

UDK: 323.15(497.5=411.16)"199"

323.28(497.11)"1991"

Review Article

Received: August 17, 2023

Accepted: May 21, 2024

<https://doi.org/10.22586/rch.v20i1.33993>

## ATTEMPTS OF DEFAMATION OF CROATIA AS ANTISEMITIC IN THE 1990S: FALSE FLAG OPERATION LABRADOR

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On August 19, 1991, during the Greater-Serbian aggression on Croatia, two explosive devices were set and activated at the door of the Jewish Community Center and in the Jewish section of Cemetery Mirogoj in Zagreb. The terrorist act was a false-flag operation, later called Labrador, performed by the Yugoslav People's Army Security Administration, with aim of accusing Croatia of increased antisemitism and portraying Croatian authorities as "pro-fascist". Croatian leadership strongly condemned the attack. They also expressed their solidarity and support for the Jewish community in Croatia by organizing and attending a protest rally.

**Keywords:** False-flag operation; Labrador; Jews; Croatian authorities; Yugoslav People's Army Security Administration; Radenko Radojčić; Mustafa Čandić

### Introduction

Parallel to the Greater-Serbian aggression on Croatia in the summer of 1991, Yugoslav People's Army (Jugoslavenska narodna armija, JNA) Security Administration (Uprava bezbednosti, UB)<sup>1</sup> under the Federal Secretariat of Peoples Defense (Savezni sekretarijat za narodnu obranu, SSNO) performed various subversive actions to damage the image of Croatia and discredit its struggle for independence and international recognition.<sup>2</sup> One of them was

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<sup>1</sup> Security Administration was colloquially known as Counterintelligence service (Kontraobavještajna služba, KOS).

<sup>2</sup> Ozren Žunec and Darko Domišljanović, *Obavještajno-sigurnosne službe Republike Hrvatske* [Intelligence-security services of the Republic of Croatia] (Zagreb: Jesenski i Turk, 2000), 37.

false-flag operation, later called Labrador, a terrorist act on 19 August 1991, when explosive devices were set and activated in front of the gate of the Jewish community center and Jewish cemetery in Mirogoj in Zagreb. Serbian media used this to intensify the accusations of Croatian authorities of fascism, which had begun in the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> Although Croatian authorities condemned the terrorist act and expressed solidarity with the Jewish community in Croatia, some international Jewish organizations expressed their concern for the safety of Jews in Croatia with regard to Croatian authorities, perceiving them as pro-fascist. Only in 1994, an UB associate Radenko Radojčić confessed his participation in Labrador Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Croatia (Ministarstvo unutarnjih poslova Republike Hrvatske, MUP RH), whereas in 2002, during his testimony at the trial of Slobodan Milošević in Haag, another perpetrator, Mustafa Čandić, confirmed that the aim of the operation was to portray Croatian authorities as antisemitic.

Although significant event, that threatened to damage the image of the Republic of Croatia in the crucial times of its existence, the topic of Labrador has never been the main focus in historiographic research so far. Several authors only briefly mentioned it within a wider context of the Croatian War of Independence and/or subversive actions performed by the UB in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>4</sup> This article is the first attempt to present the operation more thoroughly within the context of special warfare against Croatia and Croatian-Jewish relations.

To present and analyze this topic, various sources were used – statements and testimonies by two perpetrators of the operation Radenko Radojčić and Mustafa Čandić, the Croatian press, as well as published and unpublished archival documents. A former UB associate, Radenko Radojčić, who was arrested by the Croatian police, gave a statement on his role in the operation to the

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<sup>3</sup> For anti-Croatian Serbian propaganda in the 1980s see: Radina Vučetić, “Vreme kada je narod govorio“. In *Dokumenti o prošlosti. Odjeci i reagovanja (Politika, 1988-1991)*. Okrugli sto Beograd, 14.-15. decembar 2001. godine, ed. Jelka Jovanović, Bojan Tončić (Beograd: Fond za humanitarno pravo, 2002), 14-19; Željka Križe, “Velikosrpska politička propaganda uoči raspada Jugoslavije na primjeru srbijanskog tiska od donošenja Memoranduma SANU do početka ratnih sukoba u Hrvatskoj (1986-1991)” (PhD thesis, University of Zagreb, Department of Croatian Studies, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Ljuban Karan, *Bio sam oficir KOS-a* (Beograd: Blic, 2006); Philip J. Cohen, *Serbia's Secret War: Propaganda and the Deceit of History* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996); Ante Nazor, *Velikosrpska agresija na Hrvatsku 1990-ih/Greater-Serbian aggression against Croatia in the 90s* (Zagreb: Hrvatski memorijalno-dokumentacijski centar Domovinskog rata, 2011), 323; Gordan Akrap, *Specijalni rat - Knjiga 3* (Zagreb: Večernji list, 2012), 14-16.

Croatian Ministry of Interior in March and April 1994.<sup>5</sup> One of the UB officers in the JNA Air Force and Air Defense (Ratno vazduhoplovstvo i protivvazdušna odbrana, RV and PVO), who participated in forming of the UB collaborative network in political, police and civil structures in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mustafa Čandić, testified about his role in Labrador at the trial of Slobodan Milošević before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in Hague on 31 October and 11 November 2002.<sup>6</sup> Both statement and testimony are available online. An UB member and a JNA officer Ljuban Karan wrote about the operation Labrador and its collaborative network in his book titled *Bio sam oficir KOS-a [I was a KOS officer]*. Daily and weekly Croatian press – *Večernji list*, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, *Nedjeljna Dalmacija*, *Globus*, *Novi list* and *Danas* extensively reported on the attack on the Jewish community of Zagreb. It also reported on the reactions from the Croatian authorities, political parties, some Croatian intellectuals and cultural institutions, as well as Jewish community of Zagreb. Franjo Tuđman's correspondence from the published collection of documents edited by Miroslav Tuđman, titled *Tuđmanov arhiv [Tuđman's Archive]*, and Croatian Parliament and Government's Archive from Zagreb contain documents related to the topic of the position of Jews in Croatia, reactions of some Jewish organizations abroad and responses from the Croatian authorities. In addition to that, a private archive of Julienne Bušić, an adviser in the Croatian Embassy in Washington D.C. (1992-1995) and in the Office of the President of the Republic of Croatia (1995-2000), also contains documents and newspaper articles on the matter.

The aim of this paper is to present the false flag operation Labrador in context of propaganda and special warfare against Croatia in the second half of the 1980s and early 1990s and to interpret the official statements and reactions of the Croatian authorities, political parties and the media, regarding Croatian-Jewish relations and in context of Croatian struggle for international recognition. This article will also examine the reactions of some Jewish international organizations and their attitude towards Croatian authorities in this matter.

<sup>5</sup> Radenko Radojčić, "Izjava," *National security and the future* 10, no. 3-4 (2009): 49-222.

<sup>6</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), 31 October 2002, accessed August 9, 2023, [https://www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan\\_milosevic/trans/en/021031IT.htm](https://www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan_milosevic/trans/en/021031IT.htm); International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), 11 November 2002, accessed August 9, 2023, [https://www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan\\_milosevic/trans/en/021111ED.htm](https://www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan_milosevic/trans/en/021111ED.htm)

## False Flag Operations

Webster dictionary defines a false flag operation as “a hostile or harmful action (such as an attack) that is designed to look like it was perpetrated by someone other than the person or group responsible for it”.<sup>7</sup> The term “false flag” most likely comes from naval combat, where ships would “fly a more innocuous flag prior to violent engagement”.<sup>8</sup> According to Jenkins, one of the four main strategic reasons for carrying out false flag operations is stigmatization. It “suggests a group of one ideological extreme committing a particularly heinous crime in such a way that one’s enemies receive the blame for it. The motive is to discredit those enemies”.<sup>9</sup> This type of action is more common in cases where groups have ideological motives.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps one of the most known examples of false flag operations with the aim of stigmatization is setting the Reichstag on fire by the Nazis and blaming the communists for it.<sup>11</sup>

False flag operations are common in contemporary warfare and in terrorism. The perpetrators can be states, organizations, secret services and individuals. One example was a group called The Call of Jesus Christ which in 1985 had plans for attacks on French, US, and Jewish targets in Spain and Venezuela. When the group was arrested by Spanish authorities, it was found Libyan involvement in the operation. However, further investigation showed that the operation had been sponsored by a French secret service called Directorate-General for External Security (Direction générale de la Sécurité extérieure, DGSE) with the aim of discrediting Libya due to the Franco-Libyan rivalry.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Merriam-Webster, “False flag,” accessed August 9, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/false%20flag>.

<sup>8</sup> Erin M. Kearns, Brendan Conlon, Joseph K. Young, “Lying About Terrorism,” *Studies in Conflict & terrorism* 37, no. 5 (2014): 426.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Jenkins, “Under two flags: Provocation and deception in European Terrorism,” *Terrorism* 11, no. 4: 280.

<sup>10</sup> Kearns, Conlon, and Young, “Lying About Terrorism,” 7.

<sup>11</sup> Jenkins, “Under two flags,” 281.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

## Stigmatization and Counter-Intelligence Activities Against Croatia in the 1980s and 1990s

### Serbian propaganda and stigmatization of Croatia in the second half of the 1980s

In attempts to centralize Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and if that fails to create ethnically pure Greater-Serbia that would comprise significant parts of the territory of one of the Yugoslav republics – Croatia – some Serbian academic circles and political leadership began a campaign to stigmatize the Croatian nation. In the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, SANU) from September 1986, Serbs were portrayed as an endangered group in Croatia, evoking memories of their fate in the Independent State of Croatia from World War II.<sup>13</sup> Serbian mainstream media, historians, publicists and politicians labeled Croats as Ustasha<sup>14</sup> and attempted to portray the entire Croatian nation as genocidal.<sup>15</sup> For example, a Serbian historian, a member of the SANU and one of the Memorandum's authors Vasilije Krestić used his research to impose a theory that generations of Croats fostered “genocidal ideas” against the Serbs in Croatia.<sup>16</sup> The public discourse in Serbia in the 1980s was filled with references to Ustasha crimes committed during World War II, trying to collectively stigmatize the entire Croatian nation as “genocidal”.<sup>17</sup> Labeling Croats as Ustasha, every public expression of Croatian patriotism or nationalism in the communist Yugoslavia (even during the Croatian national movement Croatian Spring in the late 1960s and early 1970s, led by the “liberal” Croatian communists) was perceived as fascism.<sup>18</sup> Serbian media and politicians accused even some Cro-

<sup>13</sup> *Memorandum Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti (nacrt) Jesen 1986*. [Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts Memorandum (draft) Fall 1986], accessed August 9, 2023, <https://www.helsinki.org.rs/serbian/doc/memorandum%20sanu.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Ustasha was the party of collaboration during the German and Italian occupation in the WWII, which committed atrocities against Serbs, Jews and Roma in the Independent State of Croatia.

<sup>15</sup> See: Križe, “Velikosrpska politička propaganda.”

<sup>16</sup> Vasilije Đ. Krestić, *Srpsko-hrvatski odnosi i jugoslovenska ideja u drugoj polovini XIX veka* [Serbian-Croatian relations and the Yugoslav idea in the second half of the 19th century] (Beograd: Nova knjiga, 1988), 342-345, 357-358, 365, 368.

<sup>17</sup> Ivo Banac, *Protiv straha. Članci, izjave i javni nastupi 1987. – 1992*. [Against fear. Articles, statements and public appearances 1987-1992] (Zagreb: Slon, Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 1992); Križe, “Velikosrpska politička propaganda,” 54, 208; Andrijana Perković Paloš, “Croatian leadership and Jews in the 1990s,” *ST OPEN* 1 (2020): 1-34.

<sup>18</sup> Križe, “Velikosrpska politička propaganda,” 162-163.

atian politicians with communist past of being Ustasha.<sup>19</sup> At the end of the 1980s, important role in such stigmatization had the Society of Serbian-Jewish Friendship, a Belgrade lobby that operated in Israel.<sup>20</sup> The aim was to portray Croats as antisemitic and deteriorate their relations with the Jews in Croatia and abroad. Having created such an image, the later counter-intelligence activities against Croatia and false flag operation Labrador during the Croatian War of Independence in the 1990s only attempted to solidify it. Such stigmatization of Croatia served to Serbian military and paramilitary troops led by the Serbian president Slobodan Milošević, together with the Serb-dominated JNA, and Serb insurgents from Croatia, to carry out aggression on Croatia in the summer of 1991.

### **Infiltration of Counter-intelligence service members into civil structures in Croatia in 1989**

Before the military aggression, a series of strong subversive and propaganda actions were carried out by the UB. Prior to that, their members had infiltrated all spheres of civil structures in Croatia (as well as in Bosnia and Herzegovina), creating a network of collaborators. According to Čandić, the infiltration started in 1989.<sup>21</sup> A network of about 300 members of the Counter-intelligence groups Counter-intelligence groups (Kontraobavještajna grupa, KOG) was created and attached to several army branches, with each member having their own collaborative network.<sup>22</sup> KOGs were divided into three detachments: I. in Skopje (today North Macedonia), II. in Zagreb (Croatia), III. in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), with the headquarters located in Belgrade under the command of Colonel Tomislav Ćuk<sup>23</sup>, who was subordinated directly to Colonel Slobodan Rakočević, the head of the security department in the command of JNA RV and PVO in Zemun, Serbia.<sup>24</sup> UB members, therefore, penetrated “the police force, state administration, security services, education, government agencies, civilian structures, and so on”,<sup>25</sup> which later enabled subversive actions and terrorist acts in Croatia.

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<sup>19</sup> Stipe Mesić, *Kako je srušena Jugoslavija* (Zagreb: Mislavpress, 1994), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Ivan Radoš, *Tuđman izbliza. Svjedočenja suradnika i protivnika* [Tuđman up close: testimonies of associates and opponents] (Zagreb: Profil International, 2005), 143.

<sup>21</sup> ICTY, 11 November 2002, 12750-12751.

<sup>22</sup> ICTY, 11 November 2002, 12751.

<sup>23</sup> ICTY, 31 October 2002, 12691, 12702; Karan, *Bio sam oficir KOS-a*, 71, 129..

<sup>24</sup> ICTY, 31 October 2002, 12780.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 12750.

## Subversive actions from 1989 to the first half of 1991

The aim of those actions was to overthrow the democratically elected Croatian authorities, prevent the breakup of Yugoslavia and, subsequently, the independence of Yugoslav republics.<sup>26</sup> Once UB determined that the emergence of democracy in Croatia was “the greatest danger for the survival of Yugoslavia”,<sup>27</sup> a subversive operation called Spring (*Proljeće*) was carried out by the Yugoslav People’s Army forces in 1989. The aim was to control the pre-election activities in Croatia.<sup>28</sup> Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ) was recognized as the most vocal advocate for Croatian sovereignty during the election race, and with its leader Franjo Tuđman had been perceived as “the main enemy of the socialist system”.<sup>29</sup>

UB also collaborated with some members of Serbian Democratic Party (Srpska demokratska stranka, SDS). This political party, formed by Serbs in Croatia in February 1990, advocated for federal system in Yugoslavia, with a possibility of “founding new autonomous units”, i.e. it “anticipated founding of autonomous Serbian territory in Croatia”.<sup>30</sup> This collaboration was particularly evident in the so called “Mlinar case”, a staged attack on a chairman of the local committee of SDS in town Benkovac Miroslav Mlinar in May 1990.<sup>31</sup> The incident was organized by the SDS leadership in collaboration with UB.<sup>32</sup> The leadership of SDS and Serbian media used this incident to portray the Croatian authorities and Croatian people as genocidal.<sup>33</sup> However, later police and forensic findings revealed that Mlinar’s injuries were self-inflicted.<sup>34</sup> The aim of this subversive action was to accuse the Croatian authorities of supporting the

<sup>26</sup> Akrap, *Specijalni rat*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Luka Knez, *Slučaj Mlinar: obavještajne službe i velikosrpska agresija* [The Mlinar case: intelligence services and greater-Serbian aggression] (Zagreb: Despot infinitus, 2021), 47.

<sup>28</sup> Knez, *Slučaj Mlinar*, 49.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>30</sup> Nikica Barić, *Srpska pobuna u Hrvatskoj 1990.-1995.* [Serbian rebellion in Croatia 1990-1995] (Zagreb: Golden marketing, Tehnička knjiga, 2005), 54-55.

<sup>31</sup> Knez, *Slučaj Mlinar*, 73-74.

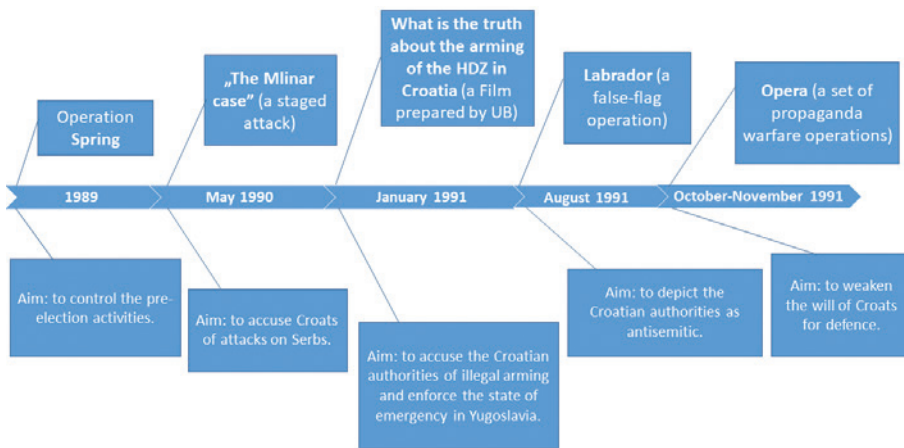
<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>33</sup> Barić, *Srpska pobuna u Hrvatskoj*, 63.

<sup>34</sup> Ante Nazor and Tomislav Pušek, *Domovinski rat: Pregled političke i diplomatske povijesti* [Homeland War: Review of Political and Diplomatic History] (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Globus: Hrvatski memorijalno-dokumentacijski centar Domovinskog rata, 2018), 46; Natko Martinić Jerčić and Ante Nazor, “Ubojstva hrvatskih policajaca 2. svibnja 1991. – najava velikosrpske agresije na Hrvatsku,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 51, no. 1 (2019): 128.

“Ustasha methods of intimidation” and discredit the idea of establishing free and independent Croatian state.<sup>35</sup>

One of the objectives was also to prevent Croatia from building their own military forces. Infiltrating into the Croatian civil structures, UB members created their network around the Croatian defense minister Martin Špegelj. With the help of the minister’s kin member, an UB associate and a JNA officer, they prepared a film titled “What is the truth about the arming of the HDZ in Croatia.” The film was broadcast in January 1991 on TV Belgrade, which was under strict control of Milošević’s regime. The aim was to accuse the Croatian authorities of illegal arming, therefore giving the opportunity to enforce the state of emergency in Yugoslavia.<sup>36</sup> The subversive activities were continued during the Serbian aggression on Croatia, as presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Major subversive actions from 1989 to the first half of 1991.

## Operation Labrador and Its Aftermath

Within the command of the JNA RV and PVO based in Zemun in Serbia, there was the II. KOG detachment located in Zagreb, filled with officers of pro-Yugoslav political orientation and “completely loyal to the idea of Tito’s Yugoslavia under the leadership of SKJ [League of Communists of Yugoslavia]”.<sup>37</sup> As mentioned earlier, their aim was to overthrow the Croatian

<sup>35</sup> Knez, *Slučaj Mlinar*, 75.

<sup>36</sup> Nazor, *Velikosrpska agresija na Hrvatsku*, 51; Akrap, *Specijalni rat*, 55.

<sup>37</sup> Akrap, *Specijalni rat*, 13.



authorities and to prevent the independence of Croatia.<sup>38</sup> Acting in line with the instructions of the Federal institutions, the II. KOG detachment formed a new intelligence and security network with the aim of “collecting, processing, manipulating and using different notifications and applying other forms of ‘the special warfare’ against the Croatian authorities, including using violent and terrorist forms of action”.<sup>39</sup>

Such an action was a false flag operation later called Labrador. In the early morning (4.50 AM) of 19 August 1991, two explosive devices were set and activated at the gate of the Jewish Community Center in Zagreb and at the Jewish section of Mirogoj, the central Zagreb cemetery (5.00 AM). The explosion caused substantial material damage, but there were no victims.<sup>40</sup>

The officer in charge of the operation Labrador was Colonel Rakočević. Operational control in Zagreb was under Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Sabolović and Major Čedo Knežević of the II. KOG detachment in Zagreb. They were “the people who had links with the collaborators in Zagreb and the persons in the field in the state security who actually launched these operations and sent in reports about everything that was happening in Zagreb and in the top leadership of the Republic of Croatia”.<sup>41</sup>

One of the field operatives was Radenko Radojčić, who from 1990 worked in the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia and collaborated with UB of RV and PVO.<sup>42</sup> For the operation Labrador, Radojčić was tasked with the transport of the explosive devices in Zagreb and in the surrounding areas<sup>43</sup>, which he described in his statement to the Croatian Ministry of Interior in 1994.<sup>44</sup> Former member of the Secretariat of Interior in Zagreb and a pirotechnician, Sredo Vučanović, personally planted the explosive devices before the gate of the Jewish Community Center and the Jewish section at the Mirogoj cemetery.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>39</sup> Akrap, *Specijalni rat*, 15; Gordan Akrap, “Informacijske strategije i operacije u oblikovanju javnog znanja,” (PhD thesis, Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Zagreb, 2011), 240.

<sup>40</sup> Ni. M., “Napad na Židovsku općinu” [Attack on the Jewish community], *Večernji list*, August 20, 1991, 4.

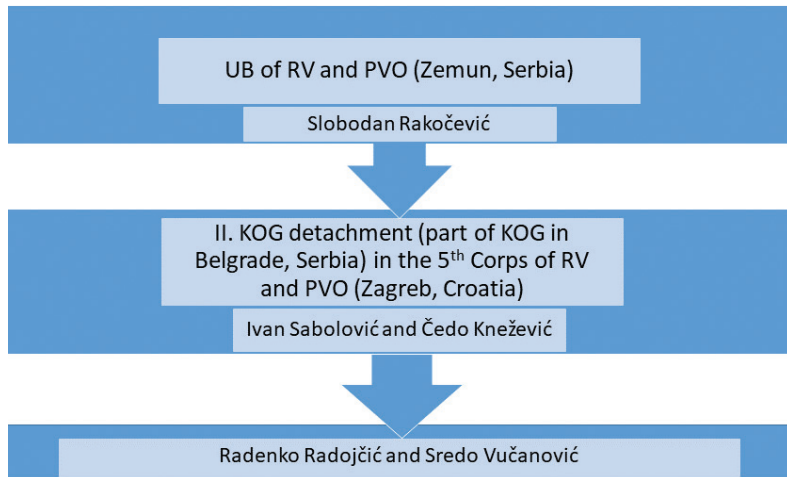
<sup>41</sup> ICTY, 31 October 2002, p. 12735.

<sup>42</sup> Radojčić, “Izjava,” 49.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Radojčić, “Izjava”.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 93; Akrap, *Specijalni rat*, 16; Akrap, “Informacijske strategije i operacije,” 240, f. 429.



**Figure 2.** Command structure for the Operation Labrador.<sup>46</sup> UB (Uprava bezbednosti) Security Administration, RV and PVO (Ratno vazduhoplovstvo i Protivvazдушna odbrana) Air Force and Air Defence, KOG (Kontraobavještajna grupa) Counterintelligence group.

The overall aim of the operation was to present Croatian authorities as “pro-fascist” and to create animosity amongst Jews towards the Croatian authorities, as testified by one of the perpetrators, Mustafa Čandić at the Milošević’s trial in 2002: “Your Honours, it is true that within Operation Labrador, or, rather, when this network of collaborators was active in Zagreb, at the Mirogoj cemetery in Zagreb, a terrorist attack was launched and Jewish graves were mined at the Mirogoj cemetery, the object being that the Croatian authorities should be represented and shown as being pro-fascist or, rather, to create animosity, that the Jews should have animosity towards the Croatian authorities in Zagreb. Another terrorist act was also being planned on the synagogue in Zagreb. However, that was never carried out because the members of the Labrador operation had to flee to Belgrade because they were in danger of being arrested.”<sup>47</sup>

In September 1991 the Croatian forces captured the 5th JNA RV and PVO corps headquarters in Zagreb.<sup>48</sup> Some members of the network were

<sup>46</sup> Akrap, *Specijalni rat*, 15-16; ICTY, 11 November, 12735

<sup>47</sup> ICTY, 31 October 2002, 12735.

<sup>48</sup> Karan, *Bio sam oficir KOS-a*, 129; Dražen Najman, Ivan Posilović, Marija Dujić, *Blokade i osvajanja vojarni i vojnih objekata JNA u Hrvatskoj 1991. – Grad Zagreb – (svjedočanstva i prilozi o Domovinskom ratu) Knjiga 2* (Zagreb: Udruga dragovoljaca Narodne zaštite Domovinskog rata, 2005), 133.

captured,<sup>49</sup> however, most of them escaped to Belgrade.<sup>50</sup> There they formed another group for the operation Opera (short for the “department for propaganda warfare” on the territory of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and also Serbia), which was “the natural continuation” of Labrador with headquarters in the aviation center “near the command of the air force and anti-air defence department”.<sup>51</sup> According to Čandić, one of the terrorist actions of Opera was mining of the railroad line near Vinkovci with aim of presenting it as Tuđman’s order.<sup>52</sup> Within this operation, RV and PVO also rocketed the seat of the Croatian President in October 1991<sup>53</sup> with aim of murdering Tuđman.

Serbia used the terrorist attack on the Jewish community in Zagreb to accuse Croatia of antisemitism. Immediately after the explosions, the official news agency and other Serbian media reported that “Croatian nationalists, ‘in keeping with their Ustasha past’” were responsible for the terrorist act.<sup>54</sup> A few months later, at the beginning of 1992, in her lecture at the George Washington University, a secretary of the aforementioned Society of Serbian-Jewish Friendship Klara Mandić, mentioned the terrorist act as an alleged evidence of antisemitism in Croatia.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Karan, *Bio sam oficir KOS-a*, 129.

<sup>50</sup> ICTY, 11 November 2002, 12734. While Čandić stated that they fled to Belgrade “with all the documents” (ICTY, 11 November 2002, 12734), another UB member Ljuban Karan stated that Croatian forces confiscated “the complete KOG detachment documentation”, which revealed “the names and all other data on Military Security Administration associates on the field” (Karan, *Bio sam oficir KOS-a*, 129).

<sup>51</sup> ICTY, 31 October 2002, 12734.

<sup>52</sup> ICTY, 31 October 2002, 12740-12741.

<sup>53</sup> Radojčić, “Izjava,” 95.

<sup>54</sup> Arhiv Julienne Bušić [Julienne Bušić Archive], Box 2 TE-Vukovar, Folder SERBIAN LEAFLETS\_ADDRESSES, PROPAGANDA ETC; Box 4 LU-PA, Folder Jewish Press: Batsheva Tsur, “Anatomy of a Balkan frame-up,” *The Jerusalem Post*, February 3, 1993.

<sup>55</sup> Cohen, *Serbia’s Secret War*, 127. Cohen also mentioned that no “legitimate Jewish organization” organized Mandić’s lecture. The organizers were Wise Communications from Washington – a public relations firm representing Jugopetrol, the Serbian-controlled oil company, a proxy for the Serbian Government. Also, Cohen emphasized that Mandić’s lecture on Capitol Hill was backed by a member of US House of Representatives Helen Delich Bently, “Serbia’s leading advocate in the U.S. Congress” (Ibid.).

## Reaction From the Croatian Authorities

On the day of the explosion, the Croatian prime minister Franjo Gregurić called an extraordinary Government session with only two agenda items – the explosions and the coup d'état in the Soviet Union. By the end of the session the Government reached three conclusions: First, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would inform the representatives of the Consular corps in Zagreb on the circumstances related to the explosion that same day and the position of the Croatian authorities on the matter. Second, the Government delegation, led by the prime minister Gregurić, would visit the Jewish Community of Zagreb. Third, the Government would release a statement condemning the terrorist act and expressing solidarity with the Jews in Croatia.<sup>56</sup>

In their statement, the Government expressed the readiness to help and provide full support “to the Jewish community and all Jews with us.” It also highlighted that every measure had been taken to find and punish the perpetrators. The Government also emphasized that “(...) this dirty war against the Republic of Croatia obviously has been fought by all means necessary. Those who spread bombs all over Croatia to jeopardize peace and democratic development, with this crime are trying to deteriorate good relations between Jews and Croatia and compromise the position of democratic Croatia before the world public. It is not a coincidence that this happened precisely after the solidarity statement of Jewish societies in Croatia with the just struggle of the Croatian people and all Croatian citizens for their sovereignty, freedom and equality.”<sup>57</sup>

Besides the decisions, the MUP RH released a public request offering citizens 25,000 German marks for useful information that could help them find the perpetrators.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Croatian authorities promised to finance the renovation of the Jewish Community Center.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> The situation in the Soviet Union was Croatia's number one foreign affairs issue at that moment, because there was a danger that it would distract the world public from the war in Croatia and Croatian struggle for the international recognition. The fact that the Croatian Government reacted so promptly and decisively to terrorist attacks on their Jewish community shows that the Croatian Government took them extremely seriously (Franjo Gregurić, *Vlada demokratskog jedinstva Hrvatske* [Democratic Unity Government of Croatia] (Zagreb: Naklada Zadro, 1998), 50, 52).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 51; “Plan blokiranja demokratskih procesa” [A plan to block democratic processes], *Večernji list*, August 20, 1991, 4; “Zločinački napad na Židovsku općinu” [A criminal attack on the Jewish community], *Novi list*, August 20, 1991, 15.

<sup>58</sup> “Za informaciju – 25,000 DEM” [25,000 DEM for information], *Večernji list*, August 20, 1991, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Cohen, *Serbia's Secret War*, 127. One of the prominent members of Jewish community in Croatia, a politician Slavko Goldstein confirmed several years later that the government did

Both Croatian Government and President Tuđman maintained that the aggressor forces were behind the terrorist act and that their aim was to deteriorate relations between Jews and Croatia.<sup>60</sup>

## Reactions From the Croatian Political Parties, Intellectuals and Media

The day after the explosion the Croatian press reported reactions from all Croatian parliamentary parties that condemned the terrorist act and expressed the solidarity with the Jewish community in Croatia. They also considered the Serbian aggressors to be the perpetrators of the terrorist act. For example, the left-wing Croatian People's Party (*Hrvatska narodna stranka*, HNS) released the following statement: "Croatian People's Party considers this heinous act a part of an organized aggression and strategy aimed to compromise and isolate the Croatian state in democratic global/world and domestic public. Such and similar provocations are useful only to those forces that are trying to "prove" the fascist nature of the Croatian people, which refers to circles that are true inspirators of diversion to the Jewish community."<sup>61</sup>

Other Croatian parties and institutions, such as Croatian Social - Liberal Party (*Hrvatska socijalno-liberalna stranka*, HSLS), Croatian Democratic - Christian Party (*Hrvatska kršćansko-demokratska stranka*, HKDS), Socialist Party of Croatia (*Socijalistička stranka Hrvatske*, SSH), Party of Democratic Changes (*Stranka demokratskih promjena*, SDP) [i.e. reformed communists] of Zagreb, right-wing Croatian Party of Rights (*Hrvatska stranka prava*, HSP), and renowned Croatian cultural institution of long tradition Matrix of Croatia (*Matica hrvatska*), also condemned the terrorist act.<sup>62</sup> The Croatian PEN Club stressed that "someone needed to prove that Croatia is 'genocidal' and 'fascist', someone needs for the

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indeed pay for the renovation of the damaged building (Slavko Goldstein, "Židovska općina Zagreb od 1941. do 1997. godine" [Jewish Community of Zagreb from 1941 to 1997], in *Dva stoljeća povijesti i kulture Židova u Zagrebu i Hrvatskoj* [Two centuries of Jewish history and culture in Zagreb and Croatia], ed. Ognjen Kraus (Zagreb: Židovska općina, 1998), 19-27, here 25.

<sup>60</sup> Pismo predsjednika RH dr. Franje Tuđmana članu Donjeg doma Britanskog parlamenta Grevilleu Janneru na temu Antisemitizma u Hrvatskoj, 19. kolovoza 1991. [The letter of the President of the Republic of Croatia Dr Franjo Tuđman to a member of the British Parliament House of Commons Greville Janner on the topic of antisemitism in Croatia, 19 August 1991] in *Tuđmanov arhiv. Korespondencija predsjednika Republike Hrvatske dr. Franje Tuđmana od 1990. do 1999. godine, Prva knjiga: Godina stvaranja i obrane: 1992.* [Tuđman's archive. Correspondence of the President of the Republic of Croatia dr Franjo Tuđman from 1990 to 1999, The first book: the year of creation and defense: 1991], ed. Miroslav Tuđman. (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada; Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2015), 266.

<sup>61</sup> R. I., "Progledan čin" [Exposed act], *Večernji list*, August 20, 1991, 4.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

citizens of the Republic of Croatia to hate each other and to introduce uncertainty and mistrust in the possibility of cooperation and coexistence”<sup>63</sup>

The next day, on invitation by parliamentary Croatian Democratic Party (*Hrvatska demokratska stranka*, HDS), at the time part of the multiparty Croatian Democratic Unity Government, ordinary citizens, public figures and members of government and opposition gathered on the central Ban Jelačić square in Zagreb expressing solidarity with and support for their fellow Jews.<sup>64</sup> Many walked from the Mirogoj cemetery to the Jewish Community Center at the corner of Palmotićeva and Amruševa Streets.<sup>65</sup> Some Jewish media abroad also reported on the solidarity of Croatian authorities, political parties, cultural institutions and public, with the Jewish community of Zagreb.<sup>66</sup>

Statements by the authorities and political parties that accused the aggressors of the terrorist act were also supported by some journalists. For example, a journalist from Croatian weekly *Nedjeljna Dalmacija* Davor Butković, otherwise critical of Tuđman and the Government, noted that Croatian politics and media gave a lot of attention “to two explosions without human losses” in a situation where “in Croatia people die every day, where not only soldiers are being killed, but more and more civilians.” He continued that “state administration and public understood the attack on Jews as an action with the aim of political overthrow of Croatia” and that “the terrorist acts in Zagreb were carried out precisely so that Croats could be accused as anti-Jewish and to provoke associations in the world opinion with the Nazi and Ustasha persecutions of Jews in the WWII and to accuse all Croats of antisemitism.”<sup>67</sup> Another journalist Branko Tuđen, from Croatian daily *Večernji list*, concluded similarly to Butković that the aim of the terrorist act was to depict Croats as “a genocidal and an antisemitic people” and Croatian authorities as pro-fascist.<sup>68</sup>

Such conclusions, however, were criticized by some scholars who stated that there was a valid reason why Croats needed to justify and distance themselves from Ustasha after the attack. Croatian-Jewish historian Ivo Goldstein reflected

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> “Solidarnost sa Židovima” [Solidarity with the Jews], *Večernji list*, August 22, 1991, 4.

<sup>65</sup> “Ni mrtvima mir” [Peace not even to the dead], *Večernji list*, August 22, 1991, 4.

<sup>66</sup> “Croatian leaders in solidarity with Zagreb’s Jews after bombing,” *JTA Daily News Bulletin*, August 23, 1991, 3, accessed on August 10, 2023, [http://pdfs.jta.org/1991/1991-08-23\\_162.pdf?\\_ga=2.19909048.126021265.1673961030-566413736.1673961030](http://pdfs.jta.org/1991/1991-08-23_162.pdf?_ga=2.19909048.126021265.1673961030-566413736.1673961030).

<sup>67</sup> Davor Butković, “Ista meta, veće odstojanje” [Same target, greater distance], *Nedjeljna Dalmacija*, August 25, 1991, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Branko Tuđen, “Podmetnuti Hrvatima” [To frame Croats], *Večernji list*, August 20, 1991, 4.

on some reactions from Croatian politicians and intellectuals (without naming them) who had said and repeated several times that “not all Croats are Ustasha” and “Croatian people have nothing to do with the Ustasha”, out of fear that there was a possibility that Croats would be labeled as extremists.<sup>69</sup> He wrote in the aforementioned *Nedjeljna Dalmacija* that “it would be easier for everyone today” if the Croatian authorities had distanced themselves from the Ustasha.<sup>70</sup> In his opinion, the attitude of the Croatian authorities towards the Ustasha was “indefinite and confused”<sup>71</sup>, because they had not condemned the “the emergence of Ustasha”.<sup>72</sup> From Goldstein’s sentences a conclusion can be drawn that Croatian authorities, although not perpetrators of this act, were partly responsible for their own stigmatization because they did not condemn the Ustasha. However, he did not support his claims with any evidence.

On the other hands, sources reveal that F. Tuđman not only distanced himself and condemned Ustasha and their crimes prior to and immediately after his coming to power in the early 1990s, but also found fascism as something completely unacceptable. Such statements can be found in his interviews to the Western European media in the 1970s and 1980s and also in his lectures to Croatian emigrants.<sup>73</sup> That F. Tuđman condemned the Ustasha crimes can be found in his writings as well.<sup>74</sup> Before and after he and his party came to power in Croatia, F. Tuđman also condemned any form of extremism in Croatia.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, it must be noted that some Ustasha-sympathizers did emerge in the turmoil of the war in the 1990s Croatia, however their numbers and impact were only marginal.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Ivo Goldstein, “Smušena vlast” [Confused authorities], *Nedjeljna Dalmacija*, August 25, 1991, 20.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Franjo Tuđman, *Usudbene povjestice* [History’s fates], (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 1995), 735-736; Mario Jareb, “Nezavisna Država Hrvatska i žrtve Drugoga svjetskog rata u povijesnim istraživanjima Franje Tuđmana” [Independent State of Croatia and victims of World War II in Franjo Tuđman’s historical research], in *Dr. Franjo Tuđman u okviru hrvatske historiografije. Zbornik radova sa znanstvenog skupa održanoga u Hrvatskom institutu za povijest u Zagrebu 10. i 11. prosinca 2009.* [Dr Franjo Tuđman in Croatian historiography. Proceedings from the scientific conference held in the Croatian Institute of History in Zagreb December 10 and 11 2009], ed. Vijoleta Herman Kaurić, (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2011), 279-312, here 318.

<sup>74</sup> Franjo Tuđman, *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti: Rasprava o povijesti i filozofiji zlosilja* [Horrors of War: Historical reality and philosophy], (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, 1989).

<sup>75</sup> Marinko Čulić, “Jamčim, revanšizma neće biti” [I guarantee, there will be no revanchism], *Danas*, May 1, 1990, 12-15; Radoš, *Tuđman izbliza*, 40-41.

<sup>76</sup> Perković Paloš, “Croatian leadership and Jews,” 15-16.

## Reaction From the Jewish Community of Zagreb

On the day of the explosion, the Jewish Community of Zagreb Council and the Cultural society “Miroslav Šalom Freiburger” Board of directors held a session, attended also by one of the Croatian government’s vice-presidents Mate Granić, minister Ivan Cesar, a parliamentary member and the HNS president Savka Dabčević-Kučar and a HSLs member Franjo Zenko.<sup>77</sup> In their statement, the Council expressed their indignation as well as concern for this and “all other aggressive and violent activities that are dangerously disrupting the future of Croatia and us as its citizens”.<sup>78</sup> The president of the Jewish Community of Zagreb Nenad Porges stated that the explosion was “a gunshot aimed at Croatia”.<sup>79</sup> Such statement seems to be in alignment with the statements of Croatian authorities, political opposition and the media.

In his further public statements, Porges refuted the Serbian accusations and spoke favorably of Croatian authorities with regard to their attitude towards Jews. On the day of the bombing of the seat of the Croatian President in Zagreb, October 7, 1991, Porges sent an open letter in the name of Jewish communities in Croatia to the World Jewish Congress, European Jewish Congress and other international Jewish organizations. In the letter titled “Appeal to our Jewish Brothers and Sisters,” he refuted all accusations by stating that Croatian leadership was not antisemitic, Jews were equal in Croatia in national, religious and all other aspects, that Croatian government publicly denounced all neofascist ideologies and “had decided to take all the necessary legal steps to prevent the spread of such threats”.<sup>80</sup> He also stated that Jews were endangered in Croatia by the Yugoslav People’s Army which had carried out an aggression against Croatia and destroyed numerous cultural, historical, and religious monuments, among them the Jewish ones. He singled out the bombing of the Jewish Community Center and cemetery in Zagreb and damage to the medieval synagogue in Dubrovnik, the second oldest in Europe. Regarding the terrorist act from August 1991, Porges as-

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<sup>77</sup> (H), “Žaljenje zbog zlodjela” [Grieving over the crime], *Večernji list*, August 20, 1991, 4.

<sup>78</sup> Vijeće Židovske općine Zagreb [Jewish Community of Zagreb Council], *Večernji list*, August 20, 1991, 4.

<sup>79</sup> “A gunshot aimed at Croatia,” 15.

<sup>80</sup> Julienne Bušić Archive, Box 3, Folder Croatian articles\_Jewish file; Box 4, LU-PA, Folder Jewish Press: Nenad Porges, “Appeal to our Jewish brothers and sisters,” October 7, 1991. The letter was published in: Dubravka Oraić Tolić, *Hrvatsko ratno pismo 1991/92.: apeli, iskazi, pjesme=Croatian war writing 1991/92: appeals, viewpoints, poems* [Bilingual edition] (Zagreb: Zavod za znanost o književnosti Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 1992), 394. It is also available online: accessed August 10, 2023, <http://www.porges.net/FamilyTreesBiographies/NenadPorges.html#a>



serted that the Jewish Community in Zagreb received support from the Croatian government after the attack.<sup>81</sup>

## Reactions From Abroad and Responses From the Croatian Authorities

### Seeking assurances from Tuđman

The terrorist act provoked strong reactions from some international institutions. On the day of the explosion, a member of the British House of Commons and the Convenor of the Inter-Parliamentary Council Against Antisemitism Greville Janner in the name of over 35 Parliaments who gathered to “combat antisemitism,” sent a letter to Croatian president Tuđman, expressing his and other members’ concern about the “anti-Jewish outrages in Zagreb,” seeking Tuđman’s assurances that he will protect the Jewish community.<sup>82</sup> Tuđman responded the same day. In his letter, he expressed his own concern about the explosion and stated that “although the investigation has not been concluded yet, the coordination of these actions [explosion before the Community building and at the cemetery] shows that this is not the individual act of some mentally ill person, but a deliberate provocation with aim of accusing authorities and people of the Republic of Croatia of antisemitism.” He further stated that “the aim of this provocation is deterioration of harmonious relationships between the Jewish community and authorities of the Republic of Croatia,” emphasizing that “the Government of the Republic of Croatia, all Croatian parties and I personally have protested against this criminal act.”<sup>83</sup> Tuđman continued that the City of Zagreb and the Republic of Croatia would do “everything to help Jewish Community in repairing the damage.”<sup>84</sup> He also informed them of his intent to rebuild the synagogue in Zagreb, destroyed in World War II.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Julienne Bušić Archive, Box 4, LU-PA, Folder Jewish Press: Porges, “Appeal”; Oraić Tolić, *Hrvatsko ratno pismo*, 394.

<sup>82</sup> Pismo člana Donjeg doma Britanskog parlamenta Grevillea Jannera predsjedniku RH dr. Franji Tuđmanu, 19. kolovoza 1991. [A letter of the member of the British Parliament House of Commons Greville Janner to the President of the Republic of Croatia Dr Franjo Tuđman, August 19, 1991], *Tuđman’s archive*, 265.

<sup>83</sup> Pismo predsjednika RH dr. Franje Tuđmana, *Tuđman’s archives*, 266.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. Tuđman planned to rebuild the synagogue in Zagreb already in 1990. This is evident from a letter which he had sent to the mayor of Zagreb Boris Buzančić in September 1990 (Julienne Bušić Archive, Box 2, Te-Vukovar, Folder Info pkt\_prepared by Julie, D.C. Embassy, Folder IV\_President Tuđman\_His Own Words: b Letter to Boris Buzancic, Mayor of Zagreb;

## Accusations of Croatia and response from Lea Bauman

Some maintained that Croatian authorities were responsible for the increase of antisemitism in Croatia which, in their opinion, led to the explosion. In the second half of October 1991, Croatian Government received a letter from Sigmund Sternberg, the chairman of the Executive Board of the International Council of Christians and Jews. Sternberg mentioned the explosion at the gate of the Jewish Community Center and at the Jewish section of the Zagreb central cemetery in support of his claims of an increase of antisemitism in Yugoslavia, particularly in Croatia.<sup>86</sup> The main source of their information seemed to be an article by Phil Davidson of the London *Independent*, which Sternberg enclosed with the letter. Davidson wrote from a Serbian town Kragujevac about a “crisis meeting” held by Jewish leaders in Belgrade where they unanimously expressed concern because of the “parallels between the Nazi and pro-Nazi massacres of 50 years ago and the unease of Jews in Croatia under the strongly nationalist regime in the breakaway republic today”.<sup>87</sup> Davidson was obviously influenced by Klara Mandić. He took Mandić at her word that “those in power in Croatia now are largely the same as during the Nazi era” and “in some cases, they are the same people, now in their seventies and back from exile under the Communists. In other cases, they are children of the Ustashe.” The articles stated that Tuđman would not dare touch the Jews now when they have their own state and that Tuđman “has prepared an atmosphere similar to that at the start of the Second World War and the fact is that many of the Croatian groups are out of his control”.<sup>88</sup> However, he did not provide any evidence to support his claims.

Three days after the arrival of Sternberg’s letter, a member of the Zagreb Jewish Community and an official in Croatian Ministry of Information, Lea Bauman, refuted Davidson’s claims stating that: “As a Jew, I am afraid of Ser-

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Box 3, Folder Croatian articles\_Jewish file: A letter from F. Tuđman to Mayor of Zagreb B. Buzančić on rebuilding of the synagogue 1990).

<sup>86</sup> Hrvatska, Vlada Republike Hrvatske Zagreb, Ured za opće poslove Hrvatskog sabora i Vlade Republike Hrvatske, Vlada Republike Hrvatske/Kabineti (later: HR, VRHZ, UZOP, VRH/Kabineti) [Croatia, Government of the Republic of Croatia Zagreb, General Administration Office of the Croatian Parliament and Croatian Government, Government of the Republic of Croatia/Cabinets], Folder 262, Vlada Republike Hrvatske [Government of the Republic of Croatia]; 010-04/91-01/04, 10731, International Council of Christians and Jews From the Office of the Chairman of the executive Committee: sir Sigmund Sternberg KCSG SP [to] HE Mr Svetozar Rikanović, Ambassador, Yugoslav Embassy, 23 October 1991.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., Phil Davidson, “War raises old anxieties for Croatian Jews,” *Independent*, October 21, 1991.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

bian aggression against Croatia, not of Croats in Croatia,” and continued that “it does not matter if one is Croatian, Hungarian, Czech or Jewish, as long as he is treading on Croatian soil where the Serbian army wishes to plant the garden of Greater Serbia”.<sup>89</sup> She also implied that Davidson was unfamiliar with the circumstances of Jews in Croatia exposed to Serbian aggression, as he had written his article in Serbia.<sup>90</sup> I do not have any data on my disposal on whether Bauman received a response from Davidson.

## Conclusion

According to Jenkins’ categorization of main strategic reasons for false-flag operations, the terrorist act Labrador is an example of a false-flag operation with aim of stigmatization of the Croatian authorities, Croatian state, and Croatian people in general, and discrediting the idea of any kind of free and independent Croatia, as stated by one of the perpetrators. That this aim was achieved to a degree, i.e., the image of Croatia was tarnished, is evident from the reactions of some international institutions described above. Prompt reactions of the Croatian authorities, political parties, non-governmental institutions, the media and the public who attended the protest rally, showed their solidarity and support of the Croatian authorities and public to their Jewish community. However, some intellectuals at the time maintained that the Croatian authorities contributed to their own stigmatization because they did not distance themselves from the Ustasha, but no concrete argumentation was presented to support such claims. On the other hand, a variety of sources reveal that President Tudman and Croatian Government often spoke critically of the Ustasha and condemned every extremist occurrence in Croatia.

The main limitation of this research is that there are possibly other unpublished archived documents that could enable a deeper insight and therefore a more thorough and detailed analysis of the false-flag operation Labrador. Also, an insight to Jewish media would reveal the impact of the terrorist act on the Jewish world and the extent that this event damaged the image of the newly established Republic of Croatia.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid; Lea Bauman, “Jews fear Serbian army, not Croats,” *Independent*, October 24, 1991. Lea Bauman’s letter was published also in: Oraić Tolić, *Hrvatsko ratno pismo*, 394.

<sup>90</sup> HR, VRHZ, UZOP, VRH/Kabineti, Folder 262: Bauman, “Jews fear Serbian army”.

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