

Croatia's two-front war vs. Serbia, IMF

by Rainer Apel

Considering that Croatia lost one-third of its territory in a war two years ago, policy-makers in Zagreb are in a peculiar state of calm that doesn't correspond to the fragility of the situation: The Serbs might launch another attack on Croatia at any time.

For a city like Osijek at the very northeastern end of Croatia, which was pounded with about 30,000 Serbian artillery shells during 1991 and which mourns the loss of more than 3,000 of its citizens, the facade of "normalcy" in Zagreb cannot be maintained: The Serbs surround Osijek on three sides; only the western side is held open by the Croatian Army as a supply corridor. Serbian forces are only 2 kilometers away, just across the Drava River.

This author saw both cities during a tour in mid-May. Osijek, longtime center and capital of the Slavonian region, is within the range of standard Serbian artillery, rocket-launchers and main battle tanks, and is no less exposed than it was during the heat of the 1991 war. People in Osijek might tell you that the situation is under control, but they also admit that the war isn't really over yet.

Unreal air of 'normalcy'

There are many indications that the population, which otherwise seems to have returned to normal everyday life, is aware of the fragile situation: There are sandbags stockpiled in front of cellar windows in many buildings and reserve stocks of bricks and other construction material in many places. In residential areas, many of the windows have only been covered with transparent plastic sheeting.

The refugees and Croatians who were expelled from their homes across the Drava River by the Serbs in late 1991 and early 1992 make up about one-half of Osijek's population. Many of them have been exiled in the city since the war broke out. In other cases, the exiles are Croatian villagers who came to work in Osijek every morning, only to find out one summer day in 1991 that their village had been destroyed, and their family killed or deported by the Serbs, making return for them impossible. The refugees and Osijek citizens who have lost relatives in the area and soldiers who are still posted there are a social and political antidote against the outbreak of "normalcy" tendencies one finds in Zagreb far from the front line.

While the Croatian Army and militia, which are visible all over Osijek, represent a certain defense capacity and maybe even a deterrent against a surprise Serb attack, the United Nations "blue helmets" who are stationed in the no-man's-land around the city with a mandate to "protect" it pose a big problem. Most of them are Russians who had fought in Afghanistan; their crude behavior and open arrogance against the Osijek population is telling: They are no friends of the Croats.

This author learned from talks with Osijek citizens that the U.N. presence played a dubious role also before the Russians had arrived there. When the U.N.-arranged ceasefire went into effect in January 1992, the Serbs first launched the heaviest artillery shellings on Osijek in the entire war, and then began mass expulsions of Croatians from occupied regions across the river. The Serbs would call the few U.N. blue helmets stationed there on short notice and then drop busloads of expelled Croatians at the demarcation line, where the U.N. then told the Croatian Army to transfer them on to Osijek. This daily humiliation went on for half a year, and the stream of deportees ended only in June 1992, when the U.N.-proclaimed "protection mandate" finally became operational.

What made Osijek citizens accept the arrival of the blue helmets in 1992 was hope that it would stop the brutal Serbian shelling. It did so, but meanwhile, with no real end of the war, no foreseeable domestication of the Serbian monster, and the all-too-apparent fact that the United Nations regime has replaced Croatian administrative authority in Osijek and strictly observes the status quo in the Serbian-held territories, a spirit of enormous opposition to the United Nations has built up. While the older citizens tend to be fearful, speaking about the tragic situation in a low voice, as if wanting not to be detected by spies of the U.N. occupation regime, the younger ones show a somewhat more rebellious spirit that goes along with a strong sense of Catholic-based resistance.

Resistance to IMF enforcers

As this author found out in talks with Osijek youths, there are quite a few who, in their search for a more principled approach to the situation, have come in contact with the ideas of Lyndon LaRouche. His call to replace austerity and debt-servicing enforced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as it is practiced in Croatia now, with an intense effort to reconstruct the war-torn regions (which will require an estimated \$20 billion) using methods of "physical economy" and of national banking principles pioneered by Alexander Hamilton, has found numerous friends there.

It is important for this youth potential to make itself heard in Zagreb, which is showing strong, pragmatic tendencies to accept the status quo and not push too hard for a return of Serbian-seized territories. There are some indications, indeed, that some of these youths will work to revitalize a spirit of offensive against Serbia.