

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Simon de Jong (Regina—Qu'Appelle): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity of joining the debate on this very important question. I appreciate the opportunity of being involved in this debate because my involvement as a person with both Croatia and Bosnia stretches back a few years now.

As I mentioned earlier in the House I helped to initiate the organization of a group of members of Parliament. We acted as observers in the first free election in Croatia. As well I helped do the same thing when the elections in Bosnia—Hercegovina occurred.

I remember spending election night with the Muslim party and celebrating with them their victory and the success of the first free election. At that time I had the hope that in Bosnia we would find a bridge between the middle eastern and western or European cultures. I was quite impressed by the people. I had met the Muslim people in Bosnia and I had high hopes that such a bridge would be built between the two different cultures and religions.

I experienced hope as well in Croatia as they started up their new government and in many ways I helped them. They wanted to know how to organize a public service commission, set up a department and what the environmental regulations were. It was the basic things in starting a government from scratch. There was the excitement as well of re-establishing their nation and their nationhood.

It was a period of a lot of hope and optimism. I made some basic understandings that even though one had many years of a totalitarian government that tried to suppress both religion and nationalism, I understood that one cannot suppress it. I am an internationalist, but one cannot suppress nationalism.

The only way to do it is as we have seen in western Europe and on the North American continent. It is the evolution of different nations coming together and beginning to realize that they have more in common with each other and a whole new attitude and a whole new approach starts to develop.

However, what I saw in both Bosnia and Croatia is that all the suppression did was to drive it underground and the moment the suppression was released it came back up to the surface right from where it left off. In the evolution of cultures, peoples and religions you cannot suppress. Suppression does not work.

I was concerned at that time that with the fall of the Berlin wall and the removal of the suppression that all sorts of groups of people who had been suppressed were going to demand their nationhood. I suggested at that time in a letter to the external affairs minister in a speech I made in the House that three principles should be observed.

First, it is the right to self-determination. The people in Croatia through a democratic process decided to become independent. They had that right.

• (2220)

Second, there is the principle that boundaries should exist the way they are and that that armed force would not be tolerated by the international community to change boundaries. The only way boundaries could change is through negotiation and in some instances perhaps through arbitration but only through a process such as this should boundaries change.

Third, there is the principle of the right of minority groups. Minority groups and people of different ethnic groups have been shifted around in the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union.

How can one deal with this? One has to respect minority groups not just by putting it in high flowing terms in the Constitution but in having the mechanism as we have here with the human rights commission. We need some tribunal that could hear complaints, lay charges and levy fines and penalties if need be. It would be able to enforce the rights of minorities in order to ensure whether they are the minority Serbs in Croatia, the minority Muslims in Serbia or whatever that their rights would be respected and they would be respected as human beings. Unfortunately this did not happen and the whole former Yugoslavia has descended into hell.

I remember being back there in January 1992 and standing in a little village called Vocin. They had a 16th century church that was totally blown up. As I entered the village I thought it had hailed all these little pebbles all over the place. Then it was explained to me that several thousand tonnes of explosives had been used to totally destroy this church. It was explained to me that there were some 45 elderly people whose average age was 65 had been murdered in that village. They happened to be Croats. One or two were older Serbians who must have tried to protect the older Croatians.

I stood at a spot and the manacles were still there where an old man had been shot in the back of the head. His hands had been manacled. His body had been sawn in half and they had tried to burn his feet. His feet had just been stubbles.

There was madness, insanity and craziness. It is as though the hounds of hell had been let loose. It is as though we had serial killers on the loose enjoying the killing in their torture.

That madness now goes on and on. One hears stories of fundamentalist Islamics fighting—the Mujahedin—for the Bosnian cause. One hears stories where some of the worst of the secret police of Albania, Russia and the former East Germany are fighting on the Serb side.

Last week I had the opportunity of having lunch with quite a high official of the Croatian government. She was informing me