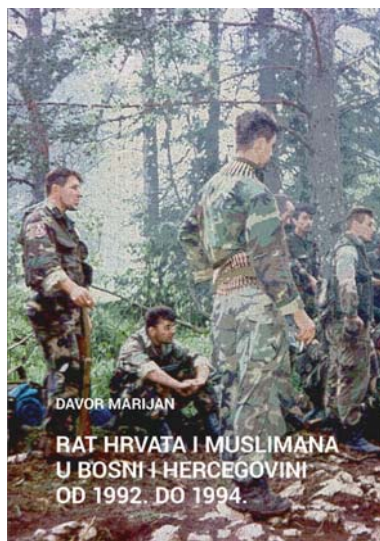


**Davor Marijan, *Rat Hrvata i Muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini od 1992. do 1994.* [The War between the Croats and the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 till 1994] (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2018)**

## Summary

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the most demanding issue in any analysis of the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the creation of new states in Southeast Europe. Called “Miniature Yugoslavia” by some, the central Yugoslav republic is a national heritage of three peoples: the Bosniaks (called Muslims till September 1993), Croats, and Serbs. There is no consensus among these three peoples about the cause, character, or even the starting date of the war. The conflict between the Croats and the Muslims, which was also the central part of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, remains the subject of the greatest controversy in this context.



The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was a continuation of the wars in Slovenia and Croatia, which were provoked by Serbs, and waged by the Yugoslav People’s Army (*Jugoslavenska narodna armija – JNA*) acting in their interests. As was the case in Croatia, these Serbs began working towards their war goals in Bosnia and Herzegovina using paramilitary formations and the Serbian part of the Territorial Defence, which were soon supported by the JNA. With Croatian assistance, the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina achieved major military successes in the Bosnian Posavina and the Neretva Valley in March and April 1992, thanks to which Bosnia and Herzegovina survived JNA attacks in April, before the latter’s formal disbandment in May 1992. These victories allowed armed Croat units in other areas, such as the valleys of the Vrbas and Lašva Rivers, to play a key role in repulsing Serbian attacks. In 1993, on the parts of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina that were defended by Croatian forces, or where Croatian forces had helped secure the basic conditions for mounting an effective defence, the Muslims initiated a war and ethnic cleansing of the Croats.

The Muslims pragmatically decided that it is more worthwhile to engage in a war against the Croats than to continue the war against the Serbs. The Serbian forces had the advantage all along the front, while the Muslims and the Croats were intermixed without a clear boundary line. Therefore, the strategic decision was easy to make. The fact that the Croats and Muslims had the same enemy in 1992 did not serve as a basis for building a harmonious relationship, let alone an alliance – it was impossible since they had differing political views on the current situation and future of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In fact, the Serbs were politically closer to the Croats because they opposed centralism, which was favoured by the Muslims. It was a political conflict between a desire for an entity and a unitarian state, which the Muslims managed to present as a civil option to a receptive part of the international community. In a political game with the Croats, Muslim leader Alija Izetbegović merely principally implemented the guidelines of the programme presented at the September 1990 election campaign and the meeting held in Velika Kladuša, where he stated that there are only two options: “civil republic” or “civil war”. He was even clearer at the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in February 1991, when he declared that he would “sacrifice peace” for a sovereign Bosnia, but “wouldn’t sacrifice a sovereign Bosnia for peace in Bosnia”. These words are the logical conclusion of the views of a person who wrote the *Islamic Declaration* twenty years earlier. They are a strategic baseline without which it is impossible to understand the Muslim-Croatian war. These views meant that a war between the Croats and the Muslims was unavoidable and, analysing the relations in 1992, it is obvious that this was the decision of the Muslim leadership. Instead of diplomacy, the Muslim leadership decided to build a “civil republic” through force of arms. The Muslim-Croat war was set into motion by the decision to, immediately after the formation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps, bring the greater part of an Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Armija BiH – ABiH) brigade, composed of Muslim refugees from Jajce fit for military service, to the Vrbas Valley. In addition to upsetting the military status quo, it threatened Makljen Pass, the most important strategic object supervised by the Croatian Defence Council (*Hrvatsko vijeće obrane* – HVO). It is at this spot that central Bosnia and the Vrbas Valley were cut off from a part of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia, which bordered the Republic of Croatia. It is also a point from which troops can be easily channelled towards Prozor and the Neretva Valley. The Croats only began to understand that they’re at war in mid-April 1993, when Muslim forces attacked HVO forces in Konjic in April 1993, and it soon became apparent that this is no isolated incident after which the situation would return to normal. What followed was a war for territory, characterised by a series of war crimes and expulsions of the local population, in which the Croats committed less crimes, but suffered more as a people.

The Muslims gained more from the conflict than the Croats, and therefore present the war as a necessary act. In February 1994, General Rasim Delić summarised the point and the effect of the war by stating that the “HVO was eliminated from the areas of Jablanica, Konjic, Fojnica, Kakanj, Zenica, Travnik, and Bugojno. That is, an entire province according to the Vance-Owen Plan, centred in Travnik”. Delić’s self-praise lays bare the motives and goal of the war the ABiH waged against the HVO. The ABiH fought for a territory that it for the most part managed to ethnically cleanse. It won in ethnically mixed areas, where the demography had been changed in favour of the Muslims before the outbreak of open conflict. The second characteristic of its success was the lack of a continuous dividing line within the conflict zones; instead, there existed a series of mixed ethnic pockets, where its numerical superiority allowed it to achieve victory. In areas where a dividing line was established, neither the ABiH nor the HVO achieved any major success. *Neretva*, an operation conducted by the ABiH in the Neretva and Vrbas Valleys in September 1993, resulted in failure, as did *Buna*, an operation carried out by the HVO in the Vrbas Valley in November 1993. The attempts of the ABiH to take control of the Lašva Valley and the town of Žepče also met with failure. With minor reinforcements from Croatia in August 1993, the HVO consolidated and, despite occasional crises, particularly in September 1993, gradually took over the initiative in Rama and the Lepenica, Neretva, and Vrbas Valleys. In December 1993 and January 1994, the HVO in the Lašva Valley managed to survive the attacks of the numerically several times superior ABiH only through maximum effort. The failed attacks threatened the total collapse of the ABiH 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps. Due to this military failure, Izetbegović agreed to the Washington Agreement and thus the war came to an end. R. Delić’s claim that the “Croatian aggressor” was brought into “a hopeless position and was threatened with total defeat, and therefore an honourable exit for Croatia and Bosnian Croats was found – the conclusion of an agreement to cease hostilities in February 1994” is therefore unfounded.

The book is mostly based on documents of the belligerent sides in Bosnia and Herzegovina, most of which have been published and are available to all Internet users. Despite the immeasurable mass of interpretations of the collapse of Yugoslavia, this sort of work has been completely ignored. The image I have reconstructed can be simplified thus: the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was a war of three constitutional peoples for a territory of which the Croats demanded little, the Serbs considerably more, and the Muslims its entirety. In trying to achieve their goals, members of each of the three peoples committed crimes against members of the other two. What the belligerent sides have in common is that they desired more than what was rational and within the realms of possibility and, as the war spread, these “wish lists” were expanded by efforts to reduce the population of the other two peoples on this territory

as much as possible. While this was common to all actors of the war, this doesn't mean that their roles and actions were equal. Their responsibility for the war is not equal, and neither is the scale of the crimes committed against the members of the other two peoples. The fact that someone is better armed and has committed the greatest number of crimes doesn't necessarily mean that they are the absolute culprit, and none of the three sides has the exclusive right to interpret the war. However, it has become common practice to allow only the Bosniaks, who are considered the greatest victims, to exercise this right. In doing so, the fact that both Serbs and Croats were interested in negotiations about drawing up internal boundaries – which couldn't take place without the participation of the Muslims – is completely ignored. Instead, Bosniak interpreters today present a picture of the war as being arranged by Tuđman and Milošević in Karadžević in Karadžević with the goal of dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is indeed the simplest way to shift the responsibility for the war to others and allow the Bosniaks self-amnesty from a series of poor decisions and the disorganisation with which they met the war.

I believe that, in this book, I have shown that the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as the relations between the Croats and Muslims, i.e. Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, are more complex than those offered by instant-interpreters who believe that their position of contemporaries of the war is sufficient for grand and far-reaching conclusions that nobody is allowed to question.

*Translation by:*

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