

Who Runs This Country?

'The Science Fiction Republic of Yugoslavia'

Jovan Vitas, a successful Serbian businessman, is married to a Croatian and has raised his children to think of themselves as Yugoslavs. He says he wants no part of the ongoing ethnic violence among Yugoslavia's six separate and increasingly nationalistic republics. But he is caught up in it anyway. As he sat in his book-lined living room last week, he pulled out a Czechoslovak-made Luger pistol, removed the fully loaded clip and pointed out a bullet labeled, he said theatrically, for the man he thinks is to blame for the infighting: "Mr. Tudjman."

Franjo Tudjman was elected president of Croatia in May on a fiery nationalist platform, and last month his parliamentary party—the Croatian Democratic Union—passed a declaration calling for greater Croatian autonomy within Yugoslavia. That unnerved Serbs, who are the largest ethnic group in Yugoslavia but make up only 20 percent of Croatia's population of 4.6 million. Fearing that resurgent Croatian nationalism would mean repression of Serbs, the Serbian Democratic Party and its president Jovan Raskovic responded to Tudjman by calling for their own referendum—on increased Serbian autonomy within the heavily Serbian region around Knin.

Blocked roads: Last week, as voters cast referendum ballots in the area, Croatia appeared on the verge of civil war. After the Croatian parliament declared the referendum illegal and nonbinding, rumors flew through Knin that the Croatians planned to stop the balloting with force. Armed Serbian men blocked roads with trees and gravel-filled dump trucks and set up checkpoints. Serbian mobs besieged police stations in search of weapons. And local Serbian authorities defiantly printed ballots in their native Cyrillic script (Croatians speak the same language but use Roman script).

Though there were no reports of actual violence or injury, Serbians claimed Croatian extremists were threatening them. "Things appear normal in the daytime," said a Serbian woman in Knin who declined



MAJKA ILIC—AFP

'They say they will slit our throats': Serb protesters gather at a demonstration in Knin

to give her full name. "But at night, every night, there are gangs that come in and say they will slit our throats." As many citizens on both sides armed themselves, Igor Guttert, a Croatian university student in Zagreb, shook his head in dismay: "It's the Balkan mentality . . . We need food, but we want blood."

Meanwhile Croatian officials charged that the unrest in Croatia was incited by agents of Slobodan Milosevic—the arch-nationalist leader of Serbia. Anticipating an attack, which had not happened by the end of the week, Croatian authorities deployed heavily armed security forces to defend the parliament building and television station in Zagreb, Croatia's capital.

The situation grew even more tense when Yugoslav Army MiG fighters intercepted three helicopters dispatched by the Croatian Interior Ministry—apparently to maintain order in Knin. Serbs saw the helicopters as proof of the Croatians' aggres-

sive intent and took to the nearby hills to watch for other aircraft. Soon Serb Radio Knin began reporting unconfirmed helicopter "raids." Alarm also spread among the Croatians, who say the MiG intercept showed that the Serbian-dominated Army supports a Serbian rebellion in Croatia.

The Army downplayed the incident, claiming the MiGs scrambled because the helicopters were on "an illegal flight path." But damage to the Army's reputation as a source of Yugoslav national pride and identity may be irreparable. "The Army can no longer play a unifying role in Yugoslavia," says a Western diplomat in Belgrade. Yet someone must play that role before the country unravels. To some Croatian newspapers, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has already become "the Science Fiction Republic of Yugoslavia."

TONY EMERSON with
MARKOS KOUNALAKIS in Knin

A German 'Day of Joy'

Oct. 3, 1990, will mark the most momentous geopolitical change Europe has seen since the aftermath of World War II. On that date the East German Parliament will vote itself and its country out of existence. East Germany will become part of the (Western) Federal Republic of Germany. The most substantial example of Europe's cold-war division will disappear. And yet,

when the date was set last week, it came almost as an anticlimax.

Ever since the Berlin wall was breached last November, Germans on both sides of the East-West divide have clamored for quick and total reunification. But a complex political wrangle broke out between parties that wanted reunification immediately to head off a looming economic debacle in the East and those

who wished to proceed more methodically. Last Wednesday Lothar de Maizière, the last prime minister of East Germany, finally persuaded all the parties in his wobbly coalition government to compromise on the Oct. 3 date. Ostensibly undismayed by the untidy last-minute wrangling, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who is expected to win handily in all-German elections on Dec. 2, pronounced last week's day of decision a "day of joy for all Germans."