

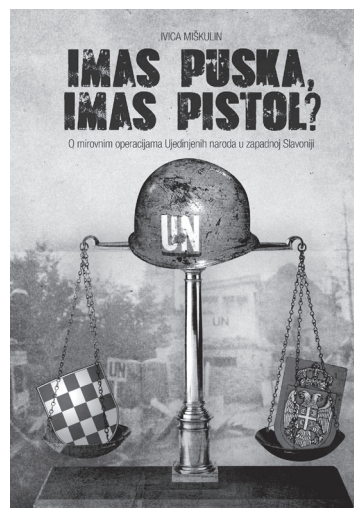
Ivica Miškulin, *Imas puska, imas pistol?* O mirovnim operacijama Ujedinjenih naroda u zapadnoj Slavoniji [Do you have a Rifle, do you have a Gun? About the UN Peacekeeping Operations in Western Slavonia] (Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest. Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2014)

Summary

The internationalization of the conflicts in the countries that emerged after the disintegration of communist Yugoslavia is unprecedented in recent European history. The intervention of the United Nations in Croatia was one of the most comprehensive interventions of an organization of the international community. The peacekeeping troops of the United Nations must be considered the most noticeable instruments of a third-party peace intervention in the conflict in Croatia. Occasionally and depending on the movement of troops (UNPROFOR – United Nations Protection Force) and (UNCRO – United Nations Confidence Restoration Operation in Croatia) more than fifteen thousand people from all continents were positioned in various deployment areas. Both activities are ranked as traditional peacekeeping operations, implying that their defining characteristics are political impartiality/military neutrality, conservative or minimal application of means of coercion and placing confidence in cooperation with the conflicting parties.

A document containing the substance of the peacekeeping operation UNPROFOR (which was mainly the foundation for the peacekeeping operation UNCRO) was presented to Croatian and Serbian representatives in Geneva in late November 1991. It was publicly announced in the first half of 1991 as a supplement to the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, officially known as the United Nations Peacekeeping Plan in Yugoslavia. This plan, soon after known as the Vance plan, was according to its substance, a temporary measure i.e. a temporary arrangement with the principal task of stabilizing the circumstances in the deployment areas of the UN peacekeeping troops, called UN protected areas. Thus, this plan foresaw the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops of various profiles in conflict areas, their task being to demilitarize the area and to protect the civilian population and consequently create circumstances for the return of expellees and refugees.

The Vance plan, in simple terms, can be considered as an endeavour to gain time: the UN, acting actually on behalf of the entire international community, temporarily stopped the conflict in Croatia, attempting to permanently resolve the conflict in a negotiation process with the higher ranks. Hence, the aim of the peacekeeping opera-



tion was not conflict resolution but to calm the situation (to reinforce the ceasefire) in contested territories. The UN started the new peacekeeping operation with the attitude that the presence of peacekeeping forces would dissuade the parties to the conflict from armed hostilities and that they would show a tendency to accept the concept of international cooperation, which could result in the implementation of the Vance plan. In such a case a final political solution would have been more probable. Instead, of course, in retrospect, it can be concluded that both parties never actually accepted the Vance plan. Although both parties officially accepted the essential dogma of the plan not to prejudice the outcome of the negotiations about a final political solution, in reality the actions of both parties indicated attempts to accomplish their political objectives. The Krajina Serbs had to perceive, in a manner of speaking, the Vance plan as a possibility to achieve statehood, that is to say, to ally themselves with Serbia. Belgrade's keynote in relation to UN peacekeeping forces was: a long-term ceasefire, or, an impending Cyprusisation of Croatia, as it was often referred to in Croatian media until mid-1992, would have opened up the possibility of a permanent separation of the territories controlled by the Krajina Serbs within Croatia; all this under the supervision and consequent sanctions of the international community i.e. the UN. In contrast to Belgrade and Knin, Zagreb accepted the UN peacekeeping operation as a method of a peaceful integration of UN protected areas into the Croatian constitutional order; any action of the peacekeeping forces leading to the suspension or even codification of the state of a permanent ceasefire, and so increasing the possibility of a permanent partition of Croatia, was unacceptable. The peacekeeping forces and as a consequence the UN peacekeeping operation as a whole found themselves from the start in a different role than previously foreseen. While for Belgrade and Knin the main characteristic of anticipated actions of the UN peacekeeping forces was a static quality, in other words maintaining a long-term ceasefire, Zagreb expected dynamism i.e. the accomplishment of permanent peace. Instead of being a mediator in order to accomplish a final and permanent political solution, the UN peacekeeping forces got involved in a territorial conflict which was only temporarily stopped by the Sarajevo Agreement at the beginning of 1992. It is therefore not hard to agree with the conclusion that the peacekeeping operation became a victim of a conflict that could not be peacefully solved or, more precisely, its ultimate failure was conditioned by the insolubleness of the conflict.

Sector West (or United Nations Protected Area West) was only a part of the entire structure of the peacekeeping operation in Croatia, in a state territory with a UN presence rarely seen in any other parts of Europe. The territorial mandate of the peacekeeping operation is probably the best evidence for that. Namely, four protected zones/areas (UNPA) or sectors were established. They were named according to a rather awkward combination of UN terminology typical for traditional peacekeeping operations and geographical conditions. The UN protected zones covered little more than a fifth of the Croatian continental territory. If we add JNA-held zones, or so called pink zones, (there are no precise data on Prevlaka), the UN jurisdiction covered, one way or the other, little more than a fourth of the Croatian inland territory. Sector West was the smallest of all the UN protected areas. Extending over 2,112 km², the sector covered less than a fifth of the total area of all UN protected areas. It comprised the

entire area of the former municipalities of Grubišno Polje, Daruvar and Pakrac, the western parts of the municipality of Novska and the eastern parts of Nova Gradiška (later the Bjelovar-Bilogora County, the Požega-Slavonia County, the Sisak-Moslavina County and the Brod-Posavina County). Along with Sector East this was the only UN protected area with no areas held by the JNA. The Krajina Serbs controlled entire areas of some sectors; only a small part of Sector West was under the control of the Krajina Serbs, that part, which was under their control at the time of the Sarajevo Agreement in January 1992, comprising little more than a fifth of the entire sector area. This small area had a number of significant strategic characteristics. The Zagreb-Belgrade motorway ran through this area and in the south there was the only preserved crossing over the Sava River to Bosnia and Herzegovina, that is to say the Stara Gradiška bridge. Eventually Sector West was the only UN protected area in Croatia with as many as three borders. The first was the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina as a result of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The second, i.e. the land border with the free Croatian territory was a result of UN mediation. Eventually, there was a third, at the same time, the most significant one: the dividing line between the parties to the conflict, running through the sector, as a result of the above mentioned ceasefire. It is noteworthy that Pakrac was the only quite large town in Croatia crossed by a dividing line. The dividing line within the Sector and the fact that it cut through a town were peculiarities of Sector West that distinguished it from other sectors. A total of four battalions of the UN peacekeeping forces coming from Argentina, Jordan, Canada and Nepal were deployed in Sector West. Furthermore, members of the United Nations Military Observers (UNMO), members of the UN Civilian Police (UNCIVPOL), officials of UN Civil Affairs (CIVAFF), several officials of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other organizations of the UN were positioned in this Sector.

The peacekeeping operation UNPROFOR of Sector West achieved better results than UNPROFOR or UNCRO all over Croatia. Sector West was a more peaceful area, i.e. a safer UN protected area than Sectors East, North and South. It was an area of fewer ceasefire violations; it had the lowest use of illicit arms (the most effective demilitarization) as well as the lowest number of victims of civilian violence. But most importantly, this zone was the only UN protected area where the return of masses of expellees and refugees was recorded (more precisely: the part under the control of the Croatian government). Special emphasis should be laid on this fact; the situation in the part of the Sector controlled by the Krajina Serbs from May 1993 did in fact not differ from the situation in other protected zones. Extensive actions in relation to the peacebuilding measures are a confirmation of the great success achieved by the UN peacekeeping operations in Sector West. The appearance of the Fischer plans (meetings with civilians, visiting villages), the Daruvar Agreement, of diverse projects of the United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV) of camps for volunteers and the motorway opening for civilian traffic was feasible only in Sector West. It was the peacebuilding that most of all emphasized Sector West compared to other protected areas. However, can the achievement of the blue helmets in Sector West, qualitatively more efficient than e.g. in Sector North or Sector South, be sufficient for a positive overall grade to be awarded? It must be borne in mind that the UN peacekeeping forces in Sector

West did not execute one single mandatory assignment effectively. They were unable to prevent the most blatant breach of the ceasefire (in May 1995). The surveillance of the bridge in Stara Gradiška existed merely in the resolutions of the Security Council and in the reports of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the return of the non-Serbian population to the sector under the Krajina Serbs never occurred, whereas the return to the Croatian part of the sector occurred without the knowledge of the UN peacekeeping forces. A more successful execution of mandatory assignments (with significant exceptions, such as border crossing surveillance and the return of expellees and refugees) took place during the first UNPROFOR year in the sector. Similar success was not to be registered again (with the exception of the motorway).

A comparison to another peacekeeping operations established by the UN in Croatia would probably be a better way to evaluate the operations in Western Slavonia. The United Nations traditional administration in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sylvania (UNTAES) was established by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1037 on January 15, 1996. Exactly two years later, on January 15, 1998 the operation was closed and the official closure was followed by a huge festivity. UNTAES was conducted in the shadow of the Dayton Agreement, which was set up to solve the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and can justifiably be valued as a great mediation success of the UN. UNTAES could briefly be described as a kind of UN executive authority set up temporarily in the territory of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sylvania; during that time the region became multi-ethnic again. Minority rights were guaranteed to the local Serbian population, within the Croatian state sovereignty, however. UNTAES belongs to the most advanced types of UN peacekeeping operations, i.e. to operations where the peacekeeping forces, in collaboration with the conflicting parties and relying on means of coercion, monitor the execution of the peacekeeping agreement or the final political solution.

Which substantial and circumstantial factors caused the success of UNTAES in Eastern Slavonia, and, by contrast, the failure of UNPROFOR in Western Slavonia (certainly also in Croatia)? The existence of a peacekeeping plan in the first place: UNTAES was based on a precise document which was actually supported by the decisions of Croatia and Serbia to adhere to it, hence those charged with certain assignments and the due dates were clearly defined, whereas UNPROFOR was based on a perfunctory and oftentimes unclear document accepted by both parties more or less on paper and which did not foresee any sanctions for trespassers, i.e. no rewards for those who complied with the regulations. There is, of course, also the issue of warranty mechanisms: General Jacques Paul Klein, the American Administrator for Eastern Slavonia or the Chief of the UNTAES mission, had the possibility to rely on approximately 5,000 soldiers, ready to use force, in case the Serbian party refused to demobilise or in case the Croatian forces invaded Baranja, while the Argentinian Commanding Officer in Sector West Brigadier-General Carlos Maria Zabala could count on four infantry battalions of which only one (the Canadian) was relatively ready for combat. A true failure of the UN was certainly the fact that the operation in Sector West had the potential gradually to turn into an operation in Eastern Slavonia. The deployment of one

Canadian platoon, for instance, would certainly have been a better way to supervise the border checkpoint at Stara Gradiška than resorting to the Nepalese. The Canadians would most certainly have supervised the security of civil traffic more effectively. Furthermore, this was only one of the missed possibilities in a situation with more favourable characteristics than elsewhere: Zagreb showed the most peaceful approach up until 1995; in the ranks of the Krajina Serbs, at least until 1993., those in favour of negotiations had the upper hand. The peculiarities of Sector West offered certain possibilities not recognized by the UN and they were therefore not utilized.