷ The new international setting was therefore paving the way to a different course of relations between the EC and Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia had now embarked on a process of internal change which resembled that of the former Soviet bloc countries. The leading actor behind Belgrade's new course towards the Common Market was Marković, who described Yugoslavia's new attitude towards the European question during a Joint Session of the Federal Chamber and Chamber of Republics and Provinces of the Federal Assembly on 18 December 1989. On this occasion, Marković presented his programme of economic reforms for 1990 which emphasized the market-oriented drive. He called for a "completely new economic and political system which provides for greater economic efficiency and political democracy with full freedoms and

rights of men and citizens."²⁸ The aim was to overcome the inherited external and domestic imbalances, considerable foreign and internal debt, and the structural disproportions and technological backwardness of the economy. According to Marković, the Programme of Economic Reforms and Measures for 1990 corresponded to the transformations in Europe. He openly mentioned the clear-cut expressions of support made by the EC and its member states to the incipient process of democratization in Yugoslavia and their readiness to extend financial and technical assistance to the reform. "This — Marković noted — is particularly important for our successful further inclusion in current integration trends in Europe." It implied an open call to the Federal Assembly delegates to follow the path of Western European integration as an example of a "Community of rich and civilized peoples who are not renouncing their history or their peculiarities [...]." Evoking the end of the Yugoslav kingdom in 1941 and the ensuing war among its constituent parts, Marković recalled the "red thread" linking Yugoslavia's future to integration in Western European economic and political structures:

Should we turn back to the wheel of history and pay anew the price that cost us so much? Must we have another Calvary to realize that it is in our common interest to live together and to be capable, prepared and acceptable members of the European Community? [...] If reason wins, if our long-term interests and bonds gain sway, we have every chance of overcoming the crisis, embarking upon the road of progress as equitable participants in Europe's march into the 21st century.²⁹

The evident rhetoric which permeated Marković's statements was also intended as an appeal to the country's international partners. They included the IMF, with which Yugoslavia was negotiating an agreement for restructuring former debts,³⁰ and Yugoslavia's major partners within the EC. As reported by the Commission delegation in Brussels, the Yugoslav leadership was particularly interested in the viewpoints of France and West Germany, which had expressed their support for Marković's reforms but also their concern that Yugoslavia would delay inter-

28 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Statement by the President of the Federal Executive Council Ante Marković on the occasion of the review of the Programme of Economic Reform and Measures for its Implementation in 1990 at the Joint Session of the Federal Chamber and Chamber of Republics and Provinces of the SFRY Assembly on 18 December 1989.

29 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Statement by the President of the Federal Executive Council Ante Marković on the occasion of the review of the Programme of Economic Reform and Measures for its Implementation in 1990 at the Joint Session of the Federal Chamber and Chamber of Republics and Provinces of the SFRY Assembly on 18 December 1989.

30 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Négociations Yougoslavie — FMI, Belgrade, 21 December 1989.

25 *NIN Magazine*, 24 September 1989, Supplement Odyssey 1992, translated and quoted in HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Note à l'attention de M. Rhein, Belgrade, 3 October 1989.

26 *NIN Magazine*, 24 September 1989, Supplement Odyssey 1992, translated and quoted in HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Note à l'attention de M. Rhein, Belgrade, 3 October 1989.

27 Historical Archives of the Council of the European Union (HACEU), Co-operation between the European Economic Community and Yugoslavia, Draft Minutes of the 8th meeting of the EEC-Yugoslavia Co-operation Council at ministerial level (27 November 1989), Brussels, 26 April 1990.

nal reforms with respect to the other European Socialist regimes.³¹ A new, political step towards the integration in the Common Market was made on 17 January 1990, when the Federal Assembly issued a political declaration: "On the Further Integration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in European Processes," which is worth quoting at length. After considering Yugoslavia's traditional "economic, historical, social, cultural and other mutual interconnections" with Western Europe, the declaration stated that:

Proceeding from the level of cooperation attained so far, the processes which are under way in the European Community, particularly those aimed at creating a single European economic, cultural and social space, as well as from the main directions of the economic reform in Yugoslavia, the Assembly of the SFR of Yugoslavia expresses the readiness of the SFR of Yugoslavia to establish close and special relations with the European Community [...]. Such relations also imply the evolution of existing forms of cooperation and the conclusion of an association agreement between the SFR of Yugoslavia and the European Community. This constitutes a step towards the establishment of a free trade area following a period of adjustment, and towards the promotion of all other forms of cooperation conducive to the closest possible link and integration of Yugoslavia with the European Community.³²

Although the membership perspective was not openly evoked, the "return to Europe" discourse, which then concerned the majority of Eastern European countries, was clearly visible.³³

Supporting Marković's Reforms

Marković attached great importance to establishing direct relations with the European Commission, which he viewed to be a major interlocutor. In particular, he was interested in the Commission's role within the Group of 24 (G-24) set up in August 1989 – on the basis of the conclusions of the Paris Group of Seven summit meeting of heads of state and government (14–16 July 1989)³⁴ – as a means

31 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Tel. 816 of 15 December 1989 from Belgrade to Brussels, Evolution de la situation en Yougoslavie.

32 Quoted in HAEC, BAC 381/1991/35, Evolution de la situation en Yougoslavie, fb/40/90, Belgrade, 19 January 1990.

33 This perspective was openly evoked by the European Commissioner Karel Van Miert after his official visit in Yugoslavia in January 1990. See HAEC, BAC/98/1997/941, Karel Van Miert to Delors, Ma visite en Yougoslavie les 22 et 23 janvier 1990, Bruxelles, 30 January 1990.

34 Declaration on East-West Relations, Paris, July 15, 1989, accessed September 29, 2020, <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/1989paris/east.html>.

of coordinating financial aid to Poland and Hungary,³⁵ with the European Commission acting as coordinator.³⁶ The EC's role in the Eastern European scenario was later confirmed in the conclusions of the European Council meeting in Strasbourg on 8–9 December 1989, which also mentioned the Council's interest in "the important reforms planned in Yugoslavia."³⁷ A few days later, on 13 December 1989, the G-24 representatives agreed to extend coordination to other Eastern European countries, including Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and, last but not least, Yugoslavia.³⁸ Faced with the Commission's clear-cut international role, on 23 January 1990 Crnobrnja met Nikolaus van der Pas, a member of Delors' cabinet, asking for a meeting between Marković and the president of the European Commission. Crnobrnja argued that Marković intended to "upgrade" its country's relations with the EC towards an association agreement. After the meeting, van der Pas noted that the actual contents of Yugoslavia's requests to the EC were still to be defined and that Belgrade's major fear was that of being isolated from the Community's pro-active stance towards the former socialist bloc.³⁹ The Commission accepted Crnobrnja's request rapidly, because of Yugoslavia's evolving internal scenario, marked by the crisis of the LCY (the country's ruling party since 1945) during its XIV Congress of 20–23 January 1990 and the stark deterioration of the situation in Kosovo.⁴⁰

In early February 1990, the Yugoslav government – like those of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and the GDR – submitted a Memorandum to the G-24 outlining the political and economic reforms under way (reform of the legal system, respect for human rights, introduction of a multi-party system, economic liberalization) and stating its request for financial aid.⁴¹ On 26–27 February 1990, a European Commission delegation visited Belgrade on a fact-finding mission on behalf of the G-24 which, during its plenary high-level meeting of 16 February

35 Historical Archives of the European Union (HAEU), Fonds Émile Noël (EN) 913, Déclaration du Groupe des 24 pour l'assistance économique à la Pologne et la Hongrie (les 24), Bruxelles, 24 November 1989.

36 Simon I. Nuttal, *European Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 83–84.

37 European Council, Strasbourg, 8 and 9 December 1989, Bulletin of the European Communities, 12/1989, accessed January 26, 2020, http://aei.pitt.edu/1395/1/Strasbourg_1989.pdf.

38 HAEU, EN 914, Plan d'action pour l'assistance coordonnée du Groupe des 24 à la Bulgarie, la Tchécoslovaquie, la RDA, la Roumanie et la Yougoslavie (undated document).

39 HAEC, BAC/98/1997/941, Commission des Communautés Européennes, Le Cabinet du Président, Note à M. Lamy, visite Marković, 23 January 1990.

40 HAEC, BAC/98/1997/941, Tel. 03/90, 6 February 1990, From Belgrade to Brussels, Evolution de la situation en Yougoslavie.

41 See HAEU, EN 916, Memorandum, undated; see also HAEC, BAC/98/1997/941, Report on fact-finding mission to Belgrade, 26/27 February 1990, Brussels, undated.

1990, had decided that the European Commission should send delegations in the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Romania. The real goal of these missions was essentially exploratory: to obtain information enabling the Commission departments to assess the positions of the Governments concerned regarding their "commitments on political and economic matters and any progress in implementing programmes for the transition to democracy and a free market economy."⁴² From an historical viewpoint, it is worth noting that the wording of this statement reflected uncertainty regarding the transition processes in the above-mentioned countries beyond the public "pro-European" declarations of their transition leaders.⁴³

The European Commission delegation's visit to Belgrade must be contextualized within this uncertain framework. The delegation was headed by Jean-Joseph Schwed, head of division within the DGI – the European Commission Directorate General for External Relations – who had already visited Yugoslavia in 1988 and closely monitored the country's debt and commercial problems since then.⁴⁴ During his 1990 fact-finding mission, Schwed positively assessed the gradual introduction of a multi-party system in Yugoslavia, although he manifested concern for the situation in Kosovo and Milošević's inflexible approach.⁴⁵ As for Yugoslavia's financial requests to the G-24, the Commission representative noted that uncertainty reigned among the Yugoslav counterparts concerning the exact scope and aim of requested loans.⁴⁶ Regarding Yugoslavia's relations with the EC, Belgrade's approach was defined by Schwed as "ambiguous," as no clear-cut strategy was formulated about the actual path of integration towards the Common Market.⁴⁷ A few days after Schwed's mission, the meeting between Marković and Delors took place in Brussels (8 March 1990). The former's visit took place within a very favorable Commission attitude towards the economic plans adopted by the Yugoslav federal government. Indeed, the preparatory documents for the meeting drafted by the DGI echoed the positive reports which Janssens was sending from Belgrade. Schwed described Marković's "evi-

dent personal effort" at reforming the political and economic life of his country in enthusiastic terms, concluding that: "Since Tito's disappearance, no Yugoslav prime minister has had so much courage and imagination to go so quickly so far."⁴⁸ He also defined the Yugoslav prime minister as "the last resort against chaos."⁴⁹ This view reflected the standpoint of the ambassadors of the Twelve in Belgrade who, having examined the Yugoslav situation on the eve of Marković's visit to Brussels, had stressed his positive yet fragile efforts at establishing market mechanisms in the economy and facing rising inflation. These efforts, according to the ambassadors, were to be fully sustained by the Community.⁵⁰ The same approach was also encouraged by the Italian government after the visit of Italy's Foreign Minister Gianni De Michelis to Belgrade on 2 March 1990. Italy, which was to assume the presidency of the EC Council of Ministers from July to December 1990, had traditionally acted as Yugoslavia's preferential partner within the Community and was particularly interested in the stability and unity of the federation, for evident geographical and security reasons.⁵¹ Contacts between the Commission Delegation and the Italian ambassador, Sergio Vento, confirmed Janssens' impression that the Yugoslav situation was tense but not desperate, and that the calls for independence – especially in Slovenia – were more a "mood" than a policy option, due to Slovenia's "historical and economic situation which cannot be compared to those of other small European countries."⁵²

Despite this very favorable atmosphere, Marković's meeting with Delors – which followed bilateral meetings with Helmut Kohl (the West German Chancellor), Giulio Andreotti (the Italian Prime Minister) and Michel Rocard (the French Prime Minister) did not mean any real change in Yugoslavia's approach to the EC. During the meeting, Marković described Yugoslavia's reforms in great detail. Regarding the economic side of reforms, he stressed the process of internal price liberalization, the ongoing reform of the banking system, and the positive relationship with the IMF. Concerning the political situation in the country, the es-

42 See HAEU, EN 916, Note à l'attention de Mms et Mm. les Membres de la Commission, SEC (90) 696, Rapport des missions d'informations en Bulgarie, RDA, Tchécoslovaquie, Roumanie et Yougoslavie – PHARE, Bruxelles, 3 April 1990.

43 For a general overview on political transitions in the region, see Sharon L. Wolchik and Jane L. Curry, ed., *Central and East European politics: From Communism to Democracy* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008).

44 David A. Dyker, *Yugoslavia: Socialism, Development and Debt* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 167–168.

45 HAEC, BAC/98/1997/941, Rapport de ma mission à Belgrade, Bruxelles, 1 March 1990.

46 HAEC, BAC/98/1997/941, Rapport de ma mission à Belgrade, Bruxelles, 1 March 1990.

47 HAEC, BAC/98/1997/941, Rapport de ma mission à Belgrade, Bruxelles, 1 March 1990.

48 HAEC, BAC/98/1997/941, Visite de M. Ante Marković Premier Ministre de Yougoslavie le 8.3.1990, Steering Brief, 2 March 1990.

49 HAEC, BAC/98/1997/941, Visite de M. Ante Marković Premier Ministre de Yougoslavie le 8.3.1990, Steering Brief, 2 March 1990.

50 HAEC, BAC/98/1997/941, Visite du Premier Ministre Marković à la Commission (8 March 1990) – Evolution de la situation en Yougoslavie, undated.

51 Antonio Varsori, *L'Italia e la fine della guerra fredda. La politica estera dei governi Andreotti (1989–1992)* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2013), 121–158.

52 HAEC, BAC/98/1997/941, Note à l'attention de M. le Président Jacques Delors et de M. Abel Matutes, Membre de la Commission, Visite de M. De Michelis à Belgrade, Bruxelles, 5 March 1990.

establishment of a multi-party system was described by Marković as the proof of Yugoslavia's democratization. The Yugoslav Prime Minister also showed himself confident of the support of the "people" in his struggle against conservative forces. However, the most pressing question, that is, Yugoslavia's future relations with the EC, was treated by Marković in vague terms and the meeting did not lead to a real "roadmap" — although still vague and provisional — for the federation's future economic integration in the EC.⁵³

From the Community's viewpoint, this was the consequence of the serious degradation of the internal situation. After the first elections in Slovenia and Croatia in April and May 1990, the image of Yugoslavia as a disintegrating federation divided between a progressive north (albeit based on a nationalistic drive) and an authoritarian and dogmatic Serbia embodied by Milošević became consolidated.⁵⁴ This view emerged in several circumstances. During an informal meeting of the EC ministers of foreign affairs held on 21 April 1990, a general feeling of "uncertainty" dominated discussion on the situation in Yugoslavia.⁵⁵ Similar impressions emerged after the official visit paid to Belgrade on 27–28 August 1990 by Luxembourg's foreign minister Jacques Poos — who was to be renowned later for his infamous "hour of Europe" statement on the eve of the state's collapse in June 1991. During the same visit, Poos' interlocutors — including the Government's vice president (the Serb Borisav Jović) and Lončar — expressed the gravity of the internal situation and called for stronger relations with the Community.⁵⁶ Poos, who was to become President-in-charge of the Foreign Affairs Council during the first semester of 1991, had in turn promised his interlocutors the EC's support to the federation: "Yugoslavia is part of Europe and the Community wants a strong and united Yugoslavia in the interest of security in the Balkans."⁵⁷ However, already in late August 1990, Yugoslavia's very future was in question. Janssens noted: "Nowadays politics are dominated by a dangerous growth of nationalism in the majority of republics, largely inspired by Serb actions and ambitions; the growing confrontation between Serbia

and Croatia, the independent drive of Slovenia and mounting tension in Kosovo." Marković's economic and political reforms — including the convertibility of the dinar, budget austerity, the end of the self-management system, abolition of the single-party system and the proclamation of individual freedoms — were considered to be the only factors of "dynamism" in Yugoslavia, despite the media's evocation of "civil war or disintegration of the country."⁵⁸ Janssens' suggestion to Brussels was clear: "The Community is directly concerned in the political evolution of the country and has an interest in sustaining the Federal government in the present-day conditions."⁵⁹ In the following weeks, Yugoslavia's rapid transformations were closely monitored in Brussels.⁶⁰ On 5 October 1990, Janssens reported: "The reform process implies a rapid and dangerous aggravation of the political climate throughout the country, to the point at which several responsible authorities do not hesitate to evoke the threat of a civil war."⁶¹ Janssens was in direct contact with federal and republican authorities. In his reports, he highlighted the weakness of Marković, faced with the nationalization of Yugoslav politics and the radicalization of the political scene, especially in Serbia, Kosovo and Croatia. Although Kosovo was described by the Commission representative as "in the state of war," the Croat scenario was no less alarming. Janssens described Croatia's concerns for Milošević's plan for a "Great Serbia" and, at the same time, Zagreb's calls for direct intervention by the USA and the EC to guide Yugoslavia's transition towards a confederation of sovereign states.⁶² Lastly, the reports of the Commission delegation portrayed the situation in Slovenia, where the prevalence of Slovene over federal legislation had been affirmed. From Ljubljana, frequent statements on the need for closer integration within the EC were also issued, stressing the need to overcome the "untenable and unacceptable Yugoslav burden" which was slowing Slovenia's economic development. The growing autonomy of the republics, especially

53 HAEC, BAC/98/1997/941, Note de dossier, Visite de M. Marković, Premier Ministre yougoslave, 9.3.1990; HAEC, BAC/98/1997/941, Note à l'attention de M. Falkenberg, Cabinet du Président, Conférence de presse de M. Marković, Bruxelles, 8 March 1990.

54 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Tel. 914/90, 3 June 1990, From Belgrade to Brussels, Evolution de la situation en Yougoslavie.

55 HAEC, COM (90)/PV/1009/2ème partie, (25 April 1990).

56 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Visite officielle de M. Jacques Poos, Vice-Premier Ministre et Ministre des Affaires étrangères de Luxembourg à Belgrade les 27 et 28 août 1990, undated.

57 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Visite officielle de M. Jacques Poos, Vice-Premier Ministre et Ministre des Affaires étrangères de Luxembourg à Belgrade les 27 et 28 août 1990, undated.

58 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Délégation de la Commission des Communautés Européennes, Note à l'attention de M. Abel Matutes, Evolution de la situation en Yougoslavie, Belgrade, 30 August 1990.

59 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Délégation de la Commission des Communautés Européennes, Note à l'attention de M. Abel Matutes, Evolution de la situation en Yougoslavie, Belgrade, 30 August 1990.

60 HAEC, COM (90)/PV/1023, 2ème partie (1 August 1990).

61 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Tel. 028/90, 5 October 1990, From Belgrade to Brussels, Evolution de la situation politique en Yougoslavie.

62 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Tel. 028/90, 5 October 1990, From Belgrade to Brussels, Evolution de la situation politique en Yougoslavie.

Slovenia and Croatia, was now described by Janssens as matters of fact which had to be acknowledged.⁶³

A Disenchanted Epilogue

It was in fact clear to the EC member states and the Commission that the internal situation in the federation was crumbling, and that Marković's reformist efforts were lagging behind, due to the increased political autonomy of the republics after the first free elections, a fateful consequence of Marković's pluralistic reforms. Marković's weakened political legitimacy meant the crisis of federal structural economic plans, including the perspective of "federal" integration with the EC market. As Delors was to note after his official mission to Belgrade on 29–30 May 1991 – when the meeting with Marković was followed by that with the Presidents of the individual republics – integration plans with the EC were actually conceived as part of Slovene and Croat calls for independence and sovereignty.⁶⁴ During his visit to Belgrade, Delors also observed that the EC did not possess "a magic wand" and that, faced with the internal political crisis in Yugoslavia, it was up to its constituent parties to find a compromise which would allow for a united Yugoslavia to start a properly planned *rapprochement* to the EC.⁶⁵ However, at the very moment when Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland started negotiations on the so-called "Europe agreements" – which were intended to reward progress towards democracy, free market, and boosted investments by establishing a free trade area – Yugoslavia was clearly leaving the course of its Eastern European neighbors.⁶⁶

Analysis of the attempts at mediation developed by the EC vis-à-vis Yugoslavia's conflicting republics in 1991 will not be discussed here: they have been the focus of several studies, although access to primary diplomatic sources is still limited.⁶⁷ Moreover, 1991 meant a change in the overall picture of EC-Yugoslav

63 HAEC, BAC/381/1991/35, Tel. 028/90, 5 October 1990, From Belgrade to Brussels, Evolution de la situation politique en Yougoslavie.

64 HAEU, Fonds Jacques Delors (JD) 244, Note de Dossier, Voyage Santer/Delors en Yougoslavie, 31 May 1991.

65 HAEU, JD 244, Note de Dossier, Voyage Santer/Delors en Yougoslavie, 31 May 1991.

66 On the origins of the "Europe agreements", see Eirini Karamouzi, Angela Romano and Aline Sierp, "The opening of accession negotiations with the countries of central and eastern Europe," in *The European Commission 1986–2000 – History and memories of an institution*, ed. Vincent Dujardin et al. (Luxembourg: Publication office of the European Union, 2019), 32–48.

67 One of the few preliminary historical accounts on the matter comes from Ivan Obadić and Benedetto Zaccaria, "The European Commission and the Yugoslav Crises," in *The European Com-*

relations, with the gradual marginalization of Marković, the de facto disintegration of the federation with the declarations of independence by Slovenia and Croatia in June, and the EC's changing role from a political-economic negotiator to a crisis manager – all against a background of conflicting views among the EC member states, which still deserve historical investigation.⁶⁸

Overall, the present work has offered a preliminary account contributing towards understanding the pre-history of the Community's involvement in the Yugoslav scenario. It has shown that Yugoslavia was fully comprised within the Community's (and, more broadly, Western) efforts to stabilize the Eastern and Central European scenario, whereas Marković's reformist approach must be understood within the major geopolitical changes in this region. Such efforts were mainly political in nature – despite being grounded on financial instruments – and were meant to offer a European perspective to newly established democratic regimes. However, the former Soviet satellites' European outlook was only shaped in concrete terms through the so-called "Europe agreements" which were negotiated in late 1990, when Yugoslavia had already started to founder.

This work has therefore highlighted the primacy of Yugoslav internal dynamics over the EC's effective instruments to intervene in the state crisis – which was observed, studied and not ignored – throughout 1989 and 1990. Analyses of EC-Yugoslav relations in this crucial biennium also demonstrate the impossibility for Marković to shape a clear-cut "European" vision, beyond general words and statements. What this work has also shown is that Community archival sources do not reveal internal divisions within the EC concerning support to Marković's federal reforms until the late 1990s. However, the internal documents of the Commission, which was closely involved in studying the Yugoslav situation by virtue of its pivotal role within the G-24, reveal widespread hostility towards Milošević's Serbia, whereas the Croat and Slovene internal dynamics were more frequently labelled as "democratic" experiments. Beyond the evolution of war dynamics in late 1991 – including the fall of Vukovar in November and attacks on Dubrovnik in November and early December – this may help in understanding the roots of the EC's attitude towards the Serb leadership, which was to lead

mission 1986–2000 – History and memories of an institution, ed. Vincent Dujardin et al. (Luxembourg: Publication office of the European Union, 2019), 607.

68 Here I refer particularly to the controversial role played by the Federal Republic of Germany. In this regard, see Michael Libal, *Limits of Persuasion. Germany and the Yugoslav Crisis, 1991–1992* (Westport, Connecticut–London: Praeger, 1997).

to the imposition of sectorial economic sanctions and, above all, the identification of Milošević as the main actor of the state crisis.⁶⁹

Archives

HACEU = Historical Archives of the Council of the European Union, Brussels.

HAEC = Historical Archives of the European Commission, Brussels;
Bruxelles Archives Commission Series.

HAEU = Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence:
Fonds Émile Noël.
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⁶⁹ On the EC's economic sanctions, see Tanguy de Wilde d'Estmael, "La Communauté européenne face à l'implosion yougoslave: alics d'une gestion de crise par la coercition économique," *Journal of European Integration History* 10 (2004): 51–74.

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