

CONFLICT BETWEEN THE COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT OF YUGOSLAVIA AND THE FRANCISCAN PROVINCE OF HERZEGOVINA: ACTIVITY OF THE CROATIAN FRANCISCAN COMMISSARIAT OF THE HOLY FAMILY IN THE USA (1954-1980) *

Miroslav AKMADŽA **

The author of the paper analyses the policy of the communist regime in Yugoslavia towards priestly emigration on the example of the Croatian Franciscan Commissariat in Chicago. The Yugoslav authorities conditioned the more liberty for the Church and Franciscan order with the changes in the Commissariat, which would prevent the anti-Yugoslav activities of the Franciscans there. Given that the Franciscans from Herzegovinian received considerable financial support from the Commissariat, they sought to find a way to satisfy the state authorities without disturbing cooperation with the Commissariat.

Key words: Croatian Franciscan Commissariat in Chicago, Herzegovinian Franciscan Province, communist authorities, Yugoslavia

Introduction

The Croatian Franciscan Commissariat of the Holy Family was founded in Chicago in 1926, with the aim of providing pastoral care to the Croatian

* This study was co-financed by the Croatian Science Foundation as part of the scholarly research project "Croatia in the 20th Century: Modernization in the Circumstances of Pluralism and Monism," Nr. 3481.

** Miroslav Akmadža, Ph.D., Croatian Institute of History, Department for the History of Slavonia, Syrmia and Baranya, Slavonski Brod, Croatia

immigrants in the US and ensuring the preservation of their national specificity.¹ In 1931, the Commissariat was placed under the jurisdiction of the Franciscan Province of Herzegovina and was hence considered as its constituent part. During World War II, the official contacts between the Commissariat and the Province were partly interrupted, which made the Commissariat largely independent in the first years after the war, with some tendencies of completely separating from the Province. This was primarily the aspiration of those Franciscans who were born in the US and had meanwhile taken over the leading posts in the Commissariat. To achieve this goal, they even resorted to accusations against the Franciscans in the Province, namely that they cooperated too closely with the Communist authorities, especially in connection with the Union of Catholic Priests "Good Shepherd". However, in the early 1960s the situation started to change and the Commissariat was again on friendly terms with the Province, especially – according to the Yugoslav authorities – owing to the inactivity of the Union's Herzegovinian members and the decline in cooperation between the Province and the regime. In return, the Province obtained significant financial support from the Commissariat. The consequence was a harsher state policy towards the Province and the Franciscans were often denied the permission to travel abroad. The Province considered this situation very disadvantageous and its leadership reached an agreement with the regime, at least on principle, about the necessity of urgently change the situation in the Commissariat, for example by rejuvenating it with new priests from the homeland. The aim was to mitigate the Commissariat's policy towards the Yugoslav regime, especially the tone of its newspaper *Danica*.²

The priests in emigration presented a considerable problem to the Communist regime in Yugoslavia, especially since they initiated various activities that aimed at informing the international public about the situation of the Croatian people and the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia. A particularly resounding international scandal, followed by stern reactions from the Yugoslav regime, was the *Memorandum on Religious Persecution and the Legal Position of Croatia and Its People*, sent by the Croatian Catholic clergy in the US and other parts of the world to various governments, leading politicians and spiritual leaders, journalists, and newspaper houses in the Western democracies. On June 15, 1954 the *Memorandum* was personally handed in to the US President Dwight D. Eisenhower. It was signed by 143 clergymen, 50 of them

¹ In 1939, general of the Franciscan order changed the name of the Commissariat into Custody, but I will consistently refer to it as Commissariat in this study for clarity reasons.

² Archive of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter: ABH), Sarajevo, Regional Commission for Relations with Religious Communities (hereafter: ZKVP), box 40, code 28, 143/1966.

from Bosnia and Herzegovina.³ The Commissariat of Herzegovinian Franciscans in Chicago had been its main initiator and one of its members, Fr. Silvije Grubišić, personally handed in the *Memorandum* to the American President.⁴

This event made it clear to the Yugoslav government that the Commissariat was a serious adversary and that they had to suppress its impact on the Franciscans of Herzegovina, as well as exert pressure on the leaders of the Province to prevent further activities of the Commissariat in this direction.

Commissariat's Dissatisfaction with the Franciscan Attitude towards the Communist Regime

Since the Commissariat was formally under the jurisdiction of the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province, this issue was primarily addressed (beside the Security Service) by the Commission for Religious Affairs of the People's Republic / Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter: Commission for Religious Affairs NR/SR BiH). Late in 1955, the Commission reached the conclusion that the leadership of the Catholic Church in BiH had become more lenient in its relations with the state. It was of the opinion that the Franciscans were opposed to all overt activity against the regime, although the reason was not patriotism, except with some individuals, but rather their realistic view of the situation. It was in this spirit that the provincial of Herzegovina, Fr. Jerko Mihaljević, wrote to the Franciscan Commissariat in Chicago, admonishing them that they should not get involved in politics and even rejecting their support to the Province, and similar letters were sent by various other Franciscans. Such attitudes caused dissatisfaction among the emigrants and a complaint was sent against the friars in BiH to the Roman Curia. As stated there, the Franciscans in BiH were "prone to magnanimity, which is often dangerous and always detrimental to the Church, and have turned into servile agents of the Yugoslav regime." They complained of the provincials for supporting the unions that "follow the line of the Yugoslav regime and are always in open opposition to Rome." Special criticism was voiced against Fr. Jerko Mihaljević, who was accused of being "arrogant and disrespectful" towards the ecclesiastical authorities and of refusing to help the bishops. On the other hand, the Yugoslav government believed that the behaviour of the Franciscans in BiH had shattered the unity of Franciscans in emigration, since some of them agreed with those in BiH. Thus, the head of the Franciscan Commissariat in Chicago, Ferdinand Skoko, stated that he was hoping

³ "Issues Related to the Church-State Relations," ABH, ZKVP, b. 5, 82/1957.

⁴ ABH, ZKVP, b. 40, c. 28, 143/1966.

for better cooperation with provincial Mihaljević, with the approval of the Yugoslav authorities, and asked for further instructions on how to proceed, as he was facing difficulties and disobedience, and he wanted to remain under the jurisdiction of the Herzegovinian Province. He also expressed readiness to receive some “benevolent” Franciscans from Yugoslavia in training.⁵

But the guilt of the Herzegovinian Franciscans for the situation in the Commissariat was particularly emphasized by the Union’s representatives from the Franciscan province of “Bosnia Argentina”, dissatisfied with the activities of the Herzegovinian Franciscans within the Union. Namely, the Herzegovinian Franciscans justified their inactivity in the Union by fearing the bans and punishments of the Mostar Bishopric, i.e. the decision *Ipsa facto* issued by the episcopal delegate Andrija Majić while Bishop Petar Čule had been in prison, which the latter did not revert upon his release. A member of the Union’s Central Committee, the Bosnian Franciscan Karlo Misilo, stated in the Commission for Religious Affairs NR BiH on November 9, 1961 that the Herzegovinian Franciscans were responsible for the situation there. He was of the opinion that Majić’s ban was a result of the fact that the Union members did not oppose the policy of the Mostar Ordinariate, adverse to the Union, and that some even approved of it. In fact, he believed that most Herzegovinian Franciscans approved of the situation, and so did those circles abroad that supported them financially, especially the Commissariat in Chicago.⁶

The Union’s secretary Karlo Karin, likewise a Bosnian Franciscan, stated before the Commission for Religious Affairs NR BiH on March 20, 1962 that his optimism about the Union in Herzegovina had turned into pessimism, and that the Herzegovinian Franciscans would not show enthusiasm for his work even if Čule reverted Majić’s ban. In his opinion, many Herzegovinian Franciscans wanted “our social order” to collapse and the society to be transformed to their own benefit. He also claimed that the same Franciscans protected the emigrants active in the Herzegovinian Franciscan Commissariat in the US in order to obtain financial aid or have their support in case of political change.⁷

However, the provincial of Bosnian Franciscans, Vjekoslav Zirdum was not of the same opinion, and neither was Fr. Vlado Karlović, a distinguished member of the Union. In a conversation with the secretary of the Commission for Religious Affairs BiH, which took place on August 1, 1962, they stated that

⁵ ABH, ZKVP, b. 4, 164/1955.

⁶ “Information” of the Commission for Religious Affairs NR BiH, nr. 26 (November 28, 1961), ABH, ZKVP, b. 14, 208/1961.

⁷ “Information”, Commission for Religious Affairs NR BiH, nr. 10 (March 28, 1962), ABH, ZKVP, b. 17, 225/1962.

they saw the Herzegovinian Franciscans in a completely different light than the state authorities. Karlović emphasized that he knew Fr. Vendelin Vasilj, head of the Chicago Commissariat, had a positive opinion of the cooperation between the clergy and the regime in BiH.⁸ The Commission for Religious Affairs adopted the stance that Franciscans should be prevented from traveling to the US for pastoral purposes until the situation in the Commissariat changed to the extent that suited the Yugoslav government.⁹

On February 26, 1963 the Commission for Religious Affairs expressed its dissatisfaction to Leonardo Oreč, secretary of the Herzegovinian Province, with the relations between the regime and the Franciscans. It was stated that the Province's leadership refused to improve these relations, which is partly due to the emigrant Franciscans, as they financially supported the Herzegovinian ones. Oreč assured the Commission that there were no enemies of socialism or Yugoslavia among the Herzegovinian Franciscans, since they were patriotic clerics and advocate brotherhood. He downplayed the influence of financial aid from abroad on the local Franciscans, emphasizing that the Commissariat consisted of priests who had been trained in a different era and their mindset was hard to change. He added that the situation in Herzegovina was pictured worse than it actually was and that he personally saw no serious problems there; and the Union could not operate unless approved by the bishop. When he was told that the government intended to intensify its cooperation with Bishop Čule and the secular clergy, Oreč said: "So, you are disappointed with the Herzegovinian Franciscans. Believe me, you've always had good friends in them." Several days later, on March 13, 1963 the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH was visited by the leading men of the Herzegovinian Province, headed by provincial Zlatko Ćorić. On that occasion, the Commission reproached them for all that had been said to Oreč and warned that their demands would not be met before the situation changed. Ćorić answered that progress could be made in Herzegovina only gradually.¹⁰

On March 6, 1963 the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH invited a group of 13 members of the Union's Central Committee and gave them some theses/instructions on the Union's further activities. Then the present Franciscans were asked whether the Herzegovinian Franciscans should be allowed to send young priests to the Commissariat in the US, regarding the present situation. Most of the present Franciscans voted against. Fr. Karlo

⁸ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs NR BiH, nr. 23 (August 9, 1962), ABH, ZKVP, b. 17, 225/1962.

⁹ ABH, ZKVP, b. 21, c. 10, 66/1964.

¹⁰ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs NR BiH, nr. 4 (March 18, 1963), ABH, ZKVP, b. 30, 324/1963.

Karin voiced his opinion that it was the Franciscans who were on decline in Herzegovina, not the Union, and that the Herzegovinian Franciscans simply did not want the Union.¹¹

An attempt of the Yugoslav Authorities to change the situation in the Commissariat through the Herzegovinian Franciscans

Hoping that they could influence the situation in the Commissariat, the Yugoslav authorities permitted first Fr. Jerko Mihaljević and then Fr. Rufin Šilić to spend prolonged periods of time in the USA. However, the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH was never satisfied with the results and reproached Mihaljević and Šilić for not having used their stay in the Commissariat to put a stop on anti-Yugoslav writing in *Danica*. The authorities also demanded that Šilić return to Yugoslavia before the previously agreed date.¹²

In a conversation with Ante Vrdoljak, president of the district branch of the Commission for Religious Affairs in Mostar, which took place on February 22, 1964, Mihaljević promised that he would develop, in cooperation with other priests, a long-term programme for solving the problems in the Commissariat in agreement with the Commission. For the beginning, however, he suggested that several theologians should be sent to the US for education, as well as a young priest, and that they should be trained to take over the leadership of the Commissariat after the death of the three elderly priests who were most fiercely opposed to Yugoslavia. In his opinion, that would make it easier to persuade other priests in the Commissariat to change their attitude. Meanwhile, the said theologians and the priest would have to be visited each year by someone who would give them instructions and exert influence on the priests in the Commissariat, and some of them should be invited each year to visit Yugoslavia. The Commissariat should also be influenced via written correspondence and so on. Mihaljević claimed that he had managed to persuade two priests from Chicago to visit Yugoslavia, and he intended to take them around the country and introduce them to the representatives of the regime. He also suggested sending several nuns to the US.¹³

¹¹ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs NR BiH, nr. 4 (March 18, 1963), ABH, ZKVP, b. 30, 324/1963.

¹² "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs NR BiH, nr. 8 (1963), ABH, ZKVP, b. 30, 324/1963.

¹³ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs of the Mostar District, nr. 6 (March 1964), ABH, ZKVP, b. 27, 143/1964.

Provincial Fr. Zlatko Ćorić agreed with Mihaljević's proposals when Vr-doljak paid them a visit on March 7, 1964. Ćorić announced the arrival of two young priests from the Commissariat, adding that it would be better for them to see the situation in Yugoslavia with their own eyes and report it to the Commissariat, since they would be trusted more than the friars who lived in the country.¹⁴

Thus, two friars from the Commissariat came to Herzegovina: Fr. Špiro Andrijanić and Fr. Anzelmo Slišković. Having visited various parishes, monasteries, and municipalities, and having talked to various priests and state officials, on June 27, 1964 they visited the Commission for Religious Affairs of the Mostar District, accompanied by provincial Ćorić. On that occasion, they said that they were pleasantly surprised by the situation in Herzegovina and the improvement of Church-state relations, and that the news brought by the Chicago *Danica* was wrong. They also wanted to know whether the priests who had fled Yugoslavia after the war could now return. The officials answered that the Amnesty Law applied to everyone unless they were accused of war crimes; thus, anyone who was willing and who did not belong to that category could return.¹⁵

Early in 1965, the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH allowed two priests from the Commissariat, Fr. Vitomir Naletilić and Fr. Bazilije Pandžić, to visit Yugoslavia.¹⁶ Upon his arrival, on August 12, 1965, Fr. Bazilije Pandžić visited the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH in the company of Fr. Karlo Karin and Fr. Bonicije Rupčić. On that occasion, Pandžić stated that he was now personally convinced that Yugoslavia granted religious freedom and that he had a positive opinion on religious life in the country. He added that he would report on everything to the Commissariat and the general of the Franciscan Order, recommending him to visit Yugoslavia and see the situation himself. He also suggested that theologians should be allowed to go for education to the USA, since he was convinced that those theologians who had been to Rome were the best promoters of religious freedom in Yugoslavia.¹⁷

Soon afterwards, Fr. Vjekoslav Bambir came from the US and expressed a positive opinion on the Yugoslav situation before the Commission for Reli-

¹⁴ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs of the Mostar District, nr. 8 (March 1964), ABH, ZKVP, b. 27, 161/1964.

¹⁵ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs of the Mostar District, nr. 17 (July 1964), ABH, ZKVP, b. 27, 383/1964.

¹⁶ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 4 (May 12, 1965), ABH, ZKVP, b. 30, 327/1965.

¹⁷ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 8 (September 7, 1965), ABH, ZKVP, b. 30, 327/1965.

gious Affairs of the Mostar District. When questioned on the writing of *Danica*, he said that it was managed by two priests alone, whom nobody in the Commissariat approved of, and that he had been asked by Fr. Vendelin Vasilj to promise the Commission that he would turn *Danica* into a weekly that would henceforth focus only on religious topics. However, the Commission did not believe that only two priests stood behind *Danica*, since Vasilj and the others could have easily removed them from the editorial board.¹⁸

However, during their visit to Yugoslavia, Bambir, Pandžić, and other priests from the Commissariat seem to have said only what they considered pleasing to the regime, yet held a different opinion for themselves. It became clear when Bambir, upon his return to the US, held a speech at the celebration of the 15th anniversary of the “United American Croats” organization in 1966. There he joined the other speakers in voicing his wish for a united struggle of Croatian emigrants to liberate their homeland and re-establish the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). Upon their return to America, Andrijanić and Slišković likewise went on speaking of religious and political intolerance in Yugoslavia, even though they had expressed positive opinions in their dialogues with state officials.¹⁹

At that time the Commission for Religious Affairs was visited by Fr. Bosiljko Bekavac Jr. (his uncle of the same name also lived in America), who was considered pro-Yugoslav in the US²⁰ and was therefore removed from the editorial board of *Zajedničar*, a newspaper published by the Croatian Fraternal Union (Hrvatska bratska zajednica). Bekavac wrote letters asking for help, in this case to the general consul in Pittsburgh, and he tried to convince the general of the Franciscan Order, Augustin Sepinski, to help him, contacting him through Fr. Karlo Balić in Rome and through provincial Zirdum. However, the general’s assistant in charge of Yugoslavia, Fr. Berard Barčić, was angry with Balić for intervening and endorsing Bekavac. Meanwhile, Bekavac also wrote to Pope Paul VI, complaining about Josip(?) Kasić and accusing him of having caused his deposition. Zlatko Frid, secretary of the Croatian Commission for Religious Affairs, also intervened in favour of Bekavac with the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, suggesting that the Franciscan elders in Sarajevo could perhaps be persuaded to plead for Bekavac with general Sepinski.²¹

¹⁸ “Information”, Commission for Religious Affairs of the Mostar District, nr. 12 (September 1965), ABH, ZKVP, b. 38, 310/1965.

¹⁹ ABH, ZKVP, b. 40, c. 28, 143/1966.

²⁰ Bekavac arrived in the US under interesting circumstances; cf. Jure Krišto, *Biljezi jedne franjevačke politike u BiH* [Notes on a Franciscan policy in BiH] (Zagreb, 2013), 140-143.

²¹ ABH, ZKVP, b. 38, c. 37, 126/1965.

Bekavac stated before the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH that the Herzegovinian Franciscans had the same opinion of Yugoslavia as the Commissariat. He mentioned the case of Fr. Rufin Šilić, who told him in Chicago that he would never return to that “Communist hell” and advised him to do the same. Bekavac also said that Fr. Jerko Mihaljević had never done any good while staying at the Commissariat, and had denigrated the Bosnian Franciscans in Rome before the general of the Order. Bekavac was of the opinion that the provincial of Herzegovina could suppress the hostile activities of the Commissariat through the general of the Order, even ban it, and that the general should be pressed to undertake such measures. He also stated that it would be of no use to send Herzegovinian Franciscans to the US, since once there they acted the same as the emigrants. He accused the priests in the Commissariat of being hostile to Socialist Yugoslavia and of closely cooperating, almost all of them, with the Ustasha emigration. He also said that the Commissariat lobbied against Yugoslavia with the American government. Although Bazilije Pandžić could do a lot, he still showed no intention of doing so, and Bekavac also considered him dishonest. The Commission concluded that Bekavac had confirmed their opinion on the relations between the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province and the Commissariat, but also that he was personally embittered because of his case and thus his words should not be taken for granted.²² This proved true as Fr. Rufin Šilić soon not only returned to Yugoslavia, but also became the provincial of the Herzegovinian Province.

Theologian Vicent Cvitković soon visited Yugoslavia as well, with the aim of checking the possibility of studying theology in Sarajevo, where he would learn Croatian and pave the way for several other theologians from the Commissariat to study in Sarajevo. Eventually he gave up the idea, saying that he could not possibly get accustomed to the discipline at the Theology Department and among the Franciscans in Herzegovina, or their interpersonal relations, which he could not understand. Nevertheless, he promised to come back the following year, perhaps with a group of other theologians, and try to get used to the local circumstances.²³

In the Commission for Religious Affairs, the appointment of Fr. Didak Ćorić to the post of definitor in the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province was understood as an act of adulation intended to strengthen the relations between the Province and the Commissariat. This strategy, they believed, was primarily pursued by Fr. Rufin Šilić, who was at that time staying with the Commissariat, in agreement with Mihaljević. The two intended to gain the

²² “Information”, Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 8 (September 7, 1965), ABH, ZKVP, b. 30, 327/1965.

²³ ABH, ZKVP, b. 37, c. 30, 320/1965.

majority to support them in taking over the Province, and if they failed, they would appoint Fr. Leonardo Oreč, who was therefore not to be compromised by cooperating with the regime, but rather kept in reserve. By the same token, they believed that Fr. Jerko Mihaljević played a double game in order to restore his shattered reputation with the Franciscans: on the one hand, he collaborated with the regime, while on the other he gave his support to the extremist priests. The Commission for Religious Affairs intended to demand a programme of long-term cooperation from Mihaljević, an issue that had been discussed with him before.²⁴

In the Commission for Religious Affairs of the Mostar District, they asked Fr. Zlatko Sivrić, prone to cooperation with the state authorities, whether Mihaljević had influenced Fr. Didak's appointment and whether that was the reason behind his journey to Rome. Fr. Zlatko answered that Mihaljević's influence was not that great and that he travelled to Rome to obtain money. He warned the Commission that Mihaljević should not be trusted, as he was often dishonest.²⁵

Fr. Jerko Mihaljević's initiative to solve the problems in the Commissariat

In a report from September 24, 1964, Srećko Primorac, official in charge of the questions related to the Catholic Church at the Commission for Religious Affairs of the Mostar District SR BiH, stated that he had spoken with Fr. Jerko Mihaljević on various occasions about the possibility of exerting influence on the clerical emigrants at the Commissariat of the Herzegovinian Franciscans in the US. This influence would primarily consist in suppressing hostile activities against Yugoslavia, particularly manifest in the weekly newspaper *Danica*. Thereby Primorac emphasized that the regime's evaluations of Mihaljević's previous work were not unanimous, especially concerning the fact that nothing changed in *Danica* after his visit to the Commissariat, after which the state authorities reduced contacts with him to the minimum. However, Mihaljević justified himself by saying that his mission had been "undermined" before he even arrived in the Commissariat, owing to certain emigrant circles and the accusations of bishops Petar Čule and Frano Franić, as well as texts published in *Zajedničar*. When he came to the Commissariat, he was told at once that they knew about his mission and his intention to ban *Danica*. Later

²⁴ ABH, ZKVP, b. 27, 35/1964.

²⁵ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs of the Mostar District, nr. 17 (July 1964), ABH, ZKVP, b. 27, 383/1964.

on, Mihaljević claimed that he had found himself in a difficult situation and had to deny his intentions, since any attempt at pursuing his plans would have ended in a debacle. Primorac emphasized that one should keep in mind that it was important for Mihaljević, as well as for other Herzegovinian Franciscans, to maintain good relations with the Commissariat, especially because of the financial aid that they received from there. He added that Mihaljević had a plan concerning the Commissariat, together with Fr. Rufin Šilić, who was staying at the Commissariat at the time with the aim of gaining trust with the friars. Then Šilić planned to return to Yugoslavia and then travel to Rome to be installed as the commissary in Chicago. That was one of Mihaljević's plans for Šilić, the other being to achieve with general Sepinski that Šilić be elected for the provincial of Herzegovina at the following chapter meeting. Mihaljević assured Primorac that he enjoyed particular esteem with the general. Namely, some years earlier, when Mihaljević was the delegate of the Yugoslav Franciscans at the General Curia, he was accused by bishops Čule and Franić of being an agent of the Yugoslav government and had to be deposed. Sepinski had to depose him, but in order not to compromise him, he issued a decree by which he abolished the post, rather than removing Mihaljević himself. Mihaljević also inquired with the Yugoslav authorities about the possibility of the commissary Fr. Vendelin Vasilj's return to Yugoslavia, as he had been sentenced in absence to two years of strict prison. It was promised that the matter would be reassessed. Primorac was of the opinion that this act would be beneficial for breaking up the emigration's activity. He also said that the authorities should decide whether it was more useful to have Šilić become the commissary or the provincial, since Mihaljević was ready to carry out anything that the authorities suggested. He also emphasized that provincial Ćorić knew nothing about his plans, since both the provincial and the commissary would be elected only in 1967 and thus everything was to be kept secret in order to avoid problems.²⁶

As for the abovementioned accusations against Mihaljević being a Yugoslav agent, Bishop Čule stated in a letter to Fr. Dominik Mandić from September 23, 1965 that he refused to confirm what is rumoured about Fr. Jerko in the clerical circles in Zagreb, namely that he had been placed in the cell of Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac in Lepoglava in order to spy on him and report to the prison management. Those were inopportune matters that served nobody and caused great damage to the Church, he said.²⁷

Regarding what has been said so far, it is difficult to make positive conclusions about Mihaljević's role in the relations with the Communist regime. It may be inferred from some sources that he stood close to the state authorities

²⁶ ABH, ZKVP, Cover: Unnumbered document, 254/1964.

²⁷ Archive of the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province (hereafter: AHFP), Mandić's Legacy (hereafter: MO), vol. 10, folder 1, subfolder 8, fol. 5.

and acted in their interest, while other sources give the impression that he was pursuing a cunning policy, deluding and using the regime for the benefit of the Church. The only thing that may be said with certainty is that he was exceptionally influential both in Rome and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that he was very successful in his projects. Fr. Bazilije Pandžić once said that Mihaljević was a very quiet man, but very perspicacious about the situation and astute in achieving his goals.²⁸

Mihaljević also presented his ideas about the change in the Commissariat to the Commission for Religious Affairs of the Mostar District on November 21, 1964, emphasizing that a long-term policy was needed, to be carried out over a period of 10-12 years. The best results would be achieved by sending priests and students from the Province to the Commissariat and by inviting their priests to visit Yugoslavia. He also stated that he had given up the idea of bringing Fr. Rufin Šilić to the commissary's position, suggesting that Fr. Leonardo Oreč would be a better solution. He said that he would liquidate *Danica* within five years and convince the Commissariat to publish a newspaper that would focus on religious problems alone.²⁹

A good example of the way in which the Franciscans at the Commissariat viewed the objections of their brethren in Herzegovina concerning *Danica* is the letter that Fr. Dominik Mandić sent to the provincial, Fr. Mile Leko on April 5, 1955. In this letter, Mandić replied to Leko's objections concerning *Danica* as follows:

Although your opportunism is surely necessary and permissible, we who live in a foreign world cannot and should not follow such a course. In the free world, in America, we must take care of our own reality, working for a better future of our Order and our people. If we, in these circumstances, thought and wrote as you think and write in your reality, we would be considered traitors, even by some of our best believers, both Croats and Americans. Your reality is different from ours, and thus it is necessary that we should go our separate ways, trying to be useful to our holy Church and to our people, whom we must serve and for whom we must make sacrifices. Nobody can call you to account for our attitude, since we are now directly under Rome and the General Delegate in New York, not under your jurisdiction.³⁰

²⁸ Bazilije S. Pandžić, *Hercegovački franjevci - sedam stoljeća s narodom* [Herzegovinian Franciscans: seven centuries with their people] (Mostar and Zagreb, 2001), 231.

²⁹ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs of the Mostar District, nr. 23 (December 1964), ABH, ZKVP, b. 27, 699/1964.

³⁰ AHFPM, MO, vol. 6, folder 2, letters from 1955, fol. 106; the letter has been published in: Jure Krišto, *Partija, UDBA i svećenička udruženja. Udbin elaborat o udruženjima i drugi*

However, Mandić was wrong in believing that it would suffice to tell the Communists that the Commissariat was not under the jurisdiction of the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province and that the Province was thus not responsible for the Commissariat's actions. It is quite evident from everything that has been said so far that such arguments were not acceptable to the regime, and the Province was under great pressure because of the Commissariat. This was a general problem in the attitude of Croatian political and clerical emigration, which refused to understand the difficult situation of their compatriots and brethren at home, and often aggravated their situation with injudicious actions. Some "shepherds" even abandoned their "sheep" and left them at the mercy of "wolves" (I am not referring here to Mandić or those who had served abroad before 1945), finding a safe haven in the free world, where they preached to the bishops and priests at home how they should behave with the Communist regime. Such criticisms and demands were voiced by certain emigrants who were of the opinion that Yugoslav bishops should adopt a belligerent stance towards the authorities, to which Archbishop Franjo Šeper once said: "Let them come to the country and act that way, and they'll see what happens."³¹

Concerns of the Yugoslav authorities regarding the increasing influence of the Commissariat on the Herzegovinian Franciscans

According to the statistics of the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, in 1964 there were 61 Catholic priests from Herzegovina in emigration, of which 54 Franciscans and 7 secular priests. The Yugoslav authorities considered 44 priests as political emigrants and 17 as economic. Most of them had a hostile attitude towards Yugoslavia and 47 of them signed the aforementioned *Memorandum* against the country, submitted to President Dwight D. Eisenhower. According to the estimates of the Commission for Religious Affairs, the aid sent by the emigrants to the clergy in Herzegovina had reached the total sum of ca. 80 million dinar by 1962, which made the clergy independent with regard to the Yugoslav state. This allowed the emigration, especially the Commissariat, to make its aid to the Herzegovinian Franciscans dependent on their attitude towards the regime.³²

dokumenti [The Party, UDBA, and clerical organizations: UDBA's report on associations and other documents] (Zagreb, 2014), 137-138; Krišto, *Biljezi jedne franjevačke politike u BiH*, 181.

³¹ Miroslav Akmadža, *Krunoslav Draganović – iskazi komunističkim istražiteljima* [Krunoslav Draganović: Testimony before the Communist investigators] (Zagreb, 2010), 21.

³² "On the Church-state relations in Herzegovina," ABH, ZKVP, b. 25, c. 30.

The Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH was of the opinion that it should not remain neutral concerning the Commissariat's activity or leave the initiative to the Franciscans. It was estimated that the results could not be achieved fast and that they could not rely on individuals; instead, they needed to prepare a long-term programme of measures and specific actions, not allowing to be intimidated by the possibility that the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province might strengthen their position in the Commissariat.³³

On July 6, 1965 Ante Vrdoljak, president of the Commission for Religious Affairs, told Fr. Zlatko Sivrić and Fr. Radovan Petrović that the Franciscans were losing a lot with the authorities because of the Commissariat in the US, which exerted influence on the Franciscans in the Herzegovinian Province. Fr. Radovan reacted angrily, asking: "How long will you keep accusing us for the sins of the Commissariat?" He emphasized that the Commissariat was wrong and misinformed the public on the Yugoslav situation through *Danica*, and that he was in favour of telling it into their face. When Vrdoljak commented that the Franciscans would then remain without the financial aid, he answered angrily: "We do not need their dollars. We will work on our little field and live as we can, without having to bear with reproaches."³⁴

On October 23, 1965 Fr. Zlatko Sivrić stated before the Commission for Religious Affairs of the Mostar District that Fr. Jerko Mihaljević was "the main player on the body of elders – regime – Provincialate – Commissariat relation," but that he was dishonest. He also accused Mihaljević of having brought dissent to the Commissariat by appointing Fr. Vendelin Vasilj as the commissary, which made the loyal brethren "who are not criminals", such as Marije Karamatić or Teofil Pehar, transfer to the secular clergy. He also said that Mihaljević's contacts with Šilić were suspicious and detrimental for the regime.³⁵

That sending young priests from Yugoslavia to the Commissariat would be of no greater avail than the previous sending of older ones was also the opinion of Ante Vrdoljak, president of the Commission for Religious Affairs of the Mostar District, who emphasized his point in his report on the current state-Church relations in Herzegovina, which he submitted to the Commission at the level of the Republic in 1965.³⁶

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs of the Mostar District, nr. 9 (July 1965), ABH, ZKVP, b. 38, 262/1965.

³⁵ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs of the Mostar District, nr. 14 (October 1965), ABH, ZKVP, b. 38, c. 35, 372/1965.

³⁶ ABH, ZKVP, b. 37, c. 30, 299/1965.

At the consultation of the Commission on the situation of the Catholic Church in Herzegovina on September 20, 1965, Alica Bilić stated that no cooperation with the regime could be expected from the Franciscans as long as they received financial support from the Commissariat. He therefore considered it crucial to put an end to this support and thus make the Church dependent on the local circumstances. He also voiced the opinion that young priests should be prevented from leaving Herzegovina for the Commissariat, which should result in the latter's decline within a ten-year period. He allowed the possibility that priests may continue leaving for the Commissariat and ensuring its survival, but under the clear condition that the Commissariat should change its mode of operation. He mentioned the case of Šilić as a typical example of the situation in the Commissariat. Namely, upon his arrival at the Commissariat, the clergy there considered him as a Yugoslav spy. In order to prove the opposite, he started making public performances in the spirit of nationalism, yet could not achieve any significant position in the Commissariat. It was only in 1965 that he was appointed the head of the Third Order of St Francis in the USA. Bilić emphasized that Šilić sent abundant materials hostile to the regime to a nun in Yugoslavia. Thus, according to Bilić, Šilić turned from a person who had been in excellent relations with the authorities while in Yugoslavia into a completely different person during his stay at the Commissariat, hostile to the state authorities.³⁷

The new plan of Fr. Jerko Mihaljević and Fr. Rufin Šilić

The Herzegovinian Province feared the Americanization of the Commissariat, since most of the priests there were elderly. Thus, it had to be rejuvenated in order to keep it under the Province's jurisdiction and thus secure the latter's material support. This is what Mihaljević and Šilić were working on, exerting pressure on Vendelin Vasilj to have *Danica* change its tone, which would make it possible for younger priests to come from Yugoslavia. In 1966, Šilić was convincing the Yugoslav authorities that the question of *Danica* could be solved if at least five priests from Yugoslavia were sent to the Commissariat. Together with Mihaljević, he claimed that in that case Vasilj agreed to openly oppose the four priests who were sitting on the editorial board of *Danica* (Ljubo Čuvalo, Silvije Grubešić, Častimir Majić, and Serafin Vištica). Mihaljević said to the authorities that he was aware of the risk if the regime allowed the priests to the Commissariat and the situation did not change. That, in fact, would mean that no further Herzegovinian Franciscans would obtain the permission to

³⁷ ABH, ZKVP, b. 40, c. 28, 28/1966.

travel abroad, but Mihaljević was of the opinion that it simply had to be done if they wanted to bind the Commissariat to the Province. He believed that it could be done only as long as Vasilj was the commissary, and even offered to arrange a meeting between him and the Yugoslav delegates in Austria or Germany to convince them about his intentions. Mihaljević and Šilić believed that these intentions should not be made public, as that could cause a counter-action of some priests at the Commissariat. In the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH the opinion prevailed that the plan should be approved, since that would mean a positive shift in the relations with the Herzegovinian Franciscans.³⁸

In accordance with the proposed plan, on September 9, 1966 provincial Fr. Zlatko Ćorić sent an application to the Secretariat for Inner Affairs (SUP) SR BiH to issue passports for six priests (Jozo Galić, Zvonimir Kutleša, Petar Miloš, Ante Oreč, Petar Vlašić, and Ivan Zovko) to travel to the USA.³⁹ Mirko Petrinić, deputy president of the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, reported on the application to the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs with a note that his Commission had not yet adopted a position, since it was bound by the previously accepted opinion of political subjects from Herzegovina that the relations with the Catholic Church should be reconsidered.⁴⁰

Secretariat for Inner Affairs SR BiH demands a more determined policy towards the Commissariat

Unlike the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, which tried to solve the Commissariat issue in cooperation with the Herzegovinian Franciscans, the stance of the Secretariat for Inner Affairs SR BiH was far harsher. The Secretariat was of the opinion that one should work on the gradual weakening and breakup of the relations between the Province and the Commissariat in order to prevent the latter's further negative and hostile influence. In that sense, the Secretariat decidedly demanded of the Province to officially ban the publication of anti-Yugoslav texts in *Danica*, as well as all other forms of political and hostile activities of the Commissariat against Yugoslavia. It was also suggested that in case of failing to do so, the Province should be threatened with an official complaint of the Yugoslav government to the Holy See and with raising charges against the carriers of hostile activity, as well

³⁸ ABH, ZKVP, b. 40, c. 28.

³⁹ ABH, ZKVP, b. 40, c. 28, 143/1966; AHFPM, Documents of the Province (hereafter: SP), 815 and 816/1966.

⁴⁰ ABH, ZKVP, b. 39, c. 10, 247/1966.

as various other repressive measures that would last until the Commissariat ceased its activity. This implied confiscating letters coming from abroad, prohibiting financial support from the Commissariat, putting an end to the exchange of priests between the Commissariat and the Province, abolishing state support for the local priests' social security, and so on. The Province was also to check the attitude of Fr. Rufin Šilić and the usefulness of his further stay in the US. In case of failure to achieve all these changes, the regime was to launch a trial against Fr. Ljubo Čuvalo, Fr. Dominik Mandić, Fr. Vendelin Vasilj, and others, and interrogate the priests who had visited the Commissariat as well as those who were visiting Yugoslavia. Measures were also to be taken against the Commissariat by way of Yugoslav embassy in the US. Parallel to these measures, it was demanded that the next commissary should be a priest from a family of economic immigrants, who considered himself American and who would de-politicize the Commissariat with regard to Yugoslavia and weaken the relations to the Herzegovinian Province. Eventually, the Commissariat would gain independence and separate from the Province. Bishop Čule should be put under pressure to undertake measures in Vatican to de-politicize the Commissariat. In return, the government was to improve the Church-state relations in Herzegovina and meet some of his demands, such as building a cathedral. It was expected that Čule would indeed do something in this regard, since he was in conflict with the Franciscans about the restructuring of parishes.⁴¹

Rejuvenation as a possible solution for the Commissariat

In a consultation on January 5, 1968, Avdo Zvonić, president of the Socialist District of Mostar, asked Fr. Rufin Šilić, provincial of the Herzegovinian Franciscans, to use his authority to achieve the banning of *Danica* with the Commissariat, or at least a radical turn in its political stance, because of its anti-Yugoslav character and for the betterment of the Church-state relations. Šilić said that he did not support the newspaper and that he regretted it was not under his jurisdiction as that was transferred to Rome during the war. He also said that he may have been able to exert an influence on the old leadership of the Commissariat, but that he could not do it with the younger one; however, he would do everything he could to change the situation.⁴² Namely, in a previous consultation on June 22, 1966 with Ante Miljas, president of the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH at the time, he had warned that

⁴¹ ABH, ZKVP, b. 40, c. 28, 143/1966.

⁴² ABH, ZKVP, b. 43, c. 01, 16/1968.

Danica should be extinguished before the election of the new Commissariat leadership, since that would not be possible later on as the new leadership would consist of old members, from whom one should not expect any betterment. He was of the opinion that Fr. Vendelin Vasilj alone had the authority to ban *Danica*, and without him in the leadership that would no longer be possible. However, for that he needed 5-10 young friars from Herzegovina to support him. Šilić also predicted that Fr. Častimir Majić would be in the new leadership, and then there would be no chance whatsoever to extinguish *Danica*.⁴³

The Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH did not put much trust in Šilić's efforts to change the situation in the Commissariat, especially because the latter promised to send him finances for the construction of a seminary in Herzegovina. The Commission considered the Commissariat and *Danica* as the primary carriers of hostile propaganda against Yugoslavia.⁴⁴

During a conversation on August 10, 1969, which he had with Petar Šegvić, assistant to the president of the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs, and a representative of the Commission SR BiH, Šilić stated that not much could be said on the Commissariat, since he had suggested to the authorities in BiH earlier on that they should allow a group of younger Franciscans to go there and replace the old ones, but the matter took so long that the new leadership was elected before they arrived. However, he said that the matter would again be topical in June 1970 and thus they should agree in time on what should be done. When asked why he did not distance himself from *Danica*, Šilić answered that he would then be removed from his post, not the Commissariat's leadership.⁴⁵

Šilić's intentions to have younger Franciscans take over the Commissariat were confirmed by Fr. Leonard Oreč during his visit to the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH in September 1969. He said that he placed his hopes in seven young Franciscans whom the Province had sent to the Commissariat in order to take over its administration with time.⁴⁶ However, some years later the Commission saw that the seven Franciscans not only failed to achieve any positive change in the Commissariat, quite the contrary: they adapted to the setting.⁴⁷

⁴³ ABH, ZKVP, b. 47, folder "Various information".

⁴⁴ "Observations on the hostile activity of clerical emigration and the impact of such activity on the clergy in our country," ABH, ZKVP, b. 34, 366/1968.

⁴⁵ ABH, ZKVP, b. 46, c. 33, 252/1969; "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 15 (August 1969): ABH, ZKVP, b. 45, unnumbered.

⁴⁶ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 16 (September 1969), ABH, ZKVP, b. 45, unnumbered.

⁴⁷ "Information on the hostile activity of the Custody of the Herzegovinian Franciscans in Chicago", ABH, ZKVP, b. 64, c. 8, unnumbered.

Change of the Statute as a possible solution for the Commissariat

The Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH was of the opinion that the negative turn in the relations between the Herzegovinian Franciscans and the regime was due to the Province's financial dependence on the Commissariat, which was against all cooperation with the authorities or activities organized by the "Good Shepherd" union. Thus, according to the Commission, the attitude of the Herzegovinian Franciscans was becoming increasingly similar to those of the hostile emigration. It was estimated that the Commissariat had entered a period of personnel crisis because the older priests were dying away, and that it urgently needed enforcement from Herzegovina. The Province approved of such plans and would therefore insist with the regime to allow a number of younger Franciscans move to Chicago. In 1967, Yugoslavia allowed seven Franciscans to leave. According to the Yugoslav authorities, the Commissariat's main goal was to organize hostile actions against Yugoslavia and to separate Croatia from the country.⁴⁸

Šilić saw an opportunity to solve the situation in the Commissariat in the new statute, which was prepared late in 1969 and early in 1970. As he said before the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH on January 12, 1970, he expected the new statute to grant the Province the right to have a say in the election of commissaries. However, he warned that one should proceed strategically, since the Province's open intervention in the Commissariat could result in its separation, which would be detrimental to the Province as it obtained considerable financial support from it (ca. 60% of the Province's budget). For this reason, Šilić intended to visit the Commissariat in person in order to exert more influence on the wording of the new statute. In his opinion, the most important thing was to prevent the extremist trio of Čuvalo, Raspudić, and Nuić from being appointed to the leading positions.⁴⁹

Fr. Leonardo Oreč was also reproached for the Commissariat's activities during his visit to the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH on February 7, 1972, especially because provincial Šilić had not fulfilled his promise about the priests from the Commissariat meeting the representatives of the Commission during their visit to Yugoslavia. Oreč answered that the Province was completely helpless when it came to the Commissariat's activities.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ "Hostile activities by the members of the Croatian Franciscan Commissariat of the Holy Family in the USA against SFRJ and a proposal for the measures to be taken," ABH, ZKVP, b. 48, 10/1969.

⁴⁹ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 1 (February 1970), ABH, ZKVP, b. 47, folder "Various information".

⁵⁰ ABH, ZKVP, b. 58, 94/1973.

The Commissariat intensifies its anti-Yugoslav activities

According to the Yugoslav regime, the Franciscans from the Commissariat were the main organizers and participants of the protests in front of the Yugoslav consulate in Chicago on December 2, 1972, which included burning the Yugoslav flag. Promoting that event, *Danica* published various slogans, including one saying “Yugoslav flags will burn everywhere.” *Danica* came out every Wednesday in 5000 copies, and Yugoslavia considered it one of the “most extremist newspapers of the hostile emigration,” which openly called to “terrorist and sabotage actions against Yugoslavia, murders of its diplomats and consular delegates, and smuggling to Yugoslavia various sabotage groups with the aim of creating a suitable situation for its destruction and creation of an Independent State of Croatia.” Besides the weekly *Danica* (Morning Star), the Commissariat published a monthly called *Hrvatski katolički glasnik* (Croatian Catholic Herald) and a *Hrvatski calendar* (Croatian Calendar). According to the data collected by the Yugoslav regime, eight of the fourteen parishes under the Yugoslav consulate of Chicago were directly administered by the Commissariat. Fr. Dominik Ćorić and Fr. Ante Čuvalo were considered to be the most extremist among the Franciscans who endorsed the reestablishment of the Independent State of Croatia and stood behind most anti-Yugoslav operations undertaken by the political emigration in those parishes. Besides parishes in the Chicago area, the Commissariat administered a parish in New York, where the Franciscans Mladen Čuvalo, Vitomir Naletilić, Leon Galić, and Karlo Pleše were active, who were also prominent in anti-Yugoslav activities. At the initiative of Fr. Mladen Čuvalo, this parish obtained a larger church and a spacious church hall, which was called “Croatian Centre” and was, according to the Yugoslav authorities, a meeting point for hostile emigration. It was thence that a group of some 200 persons started on December 3, 1972 towards the UN building, where they held a protest, burned the Yugoslav and socialist Croatian flags, and displayed a coffin with an inscription saying “Yugoslavia” On April 10, 1973, the anniversary of the foundation of the Independent State of Croatia was celebrated at the Croatian Centre by Fr. Mladen Čuvalo, in the presence of some 300 persons. The parish’s leadership, according to the Yugoslav authorities, tried to use the visit of Cardinal Franjo Šeper and the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the “Croatian catholic Church” in New York to their purposes, and they persuaded the mayor to proclaim a “Croatian Day in New York,” to be publicly announced on November 2, 1973. However, following an intervention of Yugoslav diplomacy, the idea was dropped and the mayor proclaimed instead a “Day of the Roman Catholic Church of St Cyril and St Methodius,” moreover in a church rather than

in front of the city hall as previously planned. The Commissariat was also very active in parishes in the Pittsburgh area.⁵¹

In a later conversation with Muhamed Bešić, president of the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, which took place late in 1974, provincial Šilić said that the Čuvalo brothers are “a story in themselves” and that he refused to go to New York to bless their newly built house.⁵²

In a conversation with the representatives of the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, which took place in 1973, Fr. Vitimir Jeličić, who had returned from the post of the secretary of the Franciscan Definitorium in Rome, condemned a group of Herzegovinian Franciscans active there in the pro-Ustasha and anti-Yugoslav spirit, stating that their home province of Herzegovina should undertake measures against them. He did not agree with Šilić's statements that he had no power over the Commissariat, emphasizing that the Custody was still under the Province's jurisdiction, only the latter was not willing to do anything. He believed that the reason was in the financial support that the Province received from the Commissariat. He saw a possible solution in an intervention by the general of the Order or even the Holy See, but those were minor issues for them and perhaps they were not even willing to make a move against the Herzegovinian Franciscans.⁵³

Novak Anđelić, president of the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, reproached provincial Šilić during a meeting on July 26, 1973 because of the election of certain priests into the Commissariat's council who were known for their anti-Yugoslav activity. Šilić answered that there were 48 priests active in the Commissariat and only 5-6 were anti-Yugoslav. He added that their political convictions were difficult to change and that the only solution was to wait for their biological death. He emphasized that the Custody needed only 12 more priests to separate itself and become a province in its own right. The Herzegovinian Province could only ratify the election of the Council but had no right to change it, which is why it could not have any influence on its membership or depose them for their political activity. If they gave up the Custody, it would pass into the hands of an American province, which would mean alienation in terms of Croatian customs, culture, and language.⁵⁴

⁵¹ ABH, ZKVP, b. 59, 15/1973 and b. 63, 14/1974.

⁵² “Information”, Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 1 (January 1975), ABH, ZKVP, b. 64, unnumbered.

⁵³ “Information”, Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 11/12 (September-October 1973), folder “Various information”, ABH, ZKVP, b. 47, unnumbered.

⁵⁴ “Information”, Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 10 (August 1973), folder “Information 5-14”, ABH, ZKVP, b. 57, unnumbered.

When Lukić, the general consul in Chicago, met Cardinal John Patrick Cody, the archbishop of Chicago, on October 5, 1973, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the Commissariat's new leadership, which did not bring any positive change, and he added that change was not to be expected without the cardinal's help. The cardinal promised that he would see what he could do.⁵⁵

Dissatisfied with the situation at the Commissariat, the state authorities concluded that they could not solve the issue with the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province, especially with Fr. Rufin Šilić as its head, and that their complaints and demands should be addressed to Bishop Petar Čule, the Episcopal Conference, the nunciature in Belgrade, and the Holy See. Thereby they should make reference to the Yugoslav-Vatican Protocol of 1966, in which the Holy See promised to take measures when necessary to prevent the political activities of emigrant clergy.⁵⁶ In that sense, the counsellor of the Yugoslav embassy at the Holy See, Martin Gabričević, visited the official in charge of Yugoslavia in the Council for the General Affairs of the Church, P.L. Celato, on November 22, 1974, and warned him about the operations of emigrant clergy against Yugoslavia, especially the priests in the Commissariat. Celato said that the Holy See decidedly condemned all hostile political activity, especially against SFRJ, not only because obliged by the Protocol, but also because it was the essence of its teaching and functioning. He promised that proper measures would be taken, and as for the Commissariat, he commented that the Holy See also had great problems with the Herzegovinian Franciscans, thereby referring to the "Herzegovinian case".⁵⁷

Attempts at changing the editorial policy of *Danica*

Early in 1975, when Fr. Ljubo Čuvalo, the editor of *Danica*, died, provincial Šilić visited the Commission for Religious Affairs on January 31 and expressed his hope that the tone of writing and content of the newspaper would change with the new editor. He also reported that he had sent a letter to the commissary and advised him to take good care about the person he would appoint to the post, namely that he should be politically neutral and guarantee that the newspaper would henceforth deal exclusively with religious topics. However, in his report he also expressed doubt about the success of this letter,

⁵⁵ ABH, ZKVP, b. 59, 25/1973.

⁵⁶ "Information on the hostile activity of the Custody of the Herzegovinian Franciscans in Chicago," ABH, ZKVP, b. 64, c. 8, unnumbered.

⁵⁷ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 1 (January 1975), ABH, ZKVP, b. 64, unnumbered.

since there were still many members of the Commissariat who endorsed the same opinions as Čuvalo. Emigrants had meanwhile launched a campaign for collecting money to erect a memorial bust for Čuvalo in his home village of Vitina, but the Commission for Religious Affairs immediately asked the Socialist District of Ljubuški and the Herzegovinian Franciscans to prevent that. The regime was also dissatisfied with the obituary, in which Šilić praised Fr. Ljubo Čuvalo greatly. In the very conversation with the assistant of the president of the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, Slavko Šimić, which took place on March 17, 1975, Šilić reported on having obtained an answer from the Commissariat that they could not find such a person as he was asking for and that there was not much chance for a change in the newspaper's policy.⁵⁸

During Šilić's visit to the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH on November 20, 1975, Muhamed Bešić, the Commission's president, told him that the Commissariat was still working openly against Yugoslavia and that its priests endorsed the idea of founding a "Croatian National Council", with the custodian Fr. Častimir Majić and Fr. Ante Čuvalo elected into the Council. He also mentioned Majić's interview published in *Danica*, where the latter "offended our society, its peoples and nationalities" and called for establishing a new Croatian state, adding that the Catholic Church was the only stronghold in opposing SFRJ. Bešić reproached Šilić for the fact that the Province had not done a thing to "curb" this sort of activity. Šilić answered that he could "say neither more nor less" on that matter, since the Commissariat included a group of "noisy priests operating from hostile positions."⁵⁹

According to the information gathered by the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH in 1975, a Franciscan fraction at the Custody, which the Commission called "the Herzegovinian Americans", opposed the editorial policy of *Danica*, considering it too politicized and anti-Yugoslav. Although they were not great friends of Yugoslavia themselves, they were of the opinion that a religious newspaper should not write against any state, and they also criticized the late Fr. Ljubo Čuvalo, claiming that he had been producing the "Letters from the Homeland" in his own office, twisting the facts and deluding the Croats in emigration. That group, according to the Commission, consisted of Josip Abramović, Lovro Franković, Marko Kozina, Jerko Kučan, Eugen Petrović, Stjepan Rajić (Stephen Raich), Dragutin Pleše, Rafo Maslač, Božidar Benković, and Robert Galinac. The Commission was particularly concerned

⁵⁸ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 2 (February 1975), ABH, ZKVP, b. 64.

⁵⁹ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 10 (December 1975), ABH, ZKVP, b. 64.

about the fact that the younger priests, who had only recently arrived at the Custody with the approval of the Yugoslav authorities, turned out to be particularly anti-Yugoslav, especially Ante Čuvalo and Ivan Bradvica.⁶⁰

Yugoslavia tries to solve the Commissariat issue by exerting pressure on the Holy See

In 1976, Fr. Marko Kozina was elected the new commissary and the previous custodian Častimir Majić, as well as Kirin Vasilj, Eugen Petrović, and Nenad Galić became his assistants. Kozina was an American citizen, and according to the information gathered by the General Consulate of SFRJ in Chicago, he had never “compromised himself by being involved in anti-Yugoslav activities”; instead, he was preoccupied with his private business and by investing in funeral companies. The consulate’s estimate was nevertheless that nothing would change with the new leadership, since the anti-Yugoslav fraction headed by Majić still ruled over the Commissariat.⁶¹

In November 1976, the 50th anniversary of the Chicago Commissariat was celebrated, with Fr. Rufin Šilić and Fr. Viktor Nuić from the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province as guests. Since the entire celebration had an anti-Yugoslav air, according to the General Consulate of SFRJ in Chicago, the Yugoslav regime proclaimed Šilić’s and Nuić’s presence as an “act of political identification of the Church in Yugoslavia with the one in emigration, regardless of the fact that both of them largely limited their utterances to religious issues.”⁶²

Since in 1977 Easter was on April 10, which was the anniversary of the Independent State of Croatia, the state authorities in BiH sought to prevent a possible misuse of Easter services, especially abroad, by speaking with the Church representatives. Thus, on March 28, 1977 the Commission’s counsellor Ivan Cvitković visited Fr. Jozo Pejić, guardian of Široki Brijeg, in the absence of the leading men of the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province, and warned him about the danger that members of the Commissariat might politically abuse Easter services. Pejić emphasized that there would certainly be no problems in the Province, but they could not influence the Commissariat in this respect, although they kept trying.⁶³ Nevertheless, according to the in-

⁶⁰ ABH, ZKVP, b. 64, 53/1975.

⁶¹ ABH, ZKVP, b. 66, 60/1976.

⁶² ABH, ZKVP, b. 66, 90/1976.

⁶³ “Information”, Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 3-4 (March-April 1977), ABH, ZKVP, b. 73, unnumbered.

formation gathered by the Commission for Religious Affairs, abuses of Easter services were negligible due to the intervention of the authorities and particularly the head of pastoral care in emigration, Vladimir Stanković. Some abuses, however, could be observed at the Commissariat.⁶⁴

The Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH believed that the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province refused to deal with the Commissariat issue and that it was therefore necessary to seek for a solution in the diplomatic contacts with the Holy See.⁶⁵

To this purpose, the Directorate for Emigration sent to the Holy See various documents and memoranda linked to the hostile activities in the USA and other lands overseas. The memoranda emphasized the “subversive and terrorist” nature of the organizations where priests held the leading positions, and which supported terrorist operations organized by the pro-Ustasha emigrants. The intolerable abuse of Church rooms and religious press for political purposes was likewise indicated. The Holy See was asked to undertake decisive measures with the responsible ecclesiastical authorities in the USA in order to put a stop on clerical anti-Yugoslav operations. It was also demanded that the Holy See should publicly condemn such activities. The State Secretariat of the Holy See promised the Yugoslav embassy representatives that the issue would be investigated and that the Church would do all that was in its power. The embassy representatives also demanded that the deputy general of the Franciscan Order, Petar Nikola Carero, who was at that time in Mostar for the appointment of the new leadership at the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province, should take care that such persons be appointed who would guarantee change in the attitude of the Chicago Commissariat towards Yugoslavia, and generally help the Herzegovinian Franciscans get rid of individuals who incited them to anti-Yugoslav activity. The representatives were promised that the Holy See would take care of that as well.⁶⁶

During the visit of pro-nuncio Michele Checchini to the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH on October 24, 1977 Muhamed Bešić, president of the Commission, complained that certain Franciscans at the Commissariat acted against SFRJ by publishing anti-Yugoslav articles and supporting terrorism, even though the Protocol of 1966 condemned terrorism and obliged the Holy See to prevent such clerical action. Cecchini asserted that the Holy See was absolutely opposed to terrorism and abuse of religion to political pur-

⁶⁴ “Information”, Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 5 (May-June 1977), ABH, ZKVP, b. 73, unnumbered.

⁶⁵ “Some current issues regarding the relations with religious communities in SR BiH” (May 1977), ABH, ZKVP, b. 70, unnumbered.

⁶⁶ ABH, ZKVP, b. 72, 46/1977.

poses, and he asked for the names and addresses of the priests in question. He was told that the corresponding memoranda had been sent on two occasions to the Holy See, with the names and addresses of the said Franciscans, yet nothing had been done. Cecchini promised that he would personally see to that matter.⁶⁷

The Bosnian-Herzegovinian authorities on the Commissariat situation in the late 1970s

The Commissariat was also a topic at the meeting of the SR BiH Presidency held on November 11, 1977, where it was emphasized that one should proceed publicly against the Herzegovinian Franciscans and show them clearly that it was a consequence of the fact that they never distanced themselves from the hostile activity of the Chicago Franciscans or tried to change something. The Presidency's stance was discussed at the meeting of the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH on December 15, 1977. The Commission agreed, remarking that an option was to influence the Franciscans by depriving them of certain privileges concerning the construction of churches and publishing activity. One of these measures was undertaken at the very meeting, by rejecting the application of the Library of the Herzegovinian Franciscans for financial support to produce a central catalogue of all books that they possessed in Herzegovina.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, at the meeting on January 31, 1979 the Commission decided that, regarding the fact that the relations with the Provincialate were developing in a positive direction and that the catalogue would be useful to the University Library in Mostar, which was in the process of foundation, the Franciscans would receive a sum of 30,000 dinar.⁶⁹

At the meeting held on June 1, 1978 the Federal Executive Council considered the issue of the relations between religious communities and emigration, especially the links between certain clergy with "hostile emigration". On that occasion, it was concluded that closer connections should be established between the state authorities and the leaderships of religious communities, and that the influence of "the society should be directed more intensely to further differentiation within the religious communities, especially in terms of precise and decided distancing and condemnation of anti-Yugoslav activities of

⁶⁷ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 3-4 (March-April 1977), ABH, ZKVP, b. 73, unnumbered.

⁶⁸ From the minutes of the meeting of the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH (December 15, 1977), ABH, ZKVP, b. 75, unnumbered.

⁶⁹ ABH, ZKVP, b. 77, 3/1979.

hostile emigration, particularly terrorist actions and attempts at politicizing the Church.”⁷⁰

According to the information gathered by the Security Service at the Secretariat of Inner Affairs SR BiH, members of the Commissariat were among the chief organizers of protests during Tito’s visit to the USA in 1978. On that occasion, *Danica* was published with a colour cover saying “Tito – Assassin of human rights visits Washington.” *Danica* supposedly also acted against Yugoslavia by justifying the hijacking of a TWA airplane by a group led by Zvonko Bušić, as well as the storming of the Yugoslav UN Mission by the Brekalo-Dizdar group, agitating to collect money for the defence of the perpetrators.⁷¹

The Yugoslav authorities were especially disconcerted by the information that early in 1979 Fr. Mladen Čuvalo led a prayer at the American Congress before its session, on which occasion he stated that the Croatian people lived in captivity and commemorated the death anniversary of Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac and the Franciscans of Široki Brijeg killed by the partisans. In continuation, he spoke before the Congress Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe on the problems with religious and other freedom in Yugoslavia.⁷²

A report of the Security Service at the Secretariat of Inner Affairs SR BiH from March 1979 mentioned hostile actions of certain Franciscans from the Commissariat, but also observed that recently other Franciscans had been distancing themselves from such activity: primarily those who had regulated their status and were now visiting Yugoslavia on a regular basis to see their relatives, becoming familiar with the situation in the country. The report also said that differentiation within the Commissariat was due to the younger Franciscans who came there for pastoral work and did not get involved in anti-Yugoslav activities. Regarding *Danica*, an increasing number of Franciscans opposed its political orientation and demanded that it become a purely religious newspaper, although still to no avail. According to the State Security, these positive shifts were due, among other things, to the appointment of Fr. Marko Kozina as the head of the Commissariat in 1976. The report also mentions that certain members of the Commissariat collaborated with foreign intelligence agencies, especially with the CIA, which prompted them to certain anti-Yugoslav activities. According to the Security Service, these agencies

⁷⁰ ABH, ZKVP, b. 74, 25/1978.

⁷¹ SDS RSUP SR BiH, “Anti-Yugoslav activity of some priests from the Custody of the Herzegovinian Franciscan province in Chicago and the information on differentiation among its ranks” (March 1979), ABH, ZKVP, b. 76, 33/1979.

⁷² “Information”, Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 2 (February 1979), ABH, ZKVP, b. 77, unnumbered.

instigated a unification of pro-Ustasha emigration and supported the foundation of the Croatian National Council, particularly encouraging the Commissariat and *Danica* to take part in these activities. The report also mentioned the Commissariat's increasing influence on the Franciscans in Herzegovina, especially regarding their conflict with the secular clergy and the deteriorating relations between the Provincialate and the regime. Allegedly there had been attempts to persuade some Herzegovinian Franciscans to specific actions against the state, even the formation of "triads" modelled upon Ustasha terrorist organizations. The report eventually voiced the State Security's utter dissatisfaction with the stance of the Provincialate with regard to the Commissariat, and its failure to undertake measures to change the position of its leadership and the tone of *Danica*.⁷³

In a letter from June 22, 1977 the Secretariat for Foreign Relations BiH informed Muhamedbešić, president of the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, about the change in the Commissariat's leadership. The reason was that a Franciscan from the Commissariat allegedly informed the FBI on all political activities of the Commissariat's Franciscans, which led to certain measures undertaken by the American authorities to stop them. The new commissary was Fr. Stephen Raich (Stjepan Rajić), who was born in the US and had no connections with extremist political emigration.⁷⁴

At the meeting of the Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH held on April 25, 1979 it was established that the Provincialate was using various excuses to conceal its links with the Commissariat and its responsibility in the latter's action before the regime. It was emphasized that the conflict with the bishop and the Holy See had made the Herzegovinian Franciscans even more dependent on the Commissariat and additionally strengthened their links. Muhamed Bešić, president of the Commission, recalled that several Franciscans had been sent from Herzegovina to the Commissariat ten years before in order to exert a positive influence on the brethren there, but soon assimilated and placed themselves at the service of hostile emigration. Husnija Sejdinović insisted that the Commission should not fall into the trap of believing that the physical death of extremist Franciscans would result in the mitigation of anti-Yugoslav activities. He also emphasized the fact that the Commissariat was in contact with foreign intelligence agencies, sought to present itself as a powerful organization on a broader political level, and acted destructively on "positive" emigrant organizations and clubs. It was therefore decreed

⁷³ Anti-Yugoslav activity of some priests from the Custody of the Herzegovinian Franciscan province in Chicago and the information on differentiation among its ranks" (March 1979), ABH, ZKVP, b. 76, 33/1979.

⁷⁴ ABH, ZKVP, b. 76, 78/1979.

that coordination with Socialist Union of Working People (SSRN) and other political bodies in Herzegovina should be established. After that, one should inform the citizens of Yugoslavia about the activities of the Commissariat and work on strengthening the links with the Heritage Foundation BiH and various emigrant associations in order to weaken the Commissariat's influence among the emigrants and to enhance its differentiation from the Provincialate in Herzegovina.⁷⁵

In a report from October 2, 1979, the Federal Secretariat for Foreign Affairs stated that there was no change in the Commissariat's activity, but that it was the first time that it was presided by a priest born in the USA, i.e. Stephen Raich, who mainly stayed away from anti-Yugoslav activities.⁷⁶

However, Raich's appointment as the commissary resulted in a schism within the Commissariat, and the fact that Fr. Častimir Majić became the editor of *Danica* caused a public protest of a group of Franciscans, who were convinced that Majić "has been imposed by someone" and published a statement on that in the emigrant *Croatian Newspaper*.⁷⁷

Further events were influenced by the death of Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito in 1980 and the dissolution of the Yugoslav Communist state, which remains a subject for future research.

Summary

During World War II, the regular contacts between the Commissariat of Herzegovinian Franciscans in Chicago and the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province in Mostar were interrupted, which brought considerable autonomy to the Commissariat in the first years after the war, with intentions to separate completely from the Province. However, this situation began to change in the early 1960s and the Province and the Commissariat cooperated more closely, especially owing to the deterioration of relations between the Province and the Yugoslav Communist regime. In return, the Province received considerable financial support from the Commissariat. However, this resulted in a harsher state policy towards the Province and the Franciscans were prohibited

⁷⁵ ABH, ZKVP, b. 77, 52/1979.

⁷⁶ Croatian State Archive, Zagreb, Commission for the Relations with Religious Communities, b. 114, hist. nr. 2/1979, contribution to the meeting of the Federal Commission for Religious Issues (October 29, 1979).

⁷⁷ "Information", Commission for Religious Affairs SR BiH, nr. 9/1979, ABH, ZKVP, b. 77, unnumbered.

to travel abroad. Since this was not in the Province's interest, its leadership agreed on principle with the state authorities that the situation in the Commissariat should be changed, for example by rejuvenating it with priests from Yugoslavia, who would take a different course and mitigate its anti-Yugoslav activities, particularly the tone of its newspaper *Danica*.

The Commissariat was a major disturbance for the Communist regime in Yugoslavia, especially because its members initiated various actions with the aim of informing the international public on the situation of the Croatian people and the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia. These activities convinced the Yugoslav authorities that the Commissariat was an important enemy and that they should put an end to its influence on the Herzegovinian Franciscans, as well as exert pressure on the Province's administration to prevent such activities in the Commissariat. In that respect, all further positions of the regime towards the Herzegovinian Franciscans depended on the Commissariat's attitude towards Yugoslavia. Since certain members of the Commissariat did not stop with anti-Yugoslav propaganda, the regime's attitude towards the Herzegovinian Franciscans deteriorated considerably, which made it difficult to practice pastoral care in the country. For this reason, the Province's leadership tried to leave an impression of trying to change the attitude of the Commissariat in order to mitigate the policy of the Communist regime towards the Herzegovinian Franciscans.

Konflikt zwischen dem jugoslawischen kommunistischen Regime und der Franziskanischen Provinz Herzegowina: Tätigkeit des Kroatischen franziskanischen Kommissariats der Heiligen Familie in den USA (1954-1980)

Zusammenfassung

In dieser Arbeit analysiert der Verfasser, vor allem aufgrund archivalischer Quellen, die Politik des kommunistischen Regimes in Jugoslawien gegenüber Emigration aus den Reihen des Klerus. Die genannte Politik erläutert er aufgrund des Beispiels des Kroatischen franziskanischen Kommissariats in Chicago. Gewisse Veränderungen im Kommissariat machten die jugoslawischen Behörden zur Bedingung für etwas freiere Tätigkeit Franziskaner aus Herzegowina, womit sie antijugoslawische Wirkung der dortigen Franziskaner verhindern wollten. Mit Rücksicht auf die Tatsache, dass die Franziskaner

aus Herzegowina beträchtliche finanzielle Unterstützung vom Kommissariat bekamen, bemühten sie sich darum, Modalitäten zu finden, um die Forderungen der jugoslawischen Behörden zu erfüllen und zugleich ihre eigene Zusammenarbeit mit dem Kommissariat nicht zu gefährden.

Bibliography

Sources

Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine, Sarajevo, Fond Zemaljske komisije za odnose s vjerskim zajednicama

Arhiv Hercegovačke franjevačke provincije:

- Mandićeva ostavština
- Spisi Provincije

Hrvatski državni arhiv, Zagreb, Fond Komisije za odnose s vjerskim zajednicama

Literature

Akmađža, Miroslav, *Krunoslav Draganović – iskazi komunističkim istražiteljima* [Krunoslav Draganović: Testimony before the Communist investigators] (Zagreb, 2010.)

Krišto, Jure, *Biljezi jedne franjevačke politike u BiH* [Notes on a Franciscan policy in BiH] (Zagreb, 2013)

Krišto, Jure, *Partija, UDBA i svećenička udruženja: Udbin elaborat o udruženjima i drugi dokumenti* [The Party, UDBA, and clerical organizations: UDBA's report on associations and other documents] (Zagreb, 2014)

Pandžić, S. Bazilije, *Hercegovački franjevci – sedam stoljeća s narodom* [Herzegovinian Franciscans: seven centuries with their people] (Mostar-Zagreb, 2001)

