

*Special Debate*

Last month the members of the Canada–Croatia and Bosnia–Hercegovina parliamentary group hosted a visit by parliamentarians from the Republic of Croatia. During that visit it was made very clear to me and my colleagues that the Croatian government was adamant about not renewing the UN mandate. In fact, Mr. Ivica Racan, the leader of the opposition Social Democratic Party of Croatia indicated to me that the one thing all parliamentarians and citizens of Croatia were in agreement on was that it was time for UNPROFOR to leave.

After the meetings with Mr. Racan and Drs. Domljan and Greguric I truly believe that the Canadian peacekeepers would be coming home. I can honestly say that I have very mixed feelings about that. While I could understand the frustration of the Croatian government and the Croatian people, I was worried that an escalation in fighting might occur, thus once again placing the safety of many innocent civilians in jeopardy.

Then on March 12 came what appeared to be good news. The president of Croatia, Dr. Franjo Tudjman, held a joint press conference with U.S. Vice-President Al Gore where it was announced that Croatia would accept the further international presence on its territory if a new UN Security Council mandate could be agreed on and that certain conditions were met.

Those conditions included: one, control of international borders between the Republic of Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Bosnia–Hercegovina and at principal crossing points not now controlled by Croatian authorities; two, control access and communications for UNPROFOR and other international humanitarian operations to Bosnia–Hercegovina through territory not currently under the control of the Croatian authorities; three, facilitate and continue implementation of a ceasefire agreement on March 29, 1994 and an economic agreement on December 7, 1994; four, facilitate implementation of future agreements aimed at reintegration of Croatia and facilitate implementation of relevant UN Security Council and general assembly resolutions.

The Copenhagen agreement engineered by U.S. Vice-President Al Gore which showed so much promise is today in jeopardy. Last week UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali forwarded the proposed new UN mandate to the Government of Croatia. The problem is that this so-called new mandate is little more than a rehashing of the old Vance–Owen peace plan. This is not what the Republic of Croatia agreed to in Copenhagen.

In a letter to UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali dated March 27, 1995, a couple of days ago, Dr. Mate Granic, Croatia's foreign minister stated:

I have the duty to inform you and the Members of the Security Council that the Republic of Croatia shall not accept the new mandate of the new peacekeeping force on its territory after the present mandate of UNPROFOR in Croatia terminates unless the following conditions are met:

One: The name of the new operations contains the word Croatia; explicitly confirming the fact that the new operation is to be carried in its entirety on the sovereign territory of the Republic of Croatia; and,

Two: The mechanism of the active control of international borders of the Republic of Croatia in the parts that are not at this moment accessible to the Croatian authorities by the new force are negotiated in detail on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions and have gained prior formal approval of the Government of Croatia; thus the mechanisms for active control of Croatia's international borders under the new mandate must be clearly established consistent with paragraph 12 of Resolution 820 (1993).

• (2045)

The words of the Croatian foreign minister make it very clear to me that Croatia means business. Either change the mandate to reflect the Copenhagen agreement or get out. If somehow, and I am hopeful, a new agreement can be reached, Canada must decide whether it is in our best interest to keep our peacekeepers in Croatia.

If we decide to remain in Croatia it is imperative we play a role in negotiating a new mandate. This is one thing I have found extremely disturbing throughout this entire mission in Croatia and Bosnia–Hercegovina. Canada appears to have had very little influence in the overall decision making process. We have the fifth largest contingent of troops in Croatia and Bosnia–Hercegovina, 2,100, yet we have been completely shut out of the so-called contact group which has been making decisions on strategy in the region.

Our neighbours to the south with only 890 troops and Russia with 1,400 peacekeepers have been playing chess with our men and women in this lengthy international conflict and we cannot allow this to continue. The safety and integrity of our troops rest solely on our shoulders. If we stay we must demand a more active role in negotiations that will ultimately affect the well-being of our peacekeepers.

In addition to playing a more active role in the negotiating process, we should also be encouraging our southern neighbours to put their money where their mouth is by increasing their presence in the region.

Canada is a proud peacekeeping nation. Our troops have done a good job in Croatia given what they have to work with. I believe the Croatian government can confirm that.

However, if there is not a new mandate, if we will simply be helping to maintain the status quo and if the lives of our peacekeepers will be placed in greater jeopardy let us stop wasting the hard earned money of Canadian taxpayers and bring our troops home.