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## CAUSES AND DYNAMIC OF THE WAR IN CROATIA\*

MLADEN KLEMENČIĆ

Considering causes and goals of hostile sides the war which broke out in Croatia in Spring 11991 is typical conflict between two states. It is the aggression against Croatia conducted by Serbia. Serbian aim is to occupy and annex Croatian territories and to include them into so-called Greater Serbia. In the dynamic of the war the stages of metapolitical and political prelude as well as the armed aggression are defined, both consisting of several phases.

### *Uzroci i dinamika rata u Hrvatskoj*

*S obzirom na uzroke izbijanja te ciljeve sukobljenih strana, rat koji se počevši od proljeća 1991. vodi u Hrvatskoj tipičan je međudržavni sukob. To je agresija koju je poduzela Srbija protiv Hrvatske sa ciljem da okupira hrvatske teritorije te ih priključi tzv. Velikoj Srbiji. U ratnoj dinamici razlikuju se etape metapolitičkog i političkog preludija te oružane agresije, svaka s po nekoliko podetapa.*

### 1. Causes of the war

When Yugoslav state union was founded in 1918, its single constitutive parts entered the union with different intentions and motives. The union state was envisaged by some of them on the federal basis and the

mutual appreciation while Serbia understood it to be a chance for realization of an old idea for expansion of its territory. Since then, the myth of Greater Serbia has been repeatedly restored whenever the conditions

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were more favourable. Since 1986 we have been witnessing the last of these Serbian attempts which led, firstly, to the breakdown of Yugoslavia and, secondly, to the present war in Croatia.

The war in Croatia is a conflict of two politogenetic ideas: Serbian, which seeks ethno-territorial expansion, and Croatian, which seeks for its full independency and sovereignty. Serbia wants to change its borders and expand territory, while Croatia defends its present-day borders and territorial integrity. Therefore, it is not an ethnic war but a war between two states and it is not a civil war but an aggression against Croatia conducted by Serbia using federal army which up to the recent time was a joint army composed of all Yugoslav nations.

Therefore, the geopolitical cause of Serbian aggression is an attempt to create Greater Serbia. The aggression however has also got its economic background. If we accept a little generalized but in its essence a truthful statement that Yugoslavia served as Serbian empire, then we bear witness to a rare case that after the breakdown of an empire, imperial center remains poorer and less developed than its composing imperial parts. Because of that fact Serbia, under the falsified pretext of defending Serbs outside its borders, is trying to conquer new living space (Lebensraum) and as possible be it larger and wider than is the present one. After that Serbia would organize that expanded state in the way which would provide flow of resources into the center of the state. Be-

cause of that, the most interesting for Serbia are the following parts of Croatia: agricultural and industrial Eastern Croatia (Slavonia) and maritime and touristic Southern Croatia (Dalmatia).

## 2. Dynamic of the war

### *2.1. Political and metapolitical prelude*

#### 2.1.1. Conflict of political conceptions

All the contrasts between Serbia on one side, and Croatia and the majority of other republics on the other side, became already obvious while Yugoslavia with its political and economic system was still existing. On the ideological basis of the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy, written in 1986 by the group of Serbian intellectuals; Serbian mass-movement, the so-called antibureaucratic revolution, sprung up. Slobodan Milošević was the political leader of that movement. By suspension of legal constitutional autonomous rights in Kosovo and Voivodina that movement first reconstructed Serbia as one whole entity inside federation and afterwards announced reconstruction of federation according to Serbia's heart's desire. Other republics, especially Croatia and Slovenia, responded by claiming higher degree of independence and fundamental economic and political reforms. Actually, it was a conflict of concepts that one of centralism, political monism and planned economy interceded by Serbia, and one of confederalism, political pluralism and market economy interceded by the so-called western republics.

Accusing Croatia of discrimination of its Serbian minority and imputing »genocidal« characteristics to all the Croats, Serbia succeeded by that metapolitical instruments to »export« antibureaucratic revolution outside Serbia, first of all among Serbs in Croatia.

### 2.1.2. Metapolitics of the Serbs in Croatia

The second phase of prewar prelude began immediately after the first free elections in Croatia in 1990 and the establishment of democratically elected Parliament.

Political leaders of the Serbs in Croatia refused to take part in the new political system. They voiced their autonomistic claims avoiding in the same time to define them clearly. An illegal referendum of the Serbs with undefined voting lists was organized in order to proclaim »autonomy«. The consequence of it was the establishment of a Serbian political-demographical-territorial core-area in Northern Dalmatia and Eastern Lika (6 communes, 8,8% of territory and 2,4% of total population of Croatia). During the whole period the Serbs in Croatia have had continuous and mansided support from Serbia.

### 2.1.3. So-called »trunk-revolution«

The third phase began on August, 17th, 1990 at the peak of the tourist season by blocking the most important roads and railroads with tree trunks which resulted in cutting off the flow of goods and people between the coast and inland. The area of »Serbian autonomy« extended on the parts of regions Banija and Kordun

(5 communes, 3,7% of surface and 1,6% of population of Croatia). The so-called »Serbian Autonomous Region Krajina« was proclaimed (including 74,2% of Serbs and 21,6% of Croats in its population) which, although geographically remote from Serbia, announced the will to unite with Serbia. Since the official Serbia's statement has been that Serbia is not at war and that the Serbs in Croatia operate independently, Serbian parliament has not accepted that unity. This phase, which lasted until spring 1991, is characterized by continuous exhaustion of the Croatian economy and destruction of its infrastructure, and by the political and later on, by the physical repression of the Croats living in »Krajina«.

### 2.1.4. The first armed conflicts

In the period from March to June 1991 the first armed conflicts between Serbian rebels and Croatian police took place in Pakrac, Plitvice Lakes National Park and Borovo Selo near Vukovar where 12 policemen were ambushed and killed. In all three cases federal army (JNA) interfered under the excuse of making buffer zone between hostile sides. During that phase nearly all the Croats from Knin region were forced to leave.

## 2.2. Armed aggression against Croatia

### 2.2.1. Phase of limited (low intensity) conflicts

Soon after Croatia and Slovenia declared their independance at the end of June 1991, JNA attacked Slo-

venia but in a week it came to a military and, moreover, ideological and moral breakdown. Ideological »cleansing« of officer's staff, which actually meant selection on the ethnical bases followed, by which the JNA definitely became Serbian military power.

In Croatia armed conflicts expanded and assumed a character of real war operations in which the JNA operated together with the rebel Serbs and volunteers which were secretly sent from Serbia. In terms of territory, fights were still limited to the so-called Serb-dominated areas in Croatia. It was significant that in the most cases Serbian rebels attacked positions of Croatian defence forces. The fights took place in the eastern Slavonia, Banija and northern Dalmatia.

Meanwhile, the ethnical cleansing in the Serb-dominated areas turned into the real genocide on the Croats (examples: Dalj near Osijek, Struga in Banija). The number of victims was in constant progression as well as the number of refugees while deserted Croatian villages were pillaged and burned down (example: Čelije in Slavonia).

### 2.2.2. Escalation – total aggression

By the mid of August 1991 parts of Croatia in which the Serbs are minority were gripped by armed conflicts. The escalation of aggression was »justified« with the fighting against »neofascism« in Croatia. JNA forces from Bosnia and Herzegovina entered Croatia and opened the new battlefields in western Slavonia,

conflicts spread out in Lika and Korčula and JNA occupied Baranya and expelled most of the Croats and the Hungarians who formed majority of population there. In Slavonia big towns were attacked: Osijek (70,3% of Croats, 15,1% of Serbs), Vinkovci (79,9% of Croats, 10,7% of Serbs) and Vukovar (47,0% of Croats, 32,4% of Serbs). And so it happened that the »defenders of Serbian villages« were in fact attacking Croatian towns.

It became obvious that Serbia, with the help of ideologically similar and ethnically uniformed JNA, wanted to occupy all parts of Croatia lying east of the line Virovitica-Karlovac-Ogulin-Karlobag. That aim was not openly announced by Serbian officials but by an extreme right-wing politician Vojislav Šešelj, instead.

The proportion of war destruction moved international factors towards the more active engagement. The European Community took over the trusteeship on peace-making. The efforts of foreign ministers of the Twelve, unfortunately, did not have corresponding results. Croatia, as well as Slovenia, obeyed agreements signed with the Twelve but Serbia and JNA in spite of series of ceasefires and declarations carried on with the aggression.

In September 1991 there was further escalation of conflicts including air attacks on, up till then, peaceful parts of Croatia. Sisak (58,1% of Croats, 23,7% of Serbs) and Šibenik (83,2% of Croats and 9,5% of Serbs) were under continuous attack for several days.

A new total offensive was launched at the end of September and the beginning of October 1991. In order to break Croatia into more divided entities, the aggressor attacked towns of Zadar (77,1% of Croats, 14,5% of Serbs) and Karlovac (64,0% of Croats and 24,0% of Serbs) and blocked all sea and air routes as well as some roads. Strategically important points were occupied (the Maslenica bridge) or tried to be demolished (the Pag bridge). The biggest destruction was in the town of Vukovar which, until now, had been besieged for almost three months. Without any plausible reason the town of Dubrovnik (77,5% of Croats, 8,8% of Serbs), »the crown of Croatian towns« and »the pearl of the Adriatic«, has also been under attack for more than a month. A more perfidious methods have also been employed, for example in Ilok, where most of the inhabitants (63,0% of Croats, 17,2% of Slovaks, 7,2% of Serbs) were actually forced to leave the town while JNA later tried to present the exodus as an act of their free choice.

The aggression on Croatia still lasts in spite of the fact that on the Peace Conference in the Hague on October 10th it was decided that JNA should withdraw from Croatia. By the time of this paper being written only on Croatian side more than 2500 persons were killed and around 9000 persons were wounded. The number of refugees is around 300000 persons. Material damages are enormous. Entire towns are being destroyed and numerous villages as well. The economy of the entire regions is com-

pletely out of work. Besides direct damages, all the indirect ones should be taken into account as well.

### 3. Serbian aims and modes of campaign

The aim of Serbia is to create a Greater Serbia i.e. to unite all areas of former Yugoslavia in which the Serbs live, no matter whether they are majority or minority. It should also include areas with no Serbian population, the reason being their geographic position. The fact that all those areas have never, throughout the history, been part of Serbia bears no importance to the Serbian leaders. The idea is, to put it modestly, an imperialistic one, moreover one of the kind known to all as inspired by »Blutt und Boden« ideology.

Knowing that in such a state Serbs would actually be a minority against non-Serbs, in its realization ethnic cleansing is practised i.e. persecution and extermination of the Croats first of all, but villages with the Hungarian or Czech majority are not spared either. Everything is followed by intentional destruction of all traces of Croatian culture which bear witness of millenary continuity of Croatian existence and Croatian statehood. In deserted Croatian villages Serbian population is intended to be colonized (example: region of Baranya).

It is very important to stress a perfidious mode of campaign. Since Serbia in all ways tries to hide its real role and officially denies its participation in the war, for reaching its

aims Serbia uses the service of the JNA. In that army the non-Serbs from Serbia (Hungarians, Slovaks, and others) and Serbs from B&H are recruited. Volunteers from Serbia, members of paramilitary neo-Chetnik units are engaged as well. For attacks on Croatia and logistic support for occupation forces, the territory of the third republic has been used (B&H). Only on the battlefield in eastern Slavonia attacks come directly from Serbia. The Montenegrins are recruited as well and during the attacks on Dubrovnik the territory of Montenegro was used.

The largest level of instrumentalization and manipulation is the relation of Serbia with the Serbs in Croatia. Most of them were forced to commit war crimes against the republic whose citizens they are.

#### **4. Aims of Croatia**

All fights up till now have taken place on the Croatian territory. In the fights most of the victims were

citizens of Croatia irrespective of their ethnicity. Only Croatian villages and towns are destroyed. None of the Croatian soldiers is fighting outside Croatia. So, there is no doubt that we are dealing here with a campaign and aggression against Croatia. Therefore, the main aim of Croatia is to stop further fights, sufferings and destruction.

Political aim of Croatia is a full sovereignty and international recognition as well as building up of its democracy. Because of such aims Croatia asked the European Community for help believing that its goals are in full accordance with the EC's interests.

Regarding the question of Serbian minority, Croatia proposes a solution which Europe can easily recognize. Under the international control it offered and guaranteed a high level of autonomy and home-rule in a proportion with the share of the Serbs and all the other non-Croats in the areas where they live.

Tab. 1. Causes and dynamic of the war in Croatia

## 1. CAUSES

- conflict of politogenetic ideas, conflict between two states
- an attempt to create Greater Serbia → amputation of Croatia
- classical war for territorial expansion

## 2. DYNAMIC

## 2.1. Political and metapolitical prelude (up til June 1991)

## 2.1.1. Conflict of political ideas:

<i>Serbia</i>	<i>Croatia</i>
centralism	confederalism
monism	pluralism
planned economy	market economy
autocracy	democracy

## 2.1.2. Metapolitics of the Serbs in Croatia (May-August 1990)

- refusing to take part in Croatian political system

## 2.1.3. So-called »trunk-revolution« (August, 1990 – March, 1991)

- transport barricades
- »Serbian Autonomous Region Krajina«

## 2.1.4. The first armed conflicts (March-June, 1991)

- Pakrac, Plitvice Lakes, Borovo Selo

## 2.2. Armed aggression against Croatia

## 2.2.1. Phase of limited (low intensity) conflicts (June-August 1991)

- JNA = Serbian army
- genocide against the Croats
- northern Dalmatia, Banija, eastern Slavonia

## 2.2.2. Escalation – total aggression (August 1991 – ?)

- Virovitica–Karlovac–Ogulin–Karlobag line
- terror imposed on civilians

*AIMS OF SERBIA*

- to carry on with the wareffort
- occupation of Croatian territories

*AIMS OF CROATIA*

- to stop the war
- independence, territorial integrity
- democratic society (minority rights)

## Sažetak

### UZROCI I DINAMIKA RATA U HRVATSKOJ

Mladen Klemenčić

Srbijanska ekspanzionistička politika ima idejnu podlogu u koncepcijama koje se povremeno ali opetovano javljaju u Srbiji još od prve polovice 19. st. U različitim varijantama, ali s istim sadržajem i ciljevima, te ekspanzionističke ideje obnavljale su se i pri kraju 19. st., u vrijeme balkanskih ratova i prvog svjetskog rata, u vrijeme Kraljevine Jugoslavije te u vrijeme drugog svjetskog rata. Najnovije očitovanje velikosrpska ideja je doživjela pojavom Memoranduma SANU te dolaskom na vlast Slobodana Miloševića, nakon čega je i došlo do krize, a naposljetku i sloma Jugoslavije te rata protiv Hrvatske. Optuživši Hrvatsku i Sloveniju za jednostranu secesiju, Srbija je oružani sukob pokušala opravdati političkim razlozima, poglavito tobožnjom potrebom zaštite srpskog naroda izvan Srbije. U svojoj bitni, međutim, to je bio sukob oko teritorija ili točnije pokušaj prisvajanja tuđeg teritorija. Agresija na Hrvat-

sku, kojom se željelo amputirati svo hrvatsko područje istočno od crte Virovitica-Karlovac-Ogulin-Karlobag, imala je svoj metapolitički i politički uvod pri čemu je inscenirana pobuna srpskog stanovništva u Hrvatskoj. Prvi oružani sukobi izbili su u proljeće 1991. i otada je sukob eskalirao do totalne agresije na Hrvatsku u jesen iste godine. Za realizaciju zacrtanih ciljeva Srbija je upotrijebila jedinu organiziranu vojnu silu u Jugoslaviji: bivša savezna vojska transformirana je u srpsku okupacijsku vojsku. Prednost na vojnom planu iskorištena je i primjenom terora nad civilnim pučanstvom, koji je vrhunac dostigao u tzv. etničkom čišćenju čitavih hrvatskih regija. Ratni cilj Srbije je nastavak oružanih operacija sve do ispunjenja zacrtanih teritorijalnih ciljeva. Hrvatska, naprotiv, želi zaustaviti rat i dalja stradanja i razaranja, te postići međunarodno priznanje u okviru postojećih granica.

Mr. Mladen Klemenčić  
Leksikografski zavod »Miroslav Krleža«  
Hrvatska, 41000 Zagreb  
Frankopanska 26