

Why recognition of Croatia was postponed

by Umberto Pascali

A letter recently sent by the Provincial of the Franciscan Order in Croatia "to the brothers of the Order" and made available to *EIR* reads in part: "Croatian Christmas 1991—We have been granted the opportunity here to experience something of the historical Christmas of Jesus: Children have been born (e.g., in Vukovar) and continue to be born in cellars and in exile; Herods fearing for their power massacre the innocent; numerous families (over 600,000 persecuted souls) are escaping to 'Egypt' from their tormentors."

"Sadly many do not escape successfully," the Provincial Father, Antun Badurina, continues. "Every day we receive reports of people murdered in their own homes. There will be no midnight mass this year. . . . No glittering Christmas eclipses reality here. Therefore we are able to see even more clearly that the war against us is being waged against Christmas. All the values that the Incarnation of God established for eternity are under attack: truth, honor, personal dignity (freedom); the right to existence, name and identity (righteousness); beauty and the wonders of creation and love as the fundamental tenet of the children of God. For all of us this is a great trial and challenge to faith. We are literally undergoing genocide and ecocide. Our lives will always be marked by the horrors we have witnessed and endured."

Father Badurina summarizes the statistics of five months of ferocious war against civilian targets and with particular fury against religious buildings. "During this period, great suffering and heavy damages have occurred. Approximately 200 parishes have been evacuated, whole deaneries in some places. Three hundred and twenty-five churches and chapels have been razed to their foundations or damaged. The shooting has damaged famous cathedrals (Sibelik, Zadar, Osijek, Dubrovnik). Twenty-five monasteries have been destroyed.

Some have been looted and razed to their foundations. In nearly one-third of occupied Croatia, Croatian communities and houses are being systematically demolished.

"There are no signs left that some communities ever even existed because everything, including the graves, has been bulldozed to ground level. Cultural goods (e.g., museum artifacts) and other valuables are taken away to Serbia and Montenegro where they are sold to institutions and the populace. Libraries have been destroyed with thousands of books, including rare manuscripts, as well as hospitals, schools and old Renaissance, Baroque and other urban entities.

"Over 200,000 family houses and apartments have been destroyed. Nearly 40% of Croatian industry is gone . . . the precise number of dead is unknown because the Army and the Chetniks do not permit inspection and usually not even burial, but it is possible to speak of numbers of at least 20,000 from each side. The number of wounded is twice as large, over 70% are civilian. The weapons used by the aggressor include forbidden devices (cluster and napalm bombs, rockets, dumdum bullets. . .). Serbs are settling in occupied areas of eastern Croatia to change the ethnic structure of the region. The remaining Croats and non-Serbs wear armbands, serve as slaves, and are exposed to extreme abuse. In Serbia actual concentration camps have been established."

Father Badurina's letter was sent at a time in which the European Community has decided to postpone the recognition of Croatia until Jan. 15. Recognition, of course, that should have been granted in June—when 95% of Croats voted for independence—would have meant that the Federal Army would never have dared to start the massacre. But on Dec. 16, at the meeting of the EC foreign ministers convened in Brussels, Belgium, to vote on recognition, Germany was

isolated and threatened, and recognition postponed. Croatia was abandoned to one more month of blood and terror.

Germany forced to postpone recognition

Germany had announced long before the Brussels meeting, that it was going to recognize Croatia and Slovenia with or without a unanimous vote by the other European members. At that point Germany had already waited too long. Public opinion all over Europe and especially in Germany, Austria, and Italy (the countries closest to Croatia) was in favor of recognition, but pressure from the British, U.S., French, and Dutch governments and by the Secretary General of the United Nations prevented Germany from taking a stand.

The week prior to the Brussels meeting was a theater of unprecedented pressures and threats against the government of Chancellor Helmut Kohl and anyone else who tried to say that enough is enough.

The meeting lasted 10 hours. At the end, a compromise was reached. Germany, as previously announced, would recognize the two republics on Dec. 19, but the "implementation of the decision" will take place on Jan. 15. In exchange, all 12 EC countries accepted formally to recognize those republics that would "apply" by Dec. 23 and that would "satisfy" criteria of democracy and reliability established by the EC. Every "applying" republic was to be examined by an arbitration commission set up through the EC peace conference in The Hague, led by Lord Peter Carrington, known for having accused the Croatians of provoking the Serbians!

Germany made it clear that there were no more conditions that the Croatians had to accept before being recognized by Bonn. "Other countries can wait for those findings if they like. We are going ahead," a German official told the press.

The U.S. State Department applauded the EC decision as if it meant non-recognition. "We welcome the EC's decision to postpone definitive decisions on recognition, which will allow more time for the efforts of the United Nations Secretary General and [EC mediator] Lord Carrington," said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher the day after the decision was announced. Boucher refused to accept the idea that a date for recognition had been somehow established. "I don't really have a comment specifically on the Jan. 15th part."

But outside the diplomatic formalities, as was "leaked" to Reuters, "privately, U.S. officials are furious that Germany has decided to exert its new power on the issue." Germany was not supposed to take even that modest step. One week before the EC meeting, every EC government had received a threatening letter from Lawrence Eagleburger, who still happily enjoys his position as deputy secretary of state, despite his business collaboration with Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic and his work at Kissinger Associates, of which Lord Carrington has been a director. The Europeans were told to stop immediately because a "premature" recognition would "almost inevitably lead to greater bloodshed."

Even the foreign minister of the non-existent Soviet Union, Yuli Vorontsov, was prompted to intervene with these historic words: "I hope very much that Germany will not make that move." And the U.N. Security Council voted a resolution asking Germany to "restrain itself."

Pérez de Cuellar honored by Bush and Queen

The most shameful performance was that of the finally outgoing U.N. Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuellar, who intervened time and again to warn Germany not to dare to recognize Croatia. His last intervention was a letter sent to the German government on Dec. 10.

During this entire period Germany resisted, and kept restating its position. On Dec. 13, German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher answered: "Dear Mr. Secretary General . . . I would like to express my deep concern that [your] statements—and their subsequent publication—are apt to encourage those elements in Yugoslavia which have been vehemently resisting the successful conclusion of the peace process. . . . To refuse recognition to those republics which desire independence must lead to a further escalation of the use of force by the Yugoslav National Army, which would construe it as a validation of its policy of conquest."

Pérez de Cuellar ranted that recognition "could have grave consequences for the Balkan region as a whole, and it would seriously undermine my own efforts and those of my personal envoy." That same day he was awarded by George Bush the Freedom Medal, nominally the United States' highest civilian medal. He had already been promised, publicly, a knighthood by Britain's Queen Elizabeth II. Bush personally intervened, demanding that Germany listen to Pérez de Cuellar and launching a series of last-minute telephone conversations, including with British Prime Minister John Major.

Third Yugoslavia and free market

The question now is: Why this postponement? First of all, the Federal Army is using this time to destroy as much as possible in Croatia. Second, the Greater Serbians have suddenly organized an "historic" congress on Jan. 3 to proclaim what they call the Third Yugoslavia—after the monarchist Yugoslavia established by the victors of World War I and the communist Yugoslavia of Tito. This "new" Yugoslavia is supposed to be dominated by the Serbians and include, at different levels of "autonomy," all the other republics. This, even though in the meantime Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina have asked to be recognized by the EC on Jan. 15.

And suddenly the new prime minister of Serbia, Radoman Bozovic, the closest protégé of communist leader Slobodan Milosevic, declared at a press conference in Belgrade that Serbia is going to be a "free market economy." "Free market" and "Third Yugoslavia" are the new pillars of the Anglo-American strategy to keep alive that terrible creature of the Versailles Treaty known as Yugoslavia.