

**Ivo Lučić, *Od vila ilirskih do Bijeloga puta: Stranputicama bosanske i hercegovačke povijesti* [From Illyrian fairies to the White road: Through the Strangles of Bosnian and Herzegovinian History] (Zagreb: Hrvatska liječnička komora and Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2018)**

## Summary

Shortly after the appearance of the Illyrian program in Zagreb, it received an enthusiastic response from Bosnia. Several Franciscans from Bosnia hoped for the liberation from the Ottoman rule and they gave faith to the state that would spread from Adriatic to the Black sea. This idea, a “voice of fairy”, disturbed the spirits and opened path to radical changes. Inspired by this Franciscan Franjo Jukić in May of 1850 wrote a letter to Sultan Abdulmejid. In it he voiced “the wishes and pleas of Christians in Bosnia-Herzegovina”. Jukić claimed that Christians should not be treated as lower class citizens, but as equal citizens of the Ottoman Empire. There was no response to his wishes and pleas, but the Ottoman authorities, confronted with internal and external events and developments tried, at least to a certain degree, to modernize its administration and to initiate social reforms. This led to a big resistance and rebellion of conservative Moslem captains in Bosnia. After a long period of crisis, lawlessness and violence, in Dračevo near Gabela in Herzegovina, on June 19, 1875, a revolt against the Ottoman authorities began. It was led by a Catholic priest Don Ivan Musić. The rebellion quickly spread, announcing the end of a centuries long Ottoman rule of Herzegovina and Bosnia. The rebellion echoed throughout Europe, especially in Serbia, Montenegro and in the Croatian lands. The demands of those who started the rebellion can be summarized in a sentence of their message to the diplomats of the European states: “We only demand to have right to live as humans, and to as animals as were are considered by the Turks. We demand autonomy”. They wanted to achieve with weapons what Franciscan Franjo Jukić was not able to achieve with his letter. The rebellion transformed the “Eastern question” into the “Eastern crisis”. Fierce battles ensued, as well as the suffering of the civilian population, followed by the diplomatic attempts to



solve the crisis. In summer of 1878 Austro-Hungarian troops entered Bosnia and Herzegovina. Austro-Hungarians thought that their troops will not be opposed, but in fact they were met with resistance and suffered considerable losses. The Ottoman authorities respected the decision of the Berlin congress, but local fanatical Moslem religious leaders did not. Faced with the unfavorable development of events, the Ottoman diplomacy, just prior to the Berlin congress, offered the European powers to allow the Austro-Hungary to occupy Herzegovina, while Bosnia would remain under Ottoman control. But the Austro-Hungarian minister of foreign affairs Andrassy rejected this, deeming such proposal as unacceptable and as a solution that would lead to "multiple conflicts". During the final days of the congress representatives of the Ottoman empire were able to gain secret concession from the Austro-Hungarian diplomats, whose and according to this Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina was declared as a provisional solution, while the Sultan would retain the sovereignty over both lands. The convention signed in Istanbul on April 21, 1879 agreed that Moslem would, during their Friday's prayers, mention the name of Sultan, while the Ottoman banners would be held at the mosques. In Catholic churches, sermons were celebrating the Austro-Hungarian emperor whose black-yellow banners hold back the national flags. The Orthodox glorified the Russian emperor who was granting them his protection. Generally, situation in the former Ottoman province Bosnia and Herzegovina were developing in the direction of the solving of the national question - the main dilemma was - who would be, among the empires, be the superior force - Austro-Hungarian, Russian or Ottoman. Confessional, in the meantime already national elites (at least among Catholics/Croats i Orthodox/Serbs) had particular interests. Their views about the future were different, they differently saw the contemporary situation and they had different memories of the past.

Shots fired in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914 rang out through Europe and announced the war that would completely change the fates of individuals and positions of whole nations and states. During that war several solutions were offered for Bosnia-Herzegovina. Shortly after the outbreak of war, in Autumn of 1914, Oskar Potiorek, Austro-Hungarian general and governor of Bosnia-Herzegovina, suggested the division of Bosnia-Herzegovina between Austria and Hungary. According to this proposition, Austria would have acquired Herzegovina with Prozor, Glamoč, Livno, Duvno and Bugojno (without Donji Vakuf) and part of territory near river Drina, because it was a border area with Serbia. What remained would have be under the Hungarian administration. But Potiorek's proposal was not accepted because Austrian and Hungarian representatives were not able to find agreement about this question. But these two dominant nations within the dual monarchy did not care about the demands of less numerous nations within the Monarchy. Both Au-

strians and Hungarians insisted on their maximalists demands until the end. But the processes initiated by the World War I also led to new demands. In August of 1917 Moslem representatives made the “most energetic objection” against any kind of South-Slavic union and they demanded from the emperor and king Charles to establish “autonomous Bosnia-Herzegovina”. During that same period Croatian representatives demanded the establishment of a united administrative unit that would include the territories of Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Herzegovina and Bosnia, and it was also seen as a desirable solution to include Istria and Slovenian province Krain. Serb representatives waited for the end of the war and aspired to unite with Kingdom of Serbia. The political strategy of the authorities of Kingdom of Serbia was clear from the contemporary statement among their diplomats: “The whole wisdom is to tie one’s boat to a right ship and then to take care for it not to get untied”. With the changes at the battlefronts, the attitude of the Croatian political elites toward the dual monarchy also underwent modifications. There were new ambitions and, along with them, new identities. What was once “the solution of state question at the south of dual monarchy according to Croatian wishes” transformed itself into a support for the creation of a particular South-Slavic state. The defeat in the Great War and fear of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia caused the breakup of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. When the Austro-Hungarian troops occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina, bishop Juraj Strossmayer said that the dual monarchy will follow the fate of the Ottoman Empire, because it will collapse and disappear from the historical scene. His statement ultimately became a wise prophecy. First and the foremost reason for such ultimate fate of Austro-Hungarian Empire, as Strossmayer wrote, will be “the egoism and ambitions of the two dominant nations, that have caused the animosity among Slavic nations whose demands and interests were completely ignored”. In the chaotic conditions of war, all sides had their plans and ambitions. Hungarians made maps that included parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina and ultimately they lost the two thirds of the territory they had under their administration and large number of ethnic Hungarians ultimately remained living outside the borders of the new Hungarian state. Once great and powerful Austria also suffered territorial losses and humiliation. A new period was coming, marked with injustice, violence and dictatorship. Serbian unitary and centralists policies, as well as Yugoslav idea, endangered the survival of the Croatian national identity. The idea of the American president Woodrow T. Wilson about the “right of nations for self-determination”, that constituted the policy of US delegation at the peace negotiations, gave strength to numerous national movements, including those in south-eastern Europe. But it was very questionable how the idea about self-determination would be put to practice. Wilson himself was not clear about what are the nations and which one of them should have the right to “self-determine”. He himself admitted that he did not even

know about the existence of various European nations that demanded their rights.

Once an Austro-Hungarian “pincer” whose purpose was to eliminate the possibility of unification of South-Slavic states, Bosnia-Herzegovina in new circumstances became the backbone of South-Slavic, Yugoslav movement and the center of gathering of South-Slavic states. The Serbian army entered Sarajevo on November 6, 1918, demonstrating the Serb victory and supremacy that would last for a long time. Three ethnic Serbs from Bosnia-Herzegovina who were members of the Yugoslav committee led extremely Greater-Serbian and anti-Croatian policy. They advocated the united Bosnia-Herzegovina solely because they believed that this is the solution that would prevent the creation of the Croatian state. In fact, Bosnia-Herzegovina became the center of what would become the Yugoslav space and “knot” that had to prevent and kind of an agreement and peaceful split between Croats and Serbs, meaning the separation and independence for Croats. Many, and especially Yugoslav communists, would later do a lot to make that “knot” as tangled as possible in order to secure the stability and long term survival of the Yugoslav state. Moslem political elites believed in the particular role and importance of Bosnia-Herzegovina for the Yugoslav state and what is even more probable – they saw the Yugoslav idea as a tool in preservation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Yugoslav Moslem Organization was formed in February 1919 and this political party proclaimed the acceptance of the “upgradable nationalism” and Yugoslav idea as the most appropriate road to “convergence and unity”. Its representatives thought that Croatian nationalism is bound with the Catholicism and Serb nationalism with Orthodox faith, therefore both of these nationalisms were inaccessible for Moslems. Therefore, they accepted Yugoslav idea because it was “not mixed with any other influence”. But with the creation of the new Yugoslav state and the establishment of its authority, Bosnia-Herzegovina was no more place of gathering. Instead it became a scene of national and political confrontation between Croats and Serbs. In such circumstances, the elites of Moslems of Bosnia-Herzegovina were ready to opt for the side that was willing to take into consideration their demands and to fulfill their interests. The element of such strategy was constant flirtation with either Serb or Croatian side, in order to make the Moslem element as important as possible.

The assassination of Croatian representatives in the Yugoslav parliament in June of 1928 heralded the breakup of Yugoslav idea and state. The dictatorship and repression that ensued only accelerated this. Vladko Maček continued the struggle of Stjepan Radić for Croatian national interests and at all the ensuing parliamentary elections he managed to secure the support of the greatest majority of Croatian people. Moslems mostly supported Mehmed

Spaho and Yugoslav Moslem Organization, while Serb voters opted for Yugoslav unitary or Serb national programs, although they were, in fact, difficult to distinguish. It is very difficult to assume how this type of political struggle would have developed, had the possibility of a new major war conflict had not appeared. Just before the outbreak of World War II, the Serb political elite, aware of the instability and divisions within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, decided to make an agreement with Croats. In late August of 1939 *Banovina Hrvatska* was established as a Croatian autonomous unit within Yugoslavia. It seemed that Yugoslavia would be able to withstand the temptations that followed. Moslem political elite was not satisfied with such solution. Spaho died just before the mentioned changes and was succeeded by Džafer Kulenović. Already in September of 1939 Kulenović demanded the establishment of an autonomous Bosnia-Herzegovina. He claimed that such unit would represent “a miniature small Yugoslavia that would attract all forces from all areas of our homeland and would, as such, strengthen the Yugoslavia as a whole”. Therefore, according to Kulenović, an autonomous Bosnia-Herzegovina would present “a binding knot of this state, it would gather to itself both Serbs and Croats and it would be the pivot of Yugoslavism and its idea as a state”. Such opinion was supported by some Serb politicians. Nevertheless, this caused the fierce reaction of the majority of Serb political representatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina that was strongly against the establishment of *Banovina Hrvatska*, because they thought that this is an initial step in breakup of Yugoslavia and that the Croatian autonomous unit gained too much territory.

In its modern history Bosnia-Herzegovina was called and considered a “pincer”, a “hearth of movement”, a “clasp between Croats and Serbs”, a “binding knot of the state”, a “Mini-Yugoslavia” by various political factors and options. But it was always just an element in someone’s wider projects, a tool for achieving some higher goal.

During World War II Bosnia-Herzegovina became part of Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH*) under the Ustasha regime. It again became the battlefield where the fate of its three nations had to be decided. Croats to a large degree accepted NDH, because they believed that it represents the final liberation from foreign dominance. They saw it as a fulfilment of old aims and as a final form of national freedom. Shortly after the proclamation of NDH Serbs began with the uprising whose aim was either the reestablishment of Yugoslavia, or the creation of their own national state – colloquially called “Greater Serbia”. The Ustashe regime proclaimed Moslems as “Croats of Islamic faith”, as a “blood of our blood” and as a “flower of our Croatian nation”. The larger part of Moslem elites accepted NDH, hoping to achieve better position than the own in the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia. As the time passed, such hopes were replaced by disappointment and after years

of struggle and violence there appeared a wakeup call. In the storm of war all were looking to tie their boat to a ship that would sail them to safety. Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina had no option, and they had no boat to salvation either. They boarded the German raft that would, ultimately, be crushed at the Austrian and Slovenian mountains with terrible losses at the end of World War II. Serbs were able to board three different boats – the first was tied to German, the second to British, and the third to Russian, in fact a Soviet ship. In the meantime, they also went along the Italian ship, before it ultimately was capsized. When it became visible who would be the ultimate winner, Serbs in large number boarded the winning boat. Moslems also chose the tactics of simultaneously supporting various factions. In early October of 1942 they demanded the exclusion of Herzegovina from NDH and its annexation to Kingdom of Italy. In November of 1942 a group of influential representatives of Yugoslav Moslem Organization send a “memorandum” to Adolf Hitler, demanding the establishment of an autonomous “County of Bosnia” that would be excluded from NDH and put under the direct rule of German Reich. In early April of 1943 Amin al Husseini, grand mufti of Jerusalem, visited Sarajevo and was welcomed with full honors. His message to the local Moslem community can be summarized in the following sentence: “You must always bear in mind, that the biggest enemies of Islam and of us Moslems in this world are England and America joined with Jews”. After this visit a massive mobilization of Moslems into 13<sup>th</sup> SS voluntary Bosnian-Herzegovinian division was initiated. This division was known as “Handjar division”. In autumn of 1944, when the final outcome of was well known, there came a massive “reorientation” of Moslems who started joining the rank of the Partisan army. Already before few Moslems, influential because of their pro-Yugoslav and pro-Serb views, had joined the ranks of Partisans led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Moslem political elite to a large degree accepted the reestablishment of the Yugoslav state under the communist regime. Their support was particularly motivated by the fact that People’s Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina was established as one of the six republic within the Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia. All “auxiliary boats” were in the meantime sank into oblivion and many of their passengers, even those who were killed as the members of the defeated armies, were – according to the needs of national “reorientation” – rehabilitated and proclaimed to be “antifascists” and patriots. Yugoslavism and self-managing socialism became the new framework for the growth of the new Moslem elite. Within this framework Moslems were in 1968 recognized as an equal Yugoslav nation. All this was achieved through a large degree of agreements between Moslem communists, nationalists and Islamists. Occasional ideological conflicts between these groups and individuals did not harm such general agreement and did not put to question the main goals of their cooperation. In nearly half a century of Yugoslav and communist indoctrination



a large part of Moslem elite accepted all its main traits. All this would later influence the intra-ethnic relations and the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The basis of intra-ethnic tensions and struggles during World War II was not in the ideological questions – fascism or anti-fascism, but in the state and national questions. The main dilemma was – Croatia or Yugoslavia, Croatian nationalism versus Yugoslav and Serb national ideas. At the end of World War II and in its immediate aftermath, Yugoslav communists organized and conducted a massive repression and execution of prisoners of war and all of their real or potential enemies. Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina were especially targeted in this wave of revolutionary and nationalist violence. Beside the fact that a large number of Catholic priests from Bosnia-Herzegovina was executed or imprisoned, in Herzegovina and in some parts of Bosnia every third adult Croatian man (averagely 23 years old) was killed. Those were the main reasons why Croats, to a large degree, were never able to accept Yugoslavia and the communist regime.

The breakup of communist regimes in Europe opened the path of democratization in Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. At the first free, general democratic and multiparty elections in the history of Bosnia-Herzegovina, held in November of 1990, the ruling communists suffered defeat. Three national parties won the elections and gained all seven seats in the Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as 84% of seats in its parliament. The results of the elections represented the national structure of population of Bosnia-Herzegovina. National identities and national politics gave legitimacy to the new authority. But such new democratically elected authority could only function in stability with the mutual respects, recognition of identity and legitimate interests of others. Readiness for compromise was a prerequisite for any further step. But it soon became obvious that it was not easy to achieve this. For Serb Democratic Party only acceptable solution was for Bosnia-Herzegovina to remain within Yugoslavia, while Croatian Democratic Union did not want to remain in Yugoslavia. Moslem Party of Democratic Action advocated Bosnia-Herzegovina as a state of “citizens”, meaning the centralized and unitary state that would in fact be the “national state” of Moslems. Ultimately the war broke out and took away lives of 100 000 people, destroying the complex fiber of society of Bosnia-Herzegovina. During that war, similarly as through history, three collective groups, Millets, religious communities, ethnic-confessional groups, people, nations – led their battles for their particular interests. During this struggle they made temporary alliances, depending on situation and balance of power. Serbs counted on the support of Yugoslav People’s Army to achieve their goals and they try to do this, which makes them most responsible for the war. Moslem political leadership made clear that it would not sacrifice “sovereign Bosnia-Herzegovina” for peace, in fact that Moslems

would lead war for Bosnia-Herzegovina as “state of citizens”. This meant that they saw Bosnia-Herzegovina exclusively as a centralized state, in fact a state of Moslems. Croats supported Bosnia-Herzegovina as long as it remained independent from Yugoslavia. They were the only party that accepted all international peace plans and accepted all solutions that were offered in order to stop the war. War between Croats and Moslems was caused primarily because of the Moslem political goal to establish Bosnia-Herzegovina as their national state, which was also aimed at bringing to finalization the establishment of the Moslem nation. Croats tried to preserve their identity and political position by all means. The war between Croats and Moslems was marked with suffering, destruction and victims, but during an important humanitarian action was launched and it, to a large degree, helped to finish this war. During the war between Croats and Moslems, Croatian doctors showed all their skills, ability to organize, they showed their readiness to sacrifice and, last but not least, they showed their humanism. They gave medical attention to Croatian, but also to enemy soldiers and civilians and they distinguished themselves with the humanitarian action called “White road to Nova Bila and Bosna Srebrena”. They secured humanitarian help for around 70 000 Croats, among them 12 000 children, who were living in encirclement of Moslem forces. These Croats were target of attacks of overwhelming Moslem forces. In such circumstances the Church of Holy Spirit in Nova Bila was turned into an improvised hospital. The Church was a place of prayer and at the same time hospital for the wounded and ill. The humanitarian action called “White road to Nova Bila and Bosna Srebrena” broke the media blockade and showed to the public, both in Croatia and across the world what is really going on in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Humanitarian volunteers who took part in this action found themselves under attack and when humanitarian convoy was returning from his mission a driver of a truck, Ante Vlaić from Split, was killed. The humanitarian action “White road to Nova Bila and Bosna Srebrena” was, in a way, a pinnacle of 150 years long connection between Zagreb and central Bosnia, between the people who have, even in the most difficult historical circumstances, had identical values and identical Croatian national identity.