

## POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND SECURITY SITUATION IN WESTERN SLAVONIA ON THE EVE OF THE GREATER-SERBIAN AGGRESSION IN 1991

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Based on archival sources and relevant literature, this paper portrays political circumstances and security situation in Western Slavonia from 1989, that is, from collapse of the communist systems in Europe and destabilisation of Yugoslavia by the political leadership of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, up until August 1991 when the overt Greater-Serbian Aggression started in Western Slavonia. Democratic processes in Europe also seized western Yugoslav republics, Slovenia and Croatia. These republics advocated either the restructure of Yugoslavia as a confederal state, or their independence in case that the political agreement with other republics about common state system was not feasible. Conversely, Serbian political leadership's goal, supported by pro-Serbian oriented leadership of the federal Yugoslav People's Army, was to impose Yugoslavia as a centralized state under the domination of Serbs, as the most numerous Yugoslav nation. After this policy failed, Serbian leadership attempted to create Greater Serbia which would comprise all territories which Serbian leadership considered as historically and ethnically a Serbian territory. Among others, that also included Western Slavonia where a certain part of population were ethnic Serbs. Part of these Serbs, as well as ethnic Serbs in certain other parts of Croatia, supported by Belgrade, gradually commenced rebellion against the Croatian authorities. Insurgency was led by representatives of Serbian Democratic Party whose centre was in town Knin. In the first phase of destabilisation the emphasis was on the thesis that the Serbs were endangered in Western Slavonia, in order to radicalize as many as possible, which was successfully implemented, and finally led to terrorist actions culminating with the open aggression in Western Slavonia.

**Keywords:** Republic of Croatia, Homeland War, Serbian rebellion, Western Slavonia, disintegration of Yugoslavia

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## Introduction

During the 1980s, after the death of President Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslavia, organized as a federation and ruled by League of Communists of Yugoslavia, was struck by a deepening economic and social crisis. In Serbia there was also a growing discontent with the federal system that gave wide autonomy to Serbian provinces Kosovo and Vojvodina. In 1986 Slobodan Milošević was elected president of the League of Communists of Serbia. A year later, in 1987, after his faction won in the Party, he initiated the populist and nationalist policies and Serbia regained complete control over its provinces, and pro-Serbian leadership was also installed in Montenegro. Milošević's policy also spread to Croatia, among the ethnic Serbs living in that republic.<sup>1</sup>

Milošević attempted to centralize Yugoslav federation under Serbian control. Slovenia, most north-western Yugoslav republic, resisted such policy and gradually communist leadership of Croatia also became critical of such policy. In late 1980s, with the democratic changes in communist states of central and south-eastern Europe, both Slovenia and Croatia opted for transition to democracy. In early 1990 the League of Communist of Yugoslavia dissolved after Slovenian and Croatian representatives left its congress held in Belgrade, refusing the pressure of Milošević and his supporters. Multiparty elections in Slovenia and Croatia were won by non-communist parties who opted for greater independence and reorganization of Yugoslavia into a confederation. After these developments Milošević's policy was to secure the areas of Croatia inhabited by ethnic Serbs to remain within Yugoslavia, in fact to create an enlarged Serb state. In these aims he had the support of the Yugoslav People's Army (Jugoslavenska narodna armija, JNA).<sup>2</sup> All these events also affected the Western Slavonia region in Croatia, an area also inhabited by sizeable number of ethnic Serbs.

## Political situation in Western Slavonia during late 1980s

The area where the part of Western Slavonia Serbs rebelled covered ten municipalities: Virovitica, Bjelovar, Grubišno Polje, Daruvar, Pakrac, Novska, Nova Gradiška, Podravska Slatina, Orahovica and Požega. Croats had an ab-

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see: Davor Marijan, Nikica Barić, *The Fall of Yugoslavia and Creation of the Croatian State* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Nikica Barić, *Srpska pobuna u Hrvatskoj 1991.-1995. [The Serb Rebellion in Croatia 1990-1995]* (Zagreb: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2005), pp. 42-52; Ante Nazor, *Greater Serbian Aggression Against Croatia in the 1990s* (Zagreb: Croatian Homeland War Memorial and Documentation Centre, 2011), pp. 21-22, 56, 188.

solute majority in most of those municipalities, with the exception of Grubišno Polje and Daruvar, where they had a relative majority, whereas the Serbs had a relative majority only in the municipality of Pakrac.<sup>3</sup>

Despite such composition of the population, during 1989 municipal committees of the ruling League of Communists of Croatia in Western Slavonia had higher percentage of ethnic Serbs in comparison to their percentage in the general population of that region. It could be assumed that such ethnic composition of the leadership of the League of Communists in that region also affected its perception of problem of nationalism. The general political line taken by the communists was to condemn all nationalistic tendencies, both Croatian and Serbian, although during that period Serbian nationalism sponsored by Serbian leadership in Belgrade had already shaken the foundations of the Yugoslav federation.<sup>4</sup>

The problem of nationalism was discussed at the Presidency session of the Bjelovar Municipal Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia, held in the first half of 1989. During the discussion it was mentioned that in the municipality of Bjelovar there were seven registered manifestations of nationalism during the previous year. Croatian nationalists consisted of “individuals and informal groups acting covertly, but continuously ever since the time of the so-called mass movement... have been manifesting their hostile platform verbally”, whereas Serbian nationalists “continue to launch theories of assimilation and their own vulnerability in the Socialist Republic of Croatia, with an increasingly ubiquitous euphoric deliberations of a Greater Serbia”.<sup>5</sup> One case of Serbian nationalism was also registered in early 1989 in Pakrac, when a group of mostly young Serbs sang nationalist songs celebrating the Orthodox Christmas.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Jasna Crkvenčić-Bojić, ed., *Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava, stanova i poljoprivrednih gospodarstava 31. ožujak 1991. Stanovništvo prema narodnosti po naseljima*. [Census of Population, Households, Dwellings and Agricultural Holdings, March 31, 1991. Population by Ethnicity in Settlements] (Zagreb: Republički zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske, 1992), images V, XIV, XXX, LIII, LV, LX, LXV, LXIX, LXXI i XCI.

<sup>4</sup> Ivica Miškulin, “Stranka ugroženog naroda – djelovanje Srpske demokratske stranke u zapadnoj Slavoniji 1990.-1991.” [“The Party of the Endangered People – the Activity of the Serbian Democratic Party in Western Slavonia 1990-1991”] in: *Srpska pobuna u zapadnoj Slavoniji 1990.-1995.: Nositelji, institucije, posljedice* [The Serb Rebellion in Western Slavonia 1990-1995: Leaders, Institutions, Consequences], Ivica Miškulin, Mladen Barać, eds. (Slavonski Brod – Zagreb: HIP-PPSSB, HMDCCR, 2012), pp. 16-18.

<sup>5</sup> E. Novak, “Pojavnost nacionalizma” [The Appearance of Nationalism], *Bjelovarski list* (Bjelovar), April 6, 1989, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ivica Miškulin, “U službi boga rata: Prilog poznavanju djelovanja Episkopa slavonskog Lukijana i Srpske pravoslavne crkve u zapadnoj Slavoniji 1985.-1991.” [“Serving the God of War: An Insight into the Activities of Bishop of Slavonia Lukijan and the Serbian Orthodox

On 28 June 1989, at the commemoration of the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo taking place on Kosovo Polje near Priština, shortly after Serbia regained control over its provinces and also over the republic of Montenegro, Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević said: “Today, we are again in battle and confronting battles. They are not armed, though that cannot yet be excluded.”<sup>7</sup> The Western Slavonia Serbs commemorated the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo on June 8, 1989 in Virovitica. It was organised by the Serbian Orthodox Church, led by Lukijan Pantelić, Bishop of the Eparchy of Slavonia. The rally was attended by around 200 people and the atmosphere of tolerance prevailed. Nevertheless, the Serbian media portrayed this event in a negative light, highlighting the fact that local communist leadership and the Serbian Orthodox Church disagreed regarding the location of holding the event, and reiterating the theory of vulnerability of Serbs in Croatia. However, reactions of the Western Slavonia communists to the commemoration of the Battle of Kosovo, which took place on July 9, 1989, in Kosovo near Knin, with clear manifestations of Greater-Serbian nationalism, provide a better insight into their views at the time. Communist leaders of most of the Western Slavonia municipalities generally condemned the manifestation of the Greater-Serbian nationalism at the commemoration, without providing any clear indication as to who its bearers are. Communist leaders in the municipality of Novska were the exception and condemned the Serbian nationalism and chauvinism.<sup>8</sup>

## From democratic changes to open insurgency

In late 1989 the League of Communists of Croatia decided to adopt a multi-party system. In February 1990, the Parliament of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (*Sabor*) adopted a decision to organize democratic parliamentary elections. These were held in late April and early May 1990.<sup>9</sup> The Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ), led by Franjo

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Church in Western Slavonia 1985-1991” in: *Srpska pobuna u zapadnoj Slavoniji 1990.-1995.: Nositelji, institucije, posljedice* [The Serb Rebellion in Western Slavonia 1990-1995: Leaders, Institutions, Consequences], Ivica Miškulin, Mladen Barać, eds. (Slavonski Brod – Zagreb: HIP-PPSSB, HMDCCR, 2012), p. 74.

<sup>7</sup> Nazor, *Greater Serbian Agression Against Croatia in the 1990s*, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Ivica Miškulin, *Međunarodna zajednica i zapadna Slavonija 1991.-1995.* [The International Community and Western Slavonia 1991-1995], PhD thesis (Zagreb: University of Zagreb, Faculty of Croatian Studies, 2009), pp. 27-30.

<sup>9</sup> Ivo Perić, *Hrvatski državni sabor 1848.-2000.: Treći svezak: 1918.-2000.* [The Croatian State Parliament 1848-2000.: Third volume: 1918-2000] (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, Dom i svijet, 2000), pp. 336-339.

Tuđman, won the elections. HDZ advocated the Croatian sovereignty and was opposed to the centralist policies advocated by Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević. Serbian media portrayed the victory of HDZ as a revival of the World War II Ustasha regime of the Independent State of Croatia. After the victory of HDZ Serbian leadership in Belgrade, in cooperation with the leadership of JNA, decided that it would not allow Croatia secession from Yugoslavia in the borders it had within Yugoslav federation, because parts of Croatia inhabited by ethnic Serbs would remain in Yugoslavia, along with Serbia proper.<sup>10</sup>

HDZ won in most of the Western Slavonia municipalities. Reformed communists, that is, the League of Communists of Croatia – Party of Democratic Change, won in municipalities with a prevalingly mixed ethnic composition of the population: Pakrac, Daruvar and Grubišno Polje.<sup>11</sup> Both Serb nationalists in Slavonia, as well as the representative of Serbian Orthodox Church in Slavonia saw the HDZ as an anti-Serb political force equating it with the Ustasha regime. They were also critical of the reformed League of Communists of Croatia as almost equally anti-Serb political option whose Croatian members were then joining the ruling HDZ.<sup>12</sup>

The Serbian Democratic Party (Srpska demokratska stranka, SDS) was founded in February 1990 in Knin in northern Dalmatia. It also took part at the first democratic elections in Croatia.<sup>13</sup> Only after the elections SDS chapters were founded in Western Slavonia during June and July of 1990 and its representatives stressed that local Serb population is endangered by the new Croatian government.<sup>14</sup> The founding assembly of SDS held in Podravska Slatina on June 9, 1990 can be taken as an example. At this assembly, head of the local SDS Milun Karadžić claimed that SDS was formed “to crush the fear and anxiety of the Serbian people”.<sup>15</sup> President of SDS, Jovan Rašković,

<sup>10</sup> Dušan Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest [Croatian Modern History]* (Zagreb: Golden marketing, 1999), pp. 770, 777.; Davor Marijan, Nikica Barić, *The Fall of Yugoslavia and Creation of the Croatian State*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>11</sup> Miškulin, *Međunarodna zajednica i zapadna Slavonija 1991.-1995.* [*The International Community and Western Slavonia 1991-1995*], pp. 46-48.

<sup>12</sup> Lukijan Pantelić, *Srbi i pravoslavlje u Slavoniji i Maloj Raškoj [Serbs and Orthodoxy in Slavonia and Mala Raška]* (Beograd: Eparhija Slavonska, 1993), p. 22; Ilija Petrović, *Srpsko nacionalno vijeće Slavonije, Baranje i zapadnog Srema [Serbian National Council of Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srem]* (Novi Sad: Cvetnik, 1994), pp. 10-11.

<sup>13</sup> Barić, *Srpska pobuna u Hrvatskoj 1991.-1995.* [*The Serb Rebellion in Croatia 1990-1995*], pp. 54-55.

<sup>14</sup> Miškulin, *Međunarodna zajednica i zapadna Slavonija 1991.-1995.* [*The International Community and Western Slavonia 1991-1995*], pp. 49-58.

<sup>15</sup> D. Šantoši, “Stop Mikeliću i Dakiću” [“Put a Stop to Mikelić and Dakić”], *Večernji list* (Zagreb), June 10, 1990, p. 4.

attained the assembly and in his speech said that “there is no life for Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia, and that the Ustashe regime arrived on the scene again (...)”. He finished his speech with the following words: “My Serbian brothers, I will see you in Krajina. There is no happiness for you in the Ustashe state.”<sup>16</sup> At that time SDS members and supporters began arming themselves, establishing training camps in Voćin, Lager Sekulinci, Bučje, Zvečevo and Čeralije.<sup>17</sup>

JNA seized the weapons of the Croatian Territorial Defence in May 1990, while percentage of ethnic Serbs working in the Croatian police was higher than their number in the general population. In such situation Croatian government began to strengthen their defence forces.<sup>18</sup> In July 1990 around 1700 new recruits for police were accepted to start their police training. Tensions build up with the local Serbs in Knin region rebelling against the Croatian authorities on August 17, 1990.<sup>19</sup>

Rebellion of Serbs in Knin area influenced the situation in Western Slavonia as well. In Novi Grabovac the Serbs set up night watches between August 18 and 20, 1990 and, despite the warning of the police, they did not want to leave the watch posts.<sup>20</sup> Worsening situation in Western Slavonia was also recorded by JNA in a report of the Chief of the Security Service of the 265<sup>th</sup> mechanised JNA brigade from Bjelovar dated August 19, 1990. The report stated that situation is complicated in the municipalities of Pakrac and Daruvar and could easily escalate. JNA noted that both Serbs and Croats had organized night watches in their villages. Tensions were especially high during the founding assemblies of HDZ in Daruvar and Pakrac. In Pakrac on August 19, people were grouped in supporters of HDZ and “Serb population” ready to confront with the Croatian authorities. Serbs who gathered in Pakrac were armed with knives, guns, and some even had hand grenades. These Serbs were

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<sup>16</sup> *Haški tribunal VII/27 – Suđenje Slobodanu Miloševiću: transkripti* [Hague Tribunal VII/27 – Trial of Slobodan Milošević: Transcripts] (Belgrade, 2006), p. 451.

<sup>17</sup> *Bijela knjiga Vlade Republike Hrvatske* [The White Paper of the Government of the Republic of Croatia] (Zagreb, 1999), p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Zdenko Radelić, *Hrvatska u Jugoslaviji 1945.-1991.: od zajedništva do razlaza* [Croatia in Yugoslavia: From Unity to Separation 1945-1990] (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2006), pp. 573-574; Ozren Žunec, *Goli život I – socijetalne dimenzije pobune Srba u Hrvatskoj* [Survival and Social Dimensions of the Serb Rebellion in Croatia] (Zagreb: Demetra, 2007), p. 570.

<sup>19</sup> Nazor, *Greater Serbian Agression Against Croatia in the 1990s*, pp. 35-40; Barić, *Srpska pobuna u Hrvatskoj 1991.-1995.* [The Serb Rebellion in Croatia 1990-1995], pp. 78-79.

<sup>20</sup> B. Šimičić, “Efikasno djelovati” [“How to Act Effectively”], *Novljanski vjesnik* (Novska), September 11, 1990, p. 1; Davor Marijan, *Novska u Domovinskom ratu* [Novska in the Homeland War] (Novska: HVIDRA Novska, 2009), p. 149.

ready to prevent the flying of the Croatian flag at the building of the municipality of Pakrac, be it “at the cost of their own lives and use of firearms, as well as other weapons”. Almost the identical scenario occurred at the founding assembly of HDZ in Daruvar, where JNA noticed that Serbs were armed with firearms and cold weapons and ready to act if new Croatian flags were to be flown on the Assembly building of the municipality of Daruvar and the Daruvar Police Station.<sup>21</sup>

Between August 19, and September 2, 1990, SDS in Western Slavonia organised the “referendum on the Serbian autonomy” in Western Slavonia. Ilija Sašić, President of the SDS Regional Committee for Slavonia, said that Croatian Serbs were seeking a certain autonomy; however, should Croatia step out of Yugoslavia, this autonomy would be political and territorial. Veljko Đakula, leader of the Western Slavonia Serbs, was of a similar opinion, saying that, should Croatia step out of Yugoslavia, ethnic Serb would not remain in Croatia. The referendum was declared illegal by Croatian authorities, and the way it was carried out was also questionable. For example, it was noticed that certain voters had voted on several polling stations, that some voters were not registered in the municipality in which they voted, and some Western Slavonia Serbs later claimed that their signature was forged. Even disregarding the irregularities, the point of the referendum remained unclear since Serbs did not have an absolute majority in any of the Western Slavonia municipalities.<sup>22</sup> Uncompromising politics exercised by the Serb leaders was confirmed on September 18, 1990, in Knin, at the meeting of the SDS Executive Committee, when it was agreed “at a proposal of Slavonians” that “no further talks are to be held with the leadership [of the Republic of Croatia] because of their Ustaša politics”.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Mate Rupić, ed., *Republika Hrvatska i Domovinski rat 1990-1995, Dokumenti, knjiga 1, Oružana pobuna Srba u Hrvatskoj i agresija Oružanih snaga SFRJ i srpskih paravojnih postrojbi na Republiku Hrvatsku (1990.-1991.)* [*The Republic of Croatia and the Croatian War of Independence 1990-1995, Documents, Vol. I, Armed Rebellion of the Serbs in Croatia and Aggression of SFRY Forces and Serb Paramilitary Formations against the Republic of Croatia (1990-1991)*] (Zagreb: Hrvatski memorijalno-dokumentacijski centar Domovinskog rata, 2007), pp. 45-47; Davor Marijan, *Slom Titove armije – JNA i raspad Jugoslavije 1987-1992*. [*The Defeat of Tito's Army and the Break-up of Yugoslavia 1987-1992*] (Zagreb: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2008), p. 229.

<sup>22</sup> Miškulin, *Međunarodna zajednica i zapadna Slavonija 1991.-1995*. [*The International Community and Western Slavonia 1991-1995*], pp. 59-62.

<sup>23</sup> HR-HMDCDR-69, Minutes of the meeting of the Serbian Democratic Party for the municipality of Pakrac in Dragović dated 23 September 1990; SDS meeting in Knin was attended by the following persons from Slavonia: Vojislav Vukčević, Stevan Stančić, Milun Karadžić, Ilija Sašić and Veljko Đakula.

As the answer to aggressive actions of the Serbs, Croatian leadership decided to strengthen its police forces. In mid-1990 the Croatian Ministry of the Interior employed 6800 people, whereas in late January 1991 this number rose to 18,500.<sup>24</sup> In September and October 1990 Croatia purchased several thousand automatic rifles with ammunition from Hungary.<sup>25</sup> Part of these weapons were distributed to crisis areas in Croatia. In late October 1990, the Western Slavonia area of Bjelovar received 360 automatic rifles.<sup>26</sup> Virovitica and its surroundings received 400 automatic rifles during October 1990, and these weapons were then distributed with consent of the Croatian police. Of those 400 rifles, 25 were sent to Podravska Slatina and another 25 to Grubišno Polje.<sup>27</sup> During November 1990 municipality of Daruvar was supplied with 30 Thompson submachine guns with ammunition.<sup>28</sup> At the end of October 1990 150 automatic rifles arrived to Nova Gradiška and 150 automatic rifles to Slavonska Požega.<sup>29</sup>

Also, during October 1990 around 128 newly trained Croatian policemen were deployed at the Bjelovar police department, which was responsible for some Western Slavonian municipalities where part of the Serbian population rebelled. Certain number of these policemen were sent to serve in police stations in western Slavonia (Virovitica, Bjelovar, Grubišno Polje, Daruvar, Pakrac) while other joined the special police forces.<sup>30</sup>

The next incident took place on September 29, 1990, in Pakrac, when a sacred liturgy was held to celebrate “300 years of migration of the Serbs” (mi-

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<sup>24</sup> Davor Marijan, “Sudionici i osnovne značajke rata u Hrvatskoj 1990.-1991.” [“Participants and the Basic Features of the War in Croatia 1990-1995”], *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 40 (2008), no. 1: 49.

<sup>25</sup> Marijan, *Novska u Domovinskom ratu* [*Novska in the Homeland War*], p. 154.

<sup>26</sup> Jure Šimić [et al.], *Bjelovar u Domovinskom ratu – svjedoci vremena* [*Bjelovar in the Homeland War – Witnesses of Time*] (Bjelovar: Bjelovarsko-bilogorska županija, Grad Bjelovar, Prosvjeta d. d. Bjelovar, 1997), p. 69.

<sup>27</sup> Antun Habijanac, *Za slobodnu Hrvatsku* [*For a Free Croatia*] (Zagreb: Meditor, 1997), pp. 24-27; Ivica Debić, Ante Delić, *Otkos* (Bjelovar: Matica hrvatska Grubišno Polje, Prosvjeta d. d. Bjelovar, UHBDDR Zagreb, 1999), p. 36.

<sup>28</sup> Vjenceslav Herout, *Pet godina poslije* [*Five Years Later*] (Daruvar: Logos-Daruvar, Tehnička škola Daruvar, Poglavarstvo grada Daruvara, Županija Bjelovarsko-bilogorska, 1996), pp. 94-95.

<sup>29</sup> The information was given to the author by Colonel Mato Modrić (HDZ war president of the municipality of Nova Gradiška) on July 9, 2012, in Nova Gradiška.

<sup>30</sup> Davor Runtić, *Prvi hrvatski redarstvenik* [*The First Croatian Policeman*] (Zagreb: Udruga Prvi hrvatski redarstvenik, 2003), pp. 118, 246-247; Božidar Štubelj et al., *Križevačke ratne postrojbe u Domovinskom ratu 1991.-1995.* [*The Križevci War Units in the Homeland War 1991-1995*] (Križevci: Grad Križevci, Koordinacija udruga Domovinskog rata Križevci, 2011), p. 26.



gration from Kosovo to Western Slavonia). Around 3500 people attended the ceremony. No major incidents were recorded at the event. However, police in Bjelovar received information that Serbs who gathered in Pakrac would try to seize the weapons of the reserve police from the local police station and requested from the Pakrac station to immediately relocate their weapons to Bjelovar. Head of the Pakrac station, Jovo Vezmar, denied that there was an attempt to take weapons. However, the information also reached the Pakrac SDS, and its representatives requested a meeting with Vezmar, along with a guarantee that reserve weapons would not be taken from the Pakrac police station. SDS President Veljko Đakula noted that “larger groups of citizens from other municipalities (Novska, Slavonska Požega, Nova Gradiška and Okučani) are moving towards Pakrac, and citizens are armed with all kinds of short and long firearms”. SDS’s request was met and Blago Nikić, Secretary of the Bjelovar police ordered subordinates in Pakrac to give an oral guarantee to SDS that no weapons would be taken from the Pakrac station. However, SDS members and the gathered citizens were not satisfied with that, so an extraordinary meeting of the Executive Committee of the Pakrac Municipality Assembly was scheduled for 9 p.m. The Executive Committee requested from Croatian Ministry of Interior assurances that weapons would not be seized from the Pakrac police station, and the Ministry sent them a telegram with such assurance. Around 4000 Serbs gathered around the Pakrac Town Hall during the meeting. Two hundred of the most violent individuals called on the crowd to enter the building of the local police station and seize the weapons. Tensions calmed down a bit after the telegram of Ministry of Interior was read to them, and the majority of people left. However, around 300 Serbs marched towards the Pakrac police station. They split up only after midnight, after chief of the station assured them that weapons would not be taken and warned them that police station would be defended with weapons, if necessary.<sup>31</sup>

Incidents occurred in other parts of Western Slavonia as well. On September 14, 1990 a group of around hundred armed Serbs, led by the high-school teacher Stevan Ratković, entered local business premises in Daruvar, taking off and destroying Croatian flags. Ratković claimed that the presence of Croatian flags offended him, which was more than his dignity could take.<sup>32</sup> In late

<sup>31</sup> HR-HMDCDR-69, RH MUP, State Security Service, Number: 1131/12, Zagreb, 2 October 1990 – Information on the protest rally in the village of B. Grabovac and celebration of “300 years of migration of the Serbs” in Pakrac, as well as other information significant for security.

<sup>32</sup> Miškulin, „Stranka ugroženog naroda – djelovanje Srpske demokratske stranke u zapadnoj Slavoniji 1990.-1991.“ [The Party of the Endangered People – the Activity of the Serbian Democratic Party in Western Slavonia 1990-1991], p. 27.

October 1990 there was also an assassination attempt in Novska on Stjepan Šašković, a local reserve policeman.<sup>33</sup>

Proclamation of the Serbian Autonomous Region of Krajina (SAO Krajina) on December 21, 1990, in Knin served the insurgent Serbs in Western Slavonia as another encouragement for their activities. According to its Statute, SAO Krajina comprised municipalities with a majority Serbian population in north Dalmatia and Lika, with the possibility of annexing other Croatian municipalities with a predominantly Serbian population “which have reached a decision on joining SAO Krajina, as well as villages with a predominantly Serbian population which spoke out at a referendum in favour of joining one of the existing or newly formed municipalities with a predominantly Serbian population”. The President of the Assembly of local communities of Okučani, presumably encouraged by the aforementioned part of the SAO Krajina Statute, decided to hold a referendum on January 20, 1991, regarding the “separation from Nova Gradiška and annexation to the municipality of Pakrac”.<sup>34</sup> In addition to villages which belonged to the municipality of Nova Gradiška and had a majority Serbian population, the referendum to join the municipality of Pakrac was also held in villages inhabited by Serbs in the municipalities of Novska and Slavonska Požega. Serbs in 31 villages in the municipality of Nova Gradiška, in five villages in the municipality of Požega and in nine villages in the municipality of Novska voted to join the municipality of Pakrac. Serbian members of Pakrac municipal council approved the voting, whereas some Croatian councilmen left the session when the results of the local referendum came to the agenda.<sup>35</sup> Similar activities were occurring in northern part of Western Slavonia. Serbs in municipalities of Virovitica, Grubišno Polje and Daruvar declared their wish to join SAO Krajina. A part of the municipality of Grubišno Polje and southern part of the municipality of Virovitica were to join the municipality of Daruvar with the final aim to join the enlarged Daruvar municipality to SAO Krajina.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> HR-HDA-1745, RH MUP, Ministry of the Interior (SUP) Kutina, Number: 511-06-02-3118/90. MV, Kutina 24 October 1990.

<sup>34</sup> Mate Rupiĉ, ed., *Republika Hrvatska i Domovinski rat 1990.-1995.- Dokumenti, knjiga 2, Dokumenti institucija pobunjenih Srba u Republici Hrvatskoj (1990.-1991.)* [The Republic of Croatia and the Croatian War of Independence 1990-1995, Documents, Vol. II, Documents of the Rebel Serbs in the Republic of Croatia (1990-1991)] (Zagreb-Slavonski Brod: HMDC-DR, Hrvatski institut za povijest – Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje (HIP-PPSSB), 2007), pp. 121, 125-126.

<sup>35</sup> D. Pejĉinoviĉ, “Trideset šest naselja pristupa Pakracu” [“Thirty-six villages Join the Municipality of Pakrac”], *Politika* (Belgrade), February 14, 1991, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> “Referendum o pripajanju SAO Krajini” [“Referendum for annexing to SAO Krajina”], *Politika* (Belgrade), June 17, 1991, p. 6. More on this in: Miškulin, “Stranka ugroženog naroda – djelovanje Srpske demokratske stranke u zapadnoj Slavoniji 1990.-1991.” [“The Party of the

At the commemoration for victims of the Ustasha crimes, which took place on January 14, 1991 in Voćin, SDS President Jovan Rašković stated that Serbs in Slavonia are accused of rebellion against Croatian authorities, but he wished them best of luck. He also accused Croatian authorities of being “Serb eaters” who were forming “SS troops” and said that Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina would not accept Yugoslavia organized as a confederate state, and that they do not accept borders of the Yugoslav republics.<sup>37</sup>

Branko Popović, SDS President of the municipality of Grubišno Polje, stated in late February 1991 that the propagation of independent Croatia and confederate Yugoslavia was a deceit to the Serbian people and that, after the breakup of Yugoslavia, “SDS would fight with a goal that the Serbian people live in one state”.<sup>38</sup>

### **From armed conflict in Pakrac to open war**

Having received the Resolution of the Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia regarding the proposal for an agreed dissociation of the SFRY, the Croatian Parliament adopted on February 21, 1991 the “Resolution on the acceptance of the proposal for the dissociation of the SFRY and a possible association into a confederation of sovereign republics”.<sup>39</sup> A day after the Resolution was adopted SDS representatives Veljko Đakula and Drenko Gaćeša demanded an extraordinary session of the municipality of Pakrac. Leadership of the municipality agreed to this proposal, despite the fact that Milan Božić, President of the Pakrac Municipality Assembly, stated that such convening of the meeting was contrary to the Statute of the Municipality of Pakrac.<sup>40</sup>

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Endangered People – the Activity of the Serbian Democratic Party in Western Slavonia 1990-1991”], pp. 40-52.

<sup>37</sup> HR-HMDCDR-11, DVD 2464, Speech by Jovan Rašković on January 14, 1991, in Voćin.

<sup>38</sup> Petar Bašić, Ivica Miškulin, “Grubišnopoljska kronika 1990.-1991. (drugi dio)” [“The Chronicle of Grubišno Polje 1990-1991 (Part II)”], *Scrinia Slavonica: godišnjak podružnice za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje Hrvatskog instituta za povijest* 10 (2010), no. 1: 456-457.

<sup>39</sup> Nazor, *Greater Serbian Agression Against Croatia in the 1990s*, p. 52.

<sup>40</sup> HR-HMDCDR-69, Minutes from the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the President and Vice-President of the Municipal Assembly, as well as presidents of its councils dated 22 February 1991; Ivica Miškulin, “Srpska pobuna u općini Pakrac 1990.-1991.; uzroci, nositelji i tijek” [“Rebellion of Serbs in Pakrac Municipality 1990-1991: Causes, Major Participants and Course”], *Scrinia Slavonica: godišnjak podružnice za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje Hrvatskog instituta za povijest* 11 (2011), no. 1: 375-376.

Municipality Assembly voted to reject the Resolution of the Croatian Parliament, and it was decided to adopt the Decision that Municipality of Pakrac would join SAO Krajina. The total of 29 out of 75 councilmen voted for this Decision, even though the President and the Secretary of the Municipal Assembly warned that there were neither any constitutional nor legal grounds for the adoption of such by-laws. It was also decided that Pakrac Police Station will be places under the management of the SAO Krajina police.<sup>41</sup> Head of the Pakrac Police Station Jovo Vezmar mobilised 80% of the – predominantly Serbian – reserve police force. These policemen received weapons from police station.<sup>42</sup>

The Decision of the Municipality of Pakrac to join SAO Krajina was annulled by the Croatian Constitutional Court on February 28, 1991.<sup>43</sup> Leaders of the Pakrac Municipality Assembly ignored this and on March 1, 1991, they demanded from the Pakrac police to temporarily remove from service policemen “lacking the necessary professional training”. Moreover, they requested that “a necessary number of the reserve police force should be activated in order to help the active policemen execute their current tasks and protect law and order in the municipality of Pakrac”.<sup>44</sup>

Already on February 27, 1991, a group of armed reserve policemen, ethnic Serbs, gathered in Šeovica near Pakrac for review. That same day a greater number of armed Serb civilians started gathering in Pakrac. On March 1 active policemen from the Pakrac Police Station held a meeting at a request of Commander Jovo Vezmar. Policemen of Serbian nationality, together with members of the reserve police force of Serbian nationality, disarmed 16 police trainees of Croatian nationality, under the excuse that the latter behaved inappropriately in public and improperly handled their weapons. The insurgents took down the Croatian flag from the Pakrac Town Hall and hung the flag of the Republic of Serbia instead. When Vezmar was informed that Croatian police special units from Zagreb were arriving in the afternoon hours, he left the police station together with around 150 active and reserve policemen. A

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<sup>41</sup> HR-HMDCDR-69, Republic of Croatia, Pakrac Municipal Assembly (OSP), Class: 021-05/91-01/28, File No.: 2162-01-91-1, Pakrac, 22 February 1991; Republic of Croatia, OSP, Class: 021-05/91-01/29, File No.: 2162-01-91-1, Pakrac, 22 February 1991; Republic of Croatia, OSP, Class: 021-05/91-02/06, File No.: 2162-01-91-2, Pakrac, 22 February 1991.

<sup>42</sup> HR-HMDCDR-69, Republic of Croatia, Ministry of the Interior, Bjelovar Police Administration (PUB), Pakrac PS, Number: 511-02-70/10-SP-7/1-91, Pakrac, 22 February 1991; Republic of Croatia, Ministry of the Interior, PUB, Number: 511-02-02/I-Ku-78/91, 25 March 1991.

<sup>43</sup> HR-HMDCDR-69, Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia, Number: U/I-39/1991, Zagreb, 28 February 1991.

<sup>44</sup> HR-HMDCDR-69, Republic of Croatia, OSP, Class: 021-05/91-01/31, File No.: 2162-01-91-1, Pakrac, 1 March 1991.

smaller number of policemen remained in the station. At the same time, civilians of Serbian nationality were being armed around the police station.<sup>45</sup>

In the early-morning hours of March 2, special units of Croatian police arrived to Pakrac. Units of the special police of the Bjelovar Police Administration – the Omegas – arrived from Daruvar and encountered barricades at the entrance of Pakrac, which they removed. After they entered the town, special policemen from Bjelovar surrounded the Town Hall and the police station and took control of these buildings. Soon after the arrival of the special police from Bjelovar, Croatian special police units arriving from Zagreb removed the barricades in village of Kukunjevac and also entered Pakrac. Croatian forces easily dispersed the insurgent Serbs. After dawn the insurgents opened heavy infantry fire at the Croatian policemen from the surrounding hills and yard of the “Eparchy House”, and the Croatian forces responded likewise, pushing the insurgents towards the hills and setting up posts in Pakrac.<sup>46</sup>

At a request of the JNA leadership and with consent of Borisav Jović, President of the SFRY Presidency, Army units were sent to Pakrac without previous consent of other members of the State Presidency. Serbian political leaders planned to use the Pakrac conflict for overthrowing the legally elected Croatian government and, to that end, the JNA commands devised an attack plan on Pakrac, which was not executed due to concessions and yielding of the Croatian authorities.<sup>47</sup>

Along with the incidents in Pakrac, armed Serbs set up barricades on traffic routes in other parts of Western Slavonia. The most critical situation was recorded in Okučani, where around 3000 Serbs had gathered. They set up barricades on traffic routes in the townships of Dubovac, Smrtić and Lađevac. Armed civilians stopped and searched vehicles and passengers, as well as provoked passengers and the Croatian police patrol. Đorđe Damjanović, head of the Okučani SDS, threatened policemen at the Dubovac barricades that he would put up heavy resistance should they attempt to remove the barricades. Situation was also critical on the Okučani-Pakrac road near

<sup>45</sup> Ivica Miškulin, “Srpska pobuna u općini Pakrac 1990.-1991.; uzroci, nositelji i tijek” [“Rebellion of Serbs in Pakrac Municipality 1990-1991: Causes, Major Participants and Course”], *Scrinia Slavonica: godišnjak podružnice za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje Hrvatskog instituta za povijest* 11 (2011): 378-379; Ivan Brigović, Natko Martinić Jerčić, Ivan Radoš, “Prvi oružani napadi na hrvatske redarstvene snage 1991.” [“The First Armed Attacks on Croatian Police in 1991”], *Hrvatski vojnik* (Zagreb), no. 498 (appendix), April 22, 2016, pp. 6-7.

<sup>46</sup> Brigović et al., “Prvi oružani napadi na hrvatske redarstvene snage 1991.” [“The First Armed Attacks on Croatian Police in 1991”], p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Marijan, *Slom Titove armije – JNA i raspad Jugoslavije 1987-1992*. [The Defeat of Tito’s Army and the Break-up of Yugoslavia 1987-1992], pp. 241-243.

Bijela Stijena were Croatian policemen from Nova Gradiška and workers of the Company for Roads (*Poduzeće za ceste*) were sent to remove the barricades on March 1. They heard gunfire as they were driving towards the barricades and in Kosovac, on their way back to Nova Gradiška, rocks were thrown at the policemen, shattering one police car window. With regard to the town of Novska and its surroundings, barricades were set up on a road in Jamarica, on the road stretching from Brezovac to Subocka, as well as on roads leading towards Novi Grabovac and Mlaka. Shots were fired from barricades between the villages of Borovac and Lađevac, and police patrol was not allowed to pass. In the morning of March 1 barricades were set up on the road stretching from Pakrac to Požega. Armed Serb civilians and reserve policemen searched and inspected civilians at those barricades. North of Pakrac towards the village of Omanovac, in the early-morning hours of March 2, armed civilians ordered one person, whom they had stopped, to return back to Daruvar because they found out that he was a Croatian national. On his way back, he was shot in the back in Badljovina, while still in his vehicle.<sup>48</sup>

Tensions were somewhat eased on March 2, 1991, with the arrival of the Croatian and Federal government representatives to Pakrac. Croatian forces were in the meantime reinforced by additional police units from Zagreb. When representatives of the federal government left Pakrac in the afternoon, the insurgents again opened fire on the town, wounding three Croatian policemen. That same evening gunshots were exchanged for the very first time between JNA and Croatian policemen. The clash did not escalate, and the situation calmed down soon.<sup>49</sup> The next day representatives of the Croatian and Federal government agreed that special police units were to retreat from Pakrac, that all policemen working in the Pakrac Police Station were to return to their posts and that the reserve police force was to be demobilised. Croatian authorities were in charge of implementing this agreement in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of the Interior.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, it was also agreed that criminal proceedings are to be instigated only against five individuals, and the regional SDS had to recognise Croatian authority in order to participate in the negotiations. Subsequently, the situation appeared to have eased down, so the Yugoslav army units left Pakrac on March 18, 1991. JNA first applied the tactic which was soon named the creation of a “buffer zone” in Pakrac, and it

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<sup>48</sup> HR-HMDCDR-69, SRH/S1990-1992/Commission for Dissociation, Illegal and unconstitutional activities during recent events in Pakrac dated 12 March 1991; Nova Gradiška PS, Number 511-11-11-1/2-1814/91, 2 March 1991; Marijan, *Novska u Domovinskom ratu [Novska in the Homeland War]*, p. 155.

<sup>49</sup> Brigović et al., “Prvi oružani napadi na hrvatske redarstvene snage 1991.” [“The First Armed Attacks on Croatian Police in 1991”], pp. 9-10.

<sup>50</sup> HR-HMDCDR-69, SFRY Presidency, Number 69/1, Beograd, 3 March 1991.

was used in the following few months in Croatia. Such a tactic prevented the work of the security bodies of the Republic of Croatia if they tried to respond against the actions of the rebel Serbs, which maintained tension and an unstable situation.<sup>51</sup>

But conflicts soon erupted in other parts of Croatia. In late March Croatian police clashed with Srb rebels at Plitvice. One Croatian policeman and one rebel lost their lives. In early May Serb rebels ambushed and killed 12 Croatian policemen in Borovo near Vukovar, and at the same time one Croatian policeman was killed in Polača near Zadar. On April 1, 1991, leadership of SAO Krajine decided to unify their entity with the Republic of Serbia and mobilised their Territorial Defence.<sup>52</sup> At the same time JNA generals promised Serbian leaders Slobodan Milošević and Borisav Jović that army would not permit Croatian police to take Knin and crush Serb rebellion in Croatia.<sup>53</sup>

As an answer to this Croatian leadership tried to upgrade its defence and at that time strength of Croatian reserve police grew to around 39,000 men. The National Guard Corps (Zbor narodne garde, ZNG) was also formed in mid-April 1991 within the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>54</sup> The first four active ZNG brigades were formed by the end of the following month.<sup>55</sup>

On May 12, 1991 leadership of SAO Krajina organised the referendum for unification of their entity with Serbia and based on its results adopted another decision on unification of SAO Krajina with Republic of Serbia. A week later, on May 19, a referendum on sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Croatia was held, where majority of voters opted for an independent Croatia.<sup>56</sup>

The referendum for unification of SAO Krajina with the Republic of Serbia held on May 12, 1991 was also organized in municipalities of Pakrac and Nova Gradiška. Ethnic Serbs in the municipality of Podravska Slatina voted for unification in the second half of May, whereas the referendum in the municipali-

<sup>51</sup> Marijan, *Slom Titove armije – JNA i raspad Jugoslavije 1987-1992*. [*The Defeat of Tito's Army and the Break-up of Yugoslavia 1987-1992*], pp. 243-245.

<sup>52</sup> Mate Rupiĉ, ed., *Republika Hrvatska i Domovinski rat 1990.-1995.– Dokumenti, knjiga 2, Dokumenti institucija pobunjenih Srba u Republici Hrvatskoj (1990.-1991.)* [*The Republic of Croatia and the Croatian War of Independence 1990-1995, Documents, Vol. II, Documents of the Rebel Serbs in the Republic of Croatia (1990-1991)*], pp. 158-161.

<sup>53</sup> Borisav Jović, *Poslednji dani SFRJ* [*The Last Days of the SFRY*] (Kragujevac: Prizma, 1996), p. 317.

<sup>54</sup> Davor Marijan, "Sudionici i osnovne znaĉajke rata u Hrvatskoj 1990.-1991." [Participants and the Basic Features of the War in Croatia 1990-1995], *Ĉasopis za suvremenu povijest* 40 (2008), no. 1: 48.

<sup>55</sup> Nazor, *Greater Serbian Agression Against Croatia in the 1990s*, p. 61.

<sup>56</sup> Nazor, *Greater Serbian Agression Against Croatia in the 1990s*, pp. 55-60, 68.

ties of Daruvar, Grubišno Polje and Virovitica was held in June 1991.<sup>57</sup> During this period JNA started supplying Serbs in Western Slavonia with weapons. In early June 1991 JNA Colonel Nikola Marić distributed weapons stored in JNA barracks near Daruvar to Serb rebels, equipping them with between 4500 and 5000 infantry weapons, along with several dozen rocket launchers, five 120 mm mortars, as well as around 1,300,000 different types of ammunition and several thousand hand bombs. Lieutenant Colonel Sreten Stevanović also armed rebels Serbs in July 1991, sending them ten truckloads of weapons and ammunition from Požega barracks.<sup>58</sup>

On June 9, 1991, Serb rebels killed Croatian policeman Vlado Laučan who served in Pakrac police Station. He was killed while conducting the traffic control duties near Pakrac.<sup>59</sup> Croatian police reacted to this by conducting gun searches. SDS in Pakrac reacted to this with a statement comparing the activities of the Croatian police with the Ustasha regime during World War II.<sup>60</sup> The situation in Western Slavonia was deteriorating with armed Serb rebels appearing on the roads in the municipalities of Pakrac, Požega and Nova Gradiška, stopping passengers and searching their vehicles. Armed Serbs were also noticed in the municipality of Daruvar.<sup>61</sup>

On June 25, 1991, the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Croatia declared independence, which basically marked the beginning of the state of war in those republics. The first crisis hotspot in Croatia was in Banovina, where Serbs rebels attacked Croatian police station in Glina on June 26. The conflict in Slovenia started on June 27, as JNA forces were ordered to re-establish Yugoslav authority at the border crossings between Slovenia and other states. The conflict ended after ten days and ultimately JNA withdrew from Slovenia.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> HR-HAD-1745, Nova Gradiška PS, Number 511-11-11-1/2-3843/2-91 dated 12 May 1991; Podravska Slatina PS, Telegram No. 511-07-61-1385/91 dated 18 May 1991; HR-HMDCDR-7, Operational Log of the 9th JNA Corps, p. 116.; "Referendum o pripajanju SAO Krajini" ["Referendum for annexing to SAO Krajina"], *Politika* (Belgrade), June 17, 1991, p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> D[ragutin] Š[antoš], "Dostojanstvom protiv provokacija" ["With Dignity Against Provocations"], *Večernji list* (Zagreb), May 16, 1991, p. 7; Aleksandar S. Jovanović, *Poraz – koreni poraza [Defeat – the Roots of Defeat]* (Veternik: LDIJ, 2001), pp. 152-153, 176.

<sup>59</sup> HR-HDA-1745, Pakrac PS, Telegram No.: 511-02-71/30-KU-140/91 dated 9 June 1991.

<sup>60</sup> Miškulin, "Stranka ugroženog naroda – djelovanje Srpske demokratske stranke u zapadnoj Slavoniji 1990.-1991." ["The Party of the Endangered People – the Activity of the Serbian Democratic Party in Western Slavonia 1990-1991"], p. 26.

<sup>61</sup> HR-HDA-1745, Slavonska Požega PS, No. 511-11-21-1/19-SP-19/1-91 dated 18 June 1991; Daruvar PS, Number 511-02-21-71/4/91 dated 1 July 1991.

<sup>62</sup> Davor Marijan, "Hrvatsko ratište 1990.-1995." ["Croatian War Theatre 1990-1995"], in: Radelić, Zdenko et al., *Stvaranje hrvatske države i Domovinski rat [Creation of the Croatian*



On June 28, 1991, in Western Slavonia, Croatian police patrol clashed with rebel Serbs in the village of Kamenska, in the municipality of Slavonska Požega. Heavily armed rebel Serbs refused to stop their cars for traffic control, which ultimately led to a firefight. Croatian policeman killed one and wounded another rebel Serb.<sup>63</sup> Another incident occurred on July 1, 1991, in the same municipality, in the village of Jakšić. Croatian police received information that weapons were being unloaded from a truck and stored in the house of an ethnic Serbs, Jovo Kljaić. Croatian police arrived at the scene and Kljaić opened fire at them. Policemen returned fire and killed Kljaić.<sup>64</sup>

Rebels Serbs were also being armed in Virovitica area. In the evening of June 30, 1991, JNA officers Branko Štrbac, Major of the Counter-Intelligence Service, and Lieutenant Colonel Alija Agić were caught by Croatian police handing out weapons in a yard of a house in Virovitica. Croatian police arrested them, together with the house owner Borivoj Šakotić, a JNA Reserve Captain and five automatic rifles were seized. On July 1, an ethnic Serb was arrested in Brezovo Polje near Virovitica for holding automatic rifles, a bomb and ammunition. During the investigation he stated that JNA had been handing out weapons to Serbs during the previous three days. The Croatian authorities also received information that JNA is arming ethnic Serbs in other villages in the municipality of Virovitica, therefore it was believed that substantial quantities of weapons were at the disposal of Serbs in that territory.<sup>65</sup>

In the evening of July 15, 1991, another attack on Croatian policemen occurred in Lipik (municipality of Pakrac). Fire was opened on patrol car and policeman Branko Čorak was killed, while two other policemen were wounded.<sup>66</sup> On July 17, civilians were harassed by rebel Serbs near the village of Sirač in the municipality of Daruvar, on a road leading to Voćin. Employees of a local forestry service informed the police that eight kilometres from Sirač, in a forest called Purnica, they had encountered several armed Serb rebels, who had not let them do their job in the forest but sent them back to Sirač. At the same time, the rebels pulled over one truck loaded with logs, searched it, and then let it drive back to Sirač. According to eye witness accounts, those were

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*State and the Croatian War of Independence*], (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2006), p. 118.

<sup>63</sup> S. Didović, J. Sikirica, D. Mirković, "Pucano na policijsku patrolu" ["Shot on a Police Patrol"], *Požeški list* (Požega), July 4, 1991, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> HR-HDA-1745, MUP RH, Slavonska Požega PS, No. 511-11-21-1/1-KU-214/91 dated 2 July 1991.

<sup>65</sup> F. B., „Dijelili oružje Srbima“ ["Handing out guns to Serbs"], *Večernji list* (Zagreb), July 2, 1991.

<sup>66</sup> HR-HDA-1745, MUP RH, Pakrac PS, No. 511-02-70/23-KU-161/91 dated 16 July 1991.

younger individuals unfamiliar to forest workers, hence not from the Daruvar area.<sup>67</sup> That same day, on that same road five kilometres from Sirač, a road haulier from Mikleuš was pulled over by armed Serb rebels who told him: “Buddy, the forest is occupied as of today, there is no more passing through.”<sup>68</sup> On July 19 members of the Croatian special police from Bjelovar were sent to that spot in a civilian van and civilian clothing. An armed insurgent stopped them on the Sirač-Voćin road, on the bridge over the Purnica river, and ordered them to step out of the van. A conflict ensued and rebel Serbs killed Croatian policeman Željko Cindrić, while seven other policemen were wounded. One of them, Ivica Filković, died soon afterwards. Croatian police reinforcements arrived soon, and rebel Serbs withdrew into woods.<sup>69</sup>

Terrorist activities in Western Slavonia became the rule rather than the exception. In Daruvar, in the late-evening hours of July 20, 1991, policemen from the Daruvar Police Station Robert Žili, Miroslav Polak and Ivica Rončević were ambushed while patrolling and killed.<sup>70</sup> Croatian policemen were being killed in the municipalities of Nova Gradiška and Orahovica as well. On August 6, 1991, in Trnakovac near Okučani, Serb rebels ambushed police patrol of the Stara Gradiška Police Branch, killing policeman Slavko Došlić, badly wounding Vladimir Berić and leaving Robert Klaić unharmed.<sup>71</sup> A few days later, in the morning of August 11 on the road stretching from Humljani to Pušina, patrol of the Orahovica Police Station encountered “a well-hidden ambush of the insurgent Serbs”. Rebels killed policeman Stjepan Mlakar on the spot, Franjo Sterle was wounded badly and Josip Jurković suffered minor injuries.<sup>72</sup> That same day on the road leading to Velika Peratovica, Serb rebels captured three Croatian civilians and took them to the Velika Peratovica prison. They were exchanged after having suffered a three-day long harassment in the prison.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> HR-HDA-1745, MUP RH, Daruvar PS, No. 511-02-21-1731/7-91 dated 17 July 1991.

<sup>68</sup> HR-HDA-1745, MUP RH, Podravska Slatina PS, Telegram No. 511-07-61-1780/91 dated 19 July 1991.

<sup>69</sup> HR-HDA-1745, MUP RH, Daruvar PS, No. 511-02-21-SP-82 dated 19 July 1991; MUP RH, Bjelovar Police Administration, No.: 511-02-01/5519/91 dated 19 July 1991.

<sup>70</sup> HR-HDA-1745, MUP RH, Daruvar PS, No. 511-02-21-1731/10-91 dated 21 July 1991.

<sup>71</sup> Vlado Radošić, *Pakao srpskog logora Stara Gradiška 1991. godine* [The Hell of Serbian Camp Stara Gradiška 1991] (Nova Gradiška: Udruga specijalne policije iz Domovinskog rata „Zebre“ Nova Gradiška, 2012), p. 21.

<sup>72</sup> Miroslav Gazda, *Zločin za koji nitko nije odgovarao* [A Crime Nobody One Was Held Responsible for] (Virovitica: Admiral Tisak, Zajednica Udruga HVIDR-a Virovitičko – podravske županije, 2011), p. 32.

<sup>73</sup> *Ratni zločini srpskih vojnih i paravojnih postrojbi u zapadnoj Slavoniji i Banovini (1991.-1995.)* [War Crimes of Serbian Military and Paramilitary Units in Western Slavonia and Banovina] (Sisak: CPD, 1997), p. 13.

On August 12, 1991, rebel Serbs in Western Slavonia proclaimed the new Serbian Autonomous Region of Western Slavonia.<sup>74</sup> Following this proclamation, Western Slavonia would experience an open war as local rebels Serbs, supported by JNA and Serb paramilitary units from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, attempted to annex Western Slavonia to Greater Serbia.

## Conclusion

Insurgency of Serbs in Western Slavonia followed the pattern of Serb rebellion in other parts of Croatia. At first, the Serbian propaganda was spreading the theory of vulnerability of Serbs in Croatia and, when the majority of the Serbian people accepted this theory, they started organizing and arming themselves for insurgency against the Republic of Croatia. The only difference from area to area was the intensity with which the insurgency spread. The insurgency was orchestrated from one centre – Knin, in fact from Belgrade, which is why rebellion had similar pattern. Serbian political leadership in Belgrade and JNA realised that they would not be able to realise their goals with political means after democratic changes. Their aim was initially to achieve a unitary Yugoslav state under Serb domination, and after that to create an enlarged Serb state composed of territories of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Such goals were to be achieved by unilateral actions and forces, using the ethnic Serbs in Croatia to achieve them. In such circumstances Croatian side negotiated, but it also tried to strengthen its police and other forces, needed for defence of Croatian territory. Such policy proved appropriate and these forces, although inferior, were able to resist the initial attacks of rebel Serbs and JNA.

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<sup>74</sup> Mate Rupić, ed., *Republika Hrvatska i Domovinski rat 1990.-1995.- Dokumenti, knjiga 4, Dokumenti institucija pobunjenih Srba u Republici Hrvatskoj (siječanj-lipanj 1992.)* [*The Republic of Croatia and the Croatian War of Independence 1990-1995, Documents, Vol. IV, Documents of the Rebel Serbs in the Republic of Croatia (January-June 1992)*] (Zagreb-Slavonski Brod: HMDCDR, HIP-PPSSB, 2008), p. 259.

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