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FRANJO TUĐMAN AND THE CROATIAN COMMUNITY/CROATIAN REPUBLIC OF HERZEG-BOSNIA

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This paper examines the role of Franjo Tuđman, President of the Republic of Croatia, in the establishment of Croatian communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The thesis posited is that, through his political views, Tuđman had a decisive influence on the founding of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia and its policies. The establishment of this community took place within the broader framework of Tuđman’s thoughts on how to resolve the Yugoslav crisis or the relationship between Croatia and Serbia.

Keywords: Franjo Tuđman; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia; Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia

Croatia’s policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s was shaped significantly by the views of Franjo Tuđman, who, as the leader of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), won Croatia’s first multi-party elections and became Croatia’s president. As early as November 1989, HDZ issued a proclamation to the citizens and parliament of the Socialist Republic of Croatia – that is, to the entire Croatian nation – condemning Serbia’s aggressive policy. In contrast to the publicly proposed plans for the creation of “Greater Serbia” either within the framework of Yugoslavia or outside it, HDZ asserted the demand for the territorial integrity of the Croatian people within their “historical and natural borders.”¹

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¹ Darko Hudelist. *Tuđman: biografija* (Zagreb: Profil International, 2004), 656-657.

The question arises: what did Tuđman consider to be the “historical and natural” borders of Croatia? As will be revealed, he considered the borders of the Banovina of Croatia, which was established in 1939, to be the “historical and natural” borders of Croatia. In August of that year, following an agreement between Dragiša Cvetković, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and Vladko Maček, leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, the Banovina of Croatia was formed as an autonomous Croatian entity within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. This entity included parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Croats constituted either an absolute or relative majority of the population. It is important to note that the establishment of the Banovina of Croatia was a temporary measure, only the first step in the reorganisation of Yugoslavia. The Banovina of Croatia existed as a provisional entity for around 20 months, until the Kingdom of Yugoslavia collapsed in April 1941.²

As early as the 1960s, Tuđman, who was the director of the Institute for the History of the Workers’ Movement in Zagreb at that time, viewed the Cvetković-Maček Agreement as a significant positive step towards resolving the national question for the Croatian people, in contrast to the then official views, which labelled the agreement a reactionary pact between the Croatian and Serbian bourgeoisie.³ Tuđman would recall this agreement at the beginning of 1990 during the campaign for multi-party elections in Croatia. In an interview he gave in March 1990, he stated that negotiations should begin on a new arrangement of relations within Yugoslavia, and if that failed, the peoples of Yugoslavia would move towards Europe independently. Referring to the 1939 Cvetković-Maček Agreement, Tuđman pointed out that even in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, a Croatian-Serbian agreement had eventually been reached, and expressed hope that such a compromise could again be reached in the future.⁴

At the end of April 1990, after the first round of multi-party elections in Croatia, in an interview Tuđman made the following comment on the possibility of changing borders within Yugoslavia: “We are not historically blind to see that the borders between Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia are the revived borders of imperial conquests by an Asian power in Europe, dating from the time when all colonial borders in Asia and Africa that had been drawn by European imperial powers were erased.”⁵

² For basic information about the Banovina of Croatia, see: Ljubo Boban, *Hrvatske granice od 1918. do 1991. godine* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1992), 39-43.

³ Hudelist, *Tuđman*, 303-371.

⁴ Dražen Gudić, “NDH je bila zločin,” *Nedjeljna Dalmacija*, March 11, 1990, 8-9.

⁵ Mladen Pleše, Zoran Daskalović, “Zašto pobjeđujemo i što namjerava HDZ?,” *Vjesnik*, April 29 and 30, May 1 and 2, 1990, 7.

When asked whether he believed the borders of the Yugoslav republics could be changed without conflict, Tuđman responded by describing Croatian-Serbian relations during the 20th century, and then reminded of the establishment of the Banovina of Croatia in 1939, giving it as an example of Serbia's realisation of the need for an agreement with the Croats.⁶

At the end of 1990 and the beginning of 1991, the Serbs in Croatia were working on establishing their own autonomous regions, while refusing to recognise Croatian authority. They had the support of Serbia and the Yugoslav People's Army. In these unfavourable circumstances for Croatia, on 25 March 1991, Tuđman met with the President of Serbia, Slobodan Milošević, in Karadžorđevo.⁷

The official communiqué following this meeting stated that Tuđman and Milošević discussed the Yugoslav crisis. The talks revealed well-known differences on key issues between Croatia and Serbia, or rather between the Croatian and Serbian peoples, but it was acknowledged that the relationship between these republics and peoples was of crucial importance for resolving the Yugoslav crisis. The statement indicated that Tuđman and Milošević held discussions aimed at: "(...) eliminating options that threaten the interests of either the Croatian or the Serbian people as a whole, and seeking permanent solutions while respecting the historical interests of both nations."⁸

Shortly after, on 10 April 1991, a meeting was held in Tikveš near Osijek, bringing together a group of Croatian and Serbian experts, decided on by Milošević and Tuđman. The Serbian delegation included Prof. Smilja Avramov, Vladan Kutlešić, PhD, Prof. Ratko Marković, and academician Kosta Mihajlović. The Croatian delegation consisted of academician Dušan Bilandžić, Prof. Zvonimir Lerotić, Prof. Smiljko Sokol, and advisor to the Croatian president, Josip Šentija.⁹

According to academician Bilandžić's later recollections, at the Tikveš meeting, Croatia's representatives stated that the key to resolving the Yugoslav crisis lay in the relations between Croatia and Serbia. Both delegations agreed that the existing Yugoslavia did not suit either Belgrade or Zagreb, and that mutual cooperation was necessary for the creation of both a Croatian and Serbian state.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Kronologija 1985 - 1995.," *Rat u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini 1991-1995.*, eds. Branka Magaš and Ivo Žanić (Zagreb, Sarajevo: Naklada Jesenski i Turk, Dani, 1999), 378.

⁸ (Hina), "Tuđman i Milošević sastali se na granici," *Vjesnik*, March 26, 1991, 1.

⁹ (Hina), "Prvi sastanak grupe eksperata Hrvatske i Srbije," *Vjesnik*, April 11, 1991, 1.

¹⁰ Dušan Bilandžić, *Povijest izbliza, Memoarski zapisi 1945-2005.* (Zagreb: Prometej, 2006), 372-374.

The second meeting of the Croatian and Serbian delegation of experts took place on 13 April 1991 in Belgrade.¹¹ According to Bilandžić's recollections, the Serbian delegation opened the meeting with the assertion that the borders of the future Croatian and Serbian states needed to be determined, with the common interest of Belgrade and Zagreb necessitating the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina to ensure that as many Croats and Serbs as possible would remain within their respective national states. However, the negotiations hit a deadlock as it became apparent that Serbia had territorial claims on parts of Croatian territory. It was concluded that Milošević and Tuđman should resolve these contentious issues. After the meeting, the Croatian negotiators informed Tuđman that Serbia's territorial ambitions in Croatia made an agreement impossible, but Tuđman decided that the negotiations should continue as he and Milošević had reached a "general agreement."¹²

Soon after, on 15 April, a new meeting between Tuđman and Milošević took place in Tikveš. The official communiqué issued by the Croatian side after this meeting stated that the two presidents discussed the current crisis and relations between Croatia and Serbia, that views were exchanged on the work of the joint expert group established by the two presidents, and that it was concluded that the talks should continue.¹³

Accordingly, on 20 April 1991, the third meeting of the Croatian and Serbian expert group took place in Zagreb.¹⁴ According to Bilandžić's recollections, during this meeting Serbia's experts underscored once again that the existence of Bosnia and Herzegovina was contrary to the interests of both Croats and Serbs, and that it had to be divided between Croatia and Serbia. Following this third meeting with Serbia's experts, Dušan Bilandžić and Josip Šentija resigned their positions in Croatia's team of negotiators.¹⁵

Some authors question Bilandžić's recollections or point to the different interpretations that he later gave about his participation in these negotiations between Croatia and Serbia's experts.¹⁶ Nevertheless, certain sources suggest that Bilandžić portrayed the negotiations accurately, in that both sides agreed that a Croatian and Serbian state should be established, and that discussions were held on the future borders of these states. However, disagreements arose

¹¹ (Hina), "Počeli pregovori stručnjaka Hrvatske i Srbije," *Vjesnik*, April 14, 1991, 1.

¹² Bilandžić, *Povijest izbliza*, 374-376.

¹³ (Hina), "Razgovori se nastavljaju," *Vjesnik*, April 16, 1991, 1.

¹⁴ (Hina), "Treći sastanak eksperata," *Vjesnik*, April 21, 1991, 3.

¹⁵ Bilandžić, *Povijest izbliza*, 376-377.

¹⁶ Ivo Lučić, "Karađorđevo: politički mit ili dogovor?," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 35, no. 1 (2003): 31-32; Ivica (Ivo) Lučić, *Uzroci rata, Bosna i Hercegovina od 1980. do 1992. godine* (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus d.o.o., Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2013), 427-433.

due to Serbia's claims on Croatian territory. Zvonimir Lerotić, who participated in the negotiations, described the April 1991 disagreements between Croatia and Serbia's experts during talks between Croatia's officials and Nikola Koljević, a representative of the Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, held in Zagreb in January 1992, in the following way: "The basic idea of the talks that we started in April [1991] was for the Croatian side to support the establishment of a Serbian state, and for the Serbian side to support the establishment of a Croatian state. This was the starting position, and in that regard, we tried to examine all the possible obstacles to this. The following were the main issues. One of the most pressing issues that was not resolved, and I'll say it openly, was that the problem between Mr. Milošević and [the leader of the Serbs in Knin] Mr. [Milan] Babić had not been dealt with at the beginning. That problem was not resolved at that time. That there should be a minimum of Croatia and a minimum of Serbia in that respect (...) was not taken into account at that time. We could not agree on that at all (...)"¹⁷

What Lerotić described as the "problem" between Milošević and the leader of the Serbs in Knin, Milan Babić, was, in fact, Belgrade's policy – to use the Yugoslav People's Army to seize parts of Croatian territory and establish a new Serbian state there. This was carried out in the second half of 1991, when the Republic of Serbian Krajina was proclaimed on parts of Croatian territory under the control of the Yugoslav People's Army and Serbian forces.

Meanwhile, during a meeting of senior Croatian officials held on 8 June 1991, Tuđman stated that all the problems of the Yugoslav crisis culminated in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He concluded that the borders of Croatia as they existed within communist Yugoslavia were absurd. Within those borders, no future independent Croatian state could achieve effective administrative and transport connections, or ensure its own defence. Therefore, it was in Croatia's interest to resolve this issue "at its core," and Bosnia and Herzegovina, within the borders established after 1945, represented a "historical absurdity" and the continuation of a "colonial creation" from the Ottoman period.¹⁸

At the same meeting, Tuđman stated that it seemed that Alija Izetbegović, president of the Party of Democratic Action and the leader of the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was also aware of his "helplessness" with regard to Serbia's disintegration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that Izetbegović also

¹⁷ Minutes of the meeting of the President of the Republic of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, and his associates with members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Prof. Nikola Koljević and Mr. Franjo Boras, held on 8 January 1992 in Zagreb. *Stenogrami o podjeli Bosne*, ed. Predrag Lucić, vol. 1, (Split; Sarajevo: Kultura&Rasvjeta d.o.o.; Civitas d.o.o., 2005), 129-154.

¹⁸ Minutes of the 7th session of the Supreme State Council of the Republic of Croatia, held on June 8, 1991. *Stenogrami o podjeli Bosne*, vol. 1, 9-74.

knew about the “dissatisfaction of the Croats” with such a state of affairs in Herzegovina. As a result, Izetbegović was “under pressure” and agreed to hold talks with both Tuđman and Milošević. Tuđman concluded that the solution lay in the “demarcation” of Bosnia and Herzegovina: “I think we will achieve this because it suits both Serbia and Croatia equally, and the Muslim component has no other choice but to accept this solution, although finding a solution will not be easy, but essentially, that is it.”¹⁹

During that period, Tuđman planned for Croatia to declare independence, but hoped that, in negotiations with Milošević and Izetbegović, the partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina could be agreed upon. Tuđman believed this would achieve two goals. By expanding its borders, Croatia would find itself in a more favourable geostrategic position, while satisfying Serbia’s territorial ambitions in Bosnia and Herzegovina would eliminate similar Serbian claims on Croatian territory. At the same time, a political agreement with the Serbs in Knin would need to be reached. If all of this were achieved, Tuđman thought, Croatia could even agree to a reorganisation of Yugoslavia into a union of sovereign states.²⁰

Accordingly, on 12 June 1991, a meeting took place in Split between Izetbegović, Milošević, and Tuđman. Borisav Jović, Milošević’s close associate and Serbia’s member of the Presidency of Yugoslavia, recorded in his diary the day before that “many expect” the partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the creation of a “Muslim mini-state” to be discussed at the meeting. Therefore, on 11 June, a meeting was held in Belgrade with Milošević, attended by, amongst others, Radovan Karadžić, the leader of the Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The purpose of the meeting was to agree on the “tactics” that Milošević should use in talks with Izetbegović and Tuđman. It was decided that Milošević should advocate for Bosnia and Herzegovina to remain in Yugoslavia. Consequently, the Serbian side would not seek its partition or the establishment of an expanded Serbian state.²¹

Despite Tuđman’s hopes, the meeting between Izetbegović, Milošević, and Tuđman in Split could not lead to any agreement.²² Much later, in mid-September 1992, in a closed meeting, Tuđman reflected on the talks that he had in the latter half of 1991 with Milošević, and then with both Milošević and

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Borisav Jović. *Poslednji dani SFRJ: izvodi iz dnevnika*, (Belgrade: self-publication, 1996), 338-339.

²² Alija Izetbegović. *Sjećanja, Autobiografski zapisi* (Sarajevo: TKD Šahinpašić, 2001), 93, 419. See also: Davor Marijan, *Rat Hrvata i Muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini od 1992. do 1994.*, (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2018), 44-45.

Izetbegović in Split. Tuđman stressed that Croatia supported the preservation of Bosnia and Herzegovina if it were organised into “three constituent units” to protect the national interests of the Croats. If this were unachievable, Bosnia and Herzegovina should be partitioned, with its territory divided between Croatia and Serbia, while “a small Muslim state could remain in the middle.”²³

On 13 June 1991, the day after the meeting with Izetbegović and Milošević in Split, Tuđman held a meeting with a delegation of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Another such meeting took place on 20 June.²⁴

I am unaware of what was discussed at these meetings. There is no doubt that, to explain Tuđman’s attitude towards Bosnia and Herzegovina, it would be extremely important if the transcripts or minutes of those meetings were available. However, later events suggest that Tuđman may have given the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina guidance on taking steps to ensure that parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, those that were predominantly or significantly inhabited by Croats, would eventually be incorporated into the Croatian state as the Yugoslav crisis unfolded. Organised into the Herzegovina and Travnik Regional Communities, representatives of the HDZ of Bosnia and Herzegovina decided on 12 November 1991 that the Croatian people of Bosnia and Herzegovina should pursue a decisive policy to achieve “our age-old dream – a unified Croatian state,” in which – I find it important to highlight – they referenced the conclusions arrived at during their discussions with Tuđman on 13 and 20 June of the same year.²⁵ At the end of December 1991, during a new meeting between representatives of the HDZ of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Tuđman, Dario Kordić, president of the Travnik Regional Community, said to the Croatian president: “We have been working tirelessly for six months on your idea of 13 and 20 June [1991] that you presented to us here.”²⁶

²³ Minutes of the meeting of Croatia’s state and political leadership with representatives of the Croatian Democratic Union and Croatian representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina, held in Zagreb on 17 September 1992. *Stenogrami o podjeli Bosne*, vol. 1, 209-254.

²⁴ Minutes of the meeting of the President of the Republic of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, with a delegation of the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the presence of officials of the Republic of Croatia, held in Zagreb on 27 December 1991. *Stenogrami o podjeli Bosne*, vol. 1, 75-128.

²⁵ ICTY Court Records, IT-98-34: Naletilić, Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, Hercegovačka regionalna zajednica, Travnička regionalna zajednica, Zaključci zajedničkog sastanka Hercegovačke regionalne zajednice i Travničke regionalne zajednice [Croatian Democratic Union, Herzegovina Regional Community, Travnik Regional Community, Conclusions of the meeting of the Herzegovina Regional Community and the Travnik Regional Community].

²⁶ Minutes of the meeting of the President of the Republic of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, with a delegation of the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the presence of

On 18 November 1991, the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia was established in Grude as a political, cultural, economic, and regional entity comprising 30 Bosnian-Herzegovinian municipalities, headquartered in Mostar. The decision on its establishment stated that Herzeg-Bosnia would respect the democratically elected authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina as long as the republic's independence from Yugoslav authorities remained intact.²⁷ At a session of the Presidency of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia held on 23 December 1991 in Tomislavgrad, it was decided, amongst other things, that Tuđman was fully authorised to represent the community's interests with international actors and in "inter-party and inter-republic" negotiations on the "final borders" of the Republic of Croatia.²⁸

As can be seen, the formulation on the establishment of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia was far more moderate than the conclusions made by the representatives of the Herzegovina and Travnik Regional Communities. At the founding of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia, there was no mention of unification with Croatia, and conditional loyalty to the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina was expressed. However, as can be seen, by late December 1991, the representatives of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia authorised Tuđman to negotiate on their behalf with regard to the determination of Croatia's "final" borders, clearly implying the assumption that certain parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina would be annexed to Croatia.

Meanwhile, the war was raging in Croatia during the second half of 1991. Towards the end of the year, Croatia secured international recognition within the borders it held as a republic within Yugoslavia. Zagreb had lost control of significant portions of its territory, held by Serbian forces and the Yugoslav People's Army. A ceasefire was established at the beginning of 1992, and United Nations Peacekeeping Forces were deployed to territories under Serbian control.

In such circumstances, Tuđman's attention shifted back to Bosnia and Herzegovina. On 27 December 1991, he held a meeting in Zagreb with the leadership of the HDZ of Bosnia and Herzegovina, at which he let them know

officials of the Republic of Croatia, held in Zagreb on 27 December 1991. *Stenogrami o podjeli Bosne*, vol. 1, 75-128.

²⁷ Miroslav Tuđman, *Istina o Bosni i Hercegovini, Dokumenti 1991.-1995.* (Zagreb: Slovo M, 2005), doc. no. 13.

²⁸ Minutes of the meeting of the President of the Republic of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, with a delegation of the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the presence of officials of the Republic of Croatia, held in Zagreb on 27 December 1991. *Stenogrami o podjeli Bosne*, vol. 1, 75-128.

that he was aware of the existence of a difference in their views on the strategy of Croatia's policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. A faction of the HDZ of Bosnia and Herzegovina, led by the party's president, Stjepan Kljuić, advocated for maintaining the sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while another faction, consisting of members of the leadership of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia, was inclined towards the idea of this community joining Croatia.²⁹

Regarding these disagreements, Tuđman, unsurprisingly, sided with the leadership of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia. He concluded that Croatia had achieved its international recognition, and thus the crisis was now shifting to Bosnia and Herzegovina. He assessed that Bosnia and Herzegovina had no prospect of becoming a sovereign state, given that the Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, backed by the Yugoslav People's Army, did not accept it. Tuđman stated that, at a time when Croatia was exposed to Serbia's territorial ambitions, Zagreb supported a sovereign Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it would therefore be "politically unwise" to raise the issue of borders within its territory. However, Tuđman believed that circumstances had since changed, making it now possible to alter the borders of the Yugoslav republics through agreement, which the international community would also accept. Thus, "demarcation" was Croatia's interest in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This would also suit the Serbian side, which would potentially avoid another war.³⁰

Tuđman reiterated that Bosnia and Herzegovina was a "colonial creation" born of Ottoman conquest. After World War II, the communists "reinvented" Bosnia and Herzegovina, and proclaimed Muslims a nation, but failed to provide a lasting solution. The survival of an independent Bosnia and Herzegovina would complicate the consolidation of an independent Croatia, both administratively and defensively, and it would also put the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina at a disadvantage in the face of Muslim demographic expansion.³¹

In response to claims that this solution would allow "Serbia to cross the Drina River," Tuđman argued that there were so many Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina that Serbian expansion in the region was inevitable. In this sense, Croatia should aim to annex the areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina inhabited by Croats, and if this did not encompass all the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina, that should be accepted, as no nation could achieve all of its goals. Just as Croatia would not be able to include all Croats, so too would the Serbs have

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

to relinquish their maximalist ambitions of annexing the territories of Croatia that they had recently seized militarily.³²

Tuđman reminded that, as early as November 1989, in its “historic proclamation,” HDZ had raised the issue of Croatia’s borders. He concluded that since that proclamation, “our goal” had not been the preservation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and therefore it was no coincidence that the original draft of the Croatian Constitution from 1990 made mention of the Banovina of Croatia, which was established in 1939.³³

Shortly thereafter, Tuđman expressed his views publicly. During an interview that he gave to Croatian journalists on New Year’s Day of 1992, Tuđman stated that international recognition of Croatia could no longer be prevented, and devoted considerable attention to future developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina: “Readiness for demarcation would mean that war in Bosnia and Herzegovina is perhaps not inevitable, and what we failed to achieve in last year’s negotiations could be achieved at the peak of the crisis. Perhaps it is possible to reach an agreement like in 1939, but an even more favourable one. All possibilities are open, alongside an interesting interplay of European and global powers in the region. On the other hand, Europe and America’s insistence on the principle that borders cannot be changed by force implies that this could be achieved through negotiations. (...) The fact is that today two million Serbs live west of the Drina River. The greater danger lies in maintaining relations of hatred and intolerance, which erupt in assassinations, war, Chetnikism, and Ustashism, rather than in removing the reasons for this constant competition and slaughter. This can be achieved by realising Serbia’s national goals so that it no longer has a reason for expansion, and at the same time, Croatia would annex its regions because Croatia’s current pretzel shape is unnatural. How will you tomorrow draw a border for the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina with Croatia near Imotski or impose customs duties near Dubrovnik and leave them outside of Croatia? It is in Croatia’s interest that this problem be solved in a natural way, in the manner that the Banovina [of Croatia] was resolved. In doing so, a part of ‘little Bosnia’ could remain, where the Muslims would have a majority, and that state of Bosnia could be a buffer between Croatia and Serbia. This would also remove the colonial creation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The problem is not insoluble if we start from the correct premise, which is to create a peaceful neighbouring coexistence of Serbia and Croatia, while taking into account the interests of the Muslims in the area. This would also satisfy international interests.”³⁴

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Olga Ramljak, “Priznanje se više ne može spriječiti! – Novogodišnji razgovor dr. Franje Tuđmana s novinarima,” *Slobodna Dalmacija*, December 31, 1991 and January 1, 1992, 2-4.

It is clear that under the unsuccessful “last year’s negotiations,” Tuđman was referring to his meetings with Milošević in March and April 1991, as well as to his meeting with Izetbegović and Milošević in Split in June of the same year.

While he considered an agreed change of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s borders to be the optimal solution, Tuđman also stated that Serbia’s conquests in Croatia would not be recognised since they were achieved by force, and that Croatia would maintain its territorial integrity with the help of UN Peacekeeping Forces, or, if necessary, with Croatia’s armed forces. Regarding this issue, Tuđman concluded: “The immediate and future solution most favourable for Croatia is demarcation with the normal borders of Croatia, in such a way that as many Serbs across the Sava River as possible are included in the state of Serbia.”³⁵

On 6 January 1992, five Croats from Sarajevo (Miljenko Jergović, Ivo Komšić, Ivan Kordić, Ivan Lovrenović, and Mile Stojić) responded to these statements by Tuđman in an open letter. They warned of the dire situation in which Bosnia and Herzegovina found itself, exposed to Serbia’s territorial ambitions. The authors of the letter assessed that the official government of Bosnia and Herzegovina was doing nothing about this, and was observing everything with a “philosophical calm.” It is in such circumstances that Tuđman’s analysis emerged, which the authors of the open letter deemed completely misguided and aimed against the interests of the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Serbs want to destroy Bosnia and Herzegovina, while “generously” offering Croatia the annexation of Western Herzegovina, and Tuđman, because he has no policy of his own, clings to the “tail” of this Serbian policy. Tuđman’s offer of an “enclave” to the Muslims was also described as rude and immoral towards the Muslim people. The authors of the letter concluded that Bosnia and Herzegovina is the homeland of the Croatian people as well, and its destruction cannot in any way be a condition for the “permanent peace” that Tuđman speaks of. Therefore, the way that Tuđman would restore the right to represent the historical interests of the Croatian people is if he fully committed to the international recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina.³⁶

Interestingly, the aforementioned open letter that was printed in the Zagreb-based daily newspaper *Vjesnik* was answered by Professor Zvonimir Lerotić, who participated in the negotiations between Croatia and Serbia’s experts on the creation and demarcation of the future Croatian and Serbian states in April 1991. He described the open letter as a malicious “pamphlet,” concluding that the authorities in Sarajevo had done nothing when Bosnia

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Zvonko Lerotić, “Danajski dar za Hrvatsku,” *Vjesnik*, January 14, 1992, 2.

and Herzegovina's territory was used as a launch point for attacks on Croatia the previous year. Lerotić believed it was obvious that Bosnia and Herzegovina no longer existed as a political and state entity. Therefore, war was not necessary to further break Bosnia and Herzegovina apart, as it no longer existed anyway. War would only be necessary if "someone" wanted Bosnia and Herzegovina to be established as a unified and sovereign republic. Hence, Lerotić justified Tuđman's initiation of a "democratic" debate about the long-term solution to the issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or rather, Tuđman's initiation of a "democratic agreement" on the "process of nation-building and the creation of new political and territorial units" in Bosnia and Herzegovina.³⁷

In contrast to the above Sarajevo-based Croats, Tuđman's analysis was, understandably, received favourably by the Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, on 8 January 1992, Nikola Koljević, the Serbian member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, visited Zagreb. He told Croatian officials that Tuđman's statements during the Christmas and New Year holidays gave him hope that, after the war in Croatia, further confrontation between the Croatian and Serbian peoples could be avoided.³⁸

Koljević also announced that the next day, the Serbian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina would proclaim their Serbian republic. He did not miss the opportunity to warn his Croatian interlocutors of the "great danger of Islamisation" threatening both Croats and Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and then discussed with Croatian representatives the ways in which the sovereignty of the Croatian and Serbian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina could be achieved, and the ways in which closer ties with their respective homelands could be developed. During this meeting, Tuđman mentioned that before the war in Croatia, he had spoken to Milošević, who was "very inclined to such a solution," and that the Serbian president had also told him that the Croatian side would have partners in the representatives of the Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, the Croatian-Serbian war in Croatia then broke out. Tuđman concluded that this war showed what could happen in Bosnia and Herzegovina, so he asked Koljević to ensure that the Serbian side would influence the commanders of the Yugoslav People's Army in the republic not to go to war because a political solution was being worked on.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Minutes of the meeting of the President of the Republic of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, and his associates with members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Prof. Nikola Koljević and Mr. Franjo Boras, held on 8 January 1992 in Zagreb. *Stenogrami o podjeli Bosne*, vol. 1, 129-154.

³⁹ Ibid.

As shown, in early June 1991, Tuđman hoped that satisfying Croatia and Serbia's territorial ambitions in Bosnia and Herzegovina could avoid war. Events took a different direction, and Serbia, relying on the Yugoslav People's Army, imposed war on Croatia. Nevertheless, Tuđman continued to think, even at the end of 1991, that satisfying Croatia and Serbia's territorial ambitions in Bosnia and Herzegovina would represent a favourable solution that would prevent the spread of war. Events would again unfold contrary to Tuđman's hopes.

Meanwhile, the leadership of the Party of Democratic Action also opted for the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As Izetbegović would later state, his commitment to independence was, to some extent, "forced," since what he was aiming for was the survival of Yugoslavia in which Bosnia and Herzegovina would have somewhat more autonomy. On the other hand, the path to independence was a consequence of the western republics gaining independence. In other words, after Croatia left Yugoslavia, the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina no longer wanted to remain in a union with Serbia and Montenegro.⁴⁰ Thus, at the beginning of 1992, the Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina decided to hold a referendum on 29 February and 1 March, where citizens were to decide whether they were in favour of a sovereign and independent state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a state of equal citizens and its peoples.⁴¹

Meanwhile, the consequences of previously expressed opposing views on the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina became visible within the HDZ of Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the meeting of the Central Committee of the HDZ of Bosnia and Herzegovina held on 2 February 1992 in Široki Brijeg, party president Kljuić resigned. The Central Committee also discussed the referendum on the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In his capacity as the representative of HDZ from Zagreb, Stjepan Mesić attended the meeting in Široki Brijeg, where he stated that the referendum on the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina was acceptable, but that at the same time, the Croatian people in that state must be guaranteed sovereignty.⁴²

Shortly after, on 9 February, the Central Committee of the HDZ of Bosnia and Herzegovina, at its meeting held in Livno, almost unanimously accepted the proposal to amend the referendum question.⁴³ The question proposed by the HDZ of Bosnia and Herzegovina was as follows: "Are you in favour of a

⁴⁰ Izetbegović, *Sjećanja*, 418.

⁴¹ Tuđman, *Istina o Bosni i Hercegovini*, doc. no. 30.

⁴² Ermin Krehić, HINA, "Stjepan Kljuić podnio ostavku," *Vjesnik*, February 3, 1992, 1.

⁴³ Editorial report, "Novo pitanje za referendum," *Vjesnik*, February 10, 1992, 1.

sovereign and independent Bosnia and Herzegovina, a state community of its constituent and sovereign nations of Croats, Muslims, and Serbs in their national territories (cantons)?⁴⁴

On 25 February 1992, at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Party of Democratic Action held in Sarajevo, Alija Izetbegović explained that for the referendum on the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina to succeed, it was essential for the Croats to participate. However, the Croatian representatives conditioned their participation in the referendum as it was adopted by the Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The condition was the formation of a Croatian “region” within Bosnia and Herzegovina once Bosnia and Herzegovina achieved its independence. Izetbegović gave his “conditional consent” to this demand. He held that it was crucial for the Croats to vote in favour of the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the referendum, but disagreed with the idea of a Croatian “region.” He added that he had just received the information that Zagreb apparently instructed the representatives of the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina to nevertheless condition their vote in the referendum on the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina by demanding that it be restructured as a confederation.⁴⁵

However, before the referendum, Stjepan Mesić, a senior HDZ official, declared that the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina should vote for the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite the fact that the proposal put forward by the HDZ of Bosnia and Herzegovina to amend the referendum question was not accepted.⁴⁶

More than 60% of voters participated in the referendum, with a vast majority voting for an independent Bosnia and Herzegovina. Following this, the government in Sarajevo declared independence, and on 7 April 1992, Franjo Tuđman informed Izetbegović that Croatia recognised Bosnia and Herzegovina as an independent state, but as a community of its constituent nations. In other words, Croatia’s recognition implied the existence of the sovereign right of the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina as one of the constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁴⁷

In early 1993, Tuđman stated during a private meeting that Croatia’s recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina had been compelled by broader circumstances. He noted that Croatia had recognised Bosnia to avoid being equated with Serbia, which was facing international sanctions for its involvement in the war

⁴⁴ Tuđman, *Istina o Bosni i Hercegovini*, doc. no. 30.

⁴⁵ Lučić, *Uzroci rata*, 360-364.

⁴⁶ M. Piškor, “Referendum ruši Miloševića,” *Večernji list*, 28 February 1992, 4.

⁴⁷ Tuđman, *Istina o Bosni i Hercegovini*, doc. no. 44.

in Bosnia and Herzegovina. "(...) on the example of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we also avoided the trap of being labelled as aggressors ourselves, understand that, had we [the Croats] not supported the referendum [for the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina], had we not voted for an independent Bosnia, we would have been labelled as aggressors, we'd be in Serbia's position."⁴⁸

As has previously been noted, Tuđman viewed Serbia's territorial and political aspirations in Bosnia and Herzegovina as justified. In this context, he was prepared to engage in conflict with the Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina only for the regions that were populated by Croats predominantly or in significant numbers. At the start of the war, in the spring of 1992, the Yugoslav People's Army and Serbian forces clashed with Croatian forces around Kupres and the Field of Livno. Subsequent points of conflict between the Croats and the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina concentrated on Bosnian Posavina and the Neretva Valley, where fierce battles were fought in 1992.

Despite these conflicts, there was evident agreement between the two sides that both had a right to certain territories in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Talks were held on 6 May 1992 in Graz, Austria, between Radovan Karadžić and Mate Boban, the leader of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia. A resolve to settle the demarcation of the Croatian and Serbian constituent units in Bosnia and Herzegovina through agreement was expressed during these discussions, although some points of contention emerged. Disagreements arose mainly over Serbia's stance that in Mostar the boundary between the Croatian and the Serbian units should be defined by the Neretva River, while the Croatian side asserted that the entire city of Mostar should belong to the Croatian national unit.⁴⁹

Both sides agreed that the demarcation in Kupres and Bosnian Posavina should consider "territorial compactness" and communication routes. Both sides consented to European Community arbitration on this matter. Boban and Karadžić concluded that there was no longer a rationale for armed conflict between the Croats and the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, thus declaring a general and lasting ceasefire that was to take immediate effect.⁵⁰

This meeting showed that there was mutual agreement between the Croatian and Serbian sides to secure parts of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina for themselves, and subsequently engage in a peace process under the oversight

⁴⁸ Minutes of the meeting between the President of the Republic of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, with representatives of the municipalities of central Bosnia, and the President of the Croatian Defence Council of Herzeg-Bosnia and associates, held on 8 March 1993. *Stenogram o podjeli Bosne*, vol. 1, 271-298.

⁴⁹ Tuđman, *Istina o Bosni i Hercegovini*, doc. no. 48.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

of the international community, or the European Community more specifically, which was to confirm the existing state of affairs. Speaking at the Assembly of the Serbian People in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 12 May 1992 in Banja Luka, Karadžić expressed satisfaction with his talks with Boban. He noted that these talks “shook” the international community, including the British Foreign Office and the United States Department of State, because they showed that it was possible to “establish other arrangements” and “draw boundaries bilaterally,” and that “there is no going back to the way things were.” Karadžić also mentioned another reason for why it was important to negotiate with Boban: “It was essential for us to pull them [the Croats] into these waters, to have them get wet and go further in this direction. It was an interim political step, a big play that surpassed our expectations, proving quite successful. Of course, peace was not achieved, nor did we believe that they would enforce a ceasefire, but this interim political manoeuvre was necessary for us.”⁵¹

Karadžić was right in stating that the talks in Graz did not lead to a ceasefire with the Croatian side. The Croatian Defence Council was established as the military force of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia, but the involvement of the Croatian Army in the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina was crucial for defending the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia. In the period from spring to autumn 1992, the Croatian Army lifted the blockade of Dubrovnik and liberated Dubrovnik’s coastal area. Serbian forces were also pushed out of Mostar and the Neretva Valley, and the area of Livno was defended. Bosnian Posavina was another major Croatian-Serbian front. This territory was strategically crucial for the Serbs, as it was the only location that could connect Bosnian Krajina and eastern Bosnia under Serbian control on land, and thus provide a link to Serbia. By mid-1992, the Serbs managed to connect Bosnian Krajina with Semberija, while fighting continued until October of that year, when the Serbs seized most of Bosnian Posavina.⁵²

By late 1992, the Croatian side succeeded in securing significant areas of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia against Serbia’s aspirations, though it suffered defeat in Bosnian Posavina. Once these conflicts ended, a state was reached where, in line with Boban and Karadžić’s talks in Graz, there was no longer justification for major Croatian-Serbian conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

⁵¹ ICTY Court Records, IT-00-39: Krajišnik, Zapisnik sa 16. sjednice Skupštine srpskog naroda u Bosni i Hercegovini održane 12. maja 1992. godine u Banja Luci [Minutes of the 16th session of the Assembly of the Serbian People in Bosnia and Herzegovina held on 12 May 1992 in Banja Luka].

⁵² On the battles in Bosnian Posavina, see: Marijan, Davor. *Rat za Bosansku Posavinu 1992. godine* (Zagreb – Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest; Hrvatski institut za povijest, Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2020).

During this time, the issue of relations between the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia and the authorities of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina arose. On 21 July 1992, Izetbegović visited Zagreb and met with Tuđman. Their meeting clearly revealed differing views on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and on the relations between the Croats and the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Tuđman insisted that the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina should have a “constituent unit,” once again citing the example of the Banovina of Croatia from 1939.⁵³

In contrast to the above, Izetbegović deemed it untenable for the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina to have a “canton”. The Croatian Defence Council could take control of central Bosnia at that time because its strength was based on arms received from Croatia. However, Izetbegović warned that such reliance on force could not be a lasting solution. Thus, a Croatian “canton” would only be possible if the “ethnic cleansing” of Muslims were carried out. This was what the Serbs had done in other parts of Bosnia, where they killed and expelled the non-Serb population, but Izetbegović concluded that the Croats would not act in this manner, as they were civilised people.⁵⁴

Tuđman reminded Izetbegović that the Muslims were “cut off” and powerless if they could not receive supplies through the Port of Ploče, i.e., through Croatia. He also warned Izetbegović that the Croatian people in the “purely Croatian areas” of Bosnia and Herzegovina “self-organised” and established their own military and civil authority, which they “would not relinquish,” and that Izetbegović needed to take note of this fact. Tuđman thus decided to be “frank,” telling Izetbegović that he had to find a solution with Mate Boban, i.e., the leadership of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia, as such a solution could not be reached with Croatian politicians in positions of authority in the republican government in Sarajevo.⁵⁵

Tuđman spoke to Izetbegović about the Croatian people who “self-organised” under the leadership of Mate Boban. In a closed meeting in mid-September 1992, however, Tuđman emphasised that the crucial role in organising the Croatian Defence Council was played by Croatia rather than the “self-organisation” of the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina: “By fighting this war in Croatia to defend the Republic of Croatia, we also waged a war for Bosnia and Herzegovina to the extent that we can and must defend it at all costs, and if it weren’t for our commitment in Herzegovina, in Bosnian Posavina, you would all already be citizens

⁵³ Minutes of the talks between the Delegation of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, headed by the President of the Presidency Alija Izetbegović, and the Delegation of the Republic of Croatia, headed by the President of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tuđman, held in Villa Zagorje on 21 July 1992, 8/2-8/5.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

of Greater Serbia or Yugoslavia. You need to be aware of that. (...) You should also be aware that, when talking about the Croatian Defence Council, it still surprises me that you haven't realised in your ranks that it was a form of organising the Croatian people with Croatia's help to defend Croatian areas (...).⁵⁶

In the same meeting, Tuđman assessed that Izetbegović did not want to accept the Croatian Defence Council as a political factor, adding that there were historical instances where efforts were made to resolve issues in this way and to "undermine even wartime and revolutionary victories." Tuđman then drew a comparison to the situation at the end of World War II, when Tito led the partisan army and had real power, while the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, wanted to preserve the Yugoslav royal government in exile and offered to recognise Tito as a military factor, but not as a political one as well. Regarding this, Tuđman concluded: "Therefore, we defended Herzegovina with the Croatian Defence Council, so that we could establish Croatian authority there, and we must maintain it."⁵⁷

In early January 1993, a peace plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina was proposed by David Owen and Cyrus Vance, co-chairs of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia. According to this plan, Bosnia and Herzegovina would be a decentralised state divided into ten provinces, with a temporary central government. Owen later noted that care was taken to avoid naming any of the ten provinces as "Croatian," "Muslim," or "Serbian," instead labelling them with numbers.⁵⁸

The Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia immediately accepted the Vance-Owen Peace Plan. Some authors would later claim that the provinces envisaged in the plan were not, as Owen argued, "nationally neutral," but rather gave hope to the Croatian side that it could establish complete control over some of these provinces.⁵⁹

In such circumstances, in which the international peace plan had not yet been fully accepted, conflicts between the Croatian Defence Council and the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina flared up in January and then in April 1993 in central Bosnia and northern Herzegovina.⁶⁰ The Vance-Owen Peace Plan was ultimate-

⁵⁶ Minutes of the meeting of Croatia's state and political leadership with representatives of the Croatian Democratic Union and Croatian representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina, held in Zagreb on 17 September 1992. *Stenogrami o podjeli Bosne*, vol. 1, 209-254.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ David Owen, *Balkanska odiseja* (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, Hrvatski institut za povijest: 1998), 127-228.

⁵⁹ Brendan Simms, *Unfinest Hour, Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2001), 142-147.

⁶⁰ Marijan, *Rat Hrvata i Muslimana*, 209-220.

ly rejected because the Serbian side refused it. Then, in the second half of 1993, a peace plan by international mediators David Owen and Thorvald Stoltenberg, who replaced Vance as co-chair of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, emerged. This peace plan, also known as the “Union of Three Republics” plan, proposed the internal division of Bosnia and Herzegovina into Croatian, Muslim, and Serbian republics.⁶¹ In accordance with this plan, the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia was proclaimed in Grude in late August 1993.

This peace plan was undoubtedly very close to Tuđman’s views. In early July 1993, he spoke with Defence Minister Gojko Šušak and Chief of Staff of the Croatian Armed Forces, General Janko Bobetko, telling them that a war for the future borders of the Croatian state was being fought in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and asking them to take steps to support the Croatian Defence Council in its fight against the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Croatian Defence Council was also to be assisted by deploying Croatian Army forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁶²

In talks with high-ranking Croatian officers in early November 1993, Tuđman stated, in connection with the support that the Croatian Army was supposed to provide to the Croatian Defence Council, that the Croatian side had a long front line with the Serbs in Croatia and with the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, concluding that it was currently unfavourable for Croatia to engage with the Serbs in Croatia, and that instead it was necessary to secure the borders of Herzeg-Bosnia, or the “future border of Croatia.”⁶³ Tuđman hoped that, ultimately, the union of republics in Bosnia and Herzegovina would be dissolved, and that the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia would be incorporated into the Republic of Croatia.⁶⁴

Thus, the international peace plans for Bosnia and Herzegovina of 1993 – first the Vance-Owen Peace Plan, and then the “Union of Three Republics” plan – led Tuđman to think that even international centres of power viewed the solution to the problem of Bosnia and Herzegovina similarly to his own; that is, Bosnia and Herzegovina was to be territorially divided into areas that would belong to each of its three peoples. What is especially evident is that Tuđman was very favourable to the “Union of Three Republics” plan. In the end, these peace

⁶¹ Owen, *Balkanska odiseja*, 229-270.

⁶² Minutes of the meeting between the President of the Republic of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, and the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia, held on 6 November 1993, in the Presidential Palace. *Stenogrami o podjeli Bosne*, vol. 1, 433-448.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Minutes of the meeting of the President of the Republic of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, with the representatives of Herzeg-Bosnia, held on 5 November 1993, in Villa Dalmatia in Split. *Stenogrami o podjeli Bosne*, vol. 1, 379-431.

plans did not bring peace to Bosnia and Herzegovina, but rather fuelled the Croatian-Muslim conflict. By early 1994, the situation for the Croatian side was unfavourable. The Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina had pushed the Croatian Defence Council out of numerous areas, and in central Bosnia, the Croatian Defence Council's strongholds were reduced to enclaves encircled by Bosniaks. Moreover, Zagreb was under pressure by the United Nations due to the presence of the Croatian Army in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia was facing the prospect of international sanctions imposed on it.⁶⁵

At a meeting of the Presidency of HDZ and HDZ's members of parliament in late January 1994, Tuđman discussed the conflict with the Muslims extensively, lamenting that the "Muslim army continues the war against Bosnian Croats." However, it is noteworthy that Tuđman also stated that this conflict was partly due to mistakes made by the Croatian side: "When talking about mistakes, about why the conflict and the Muslim-Croatian war broke out, I would say that 70 percent of the causes of this war are on the Muslim side, and 30 percent on the Croatian side."⁶⁶

However, the American administration under President Bill Clinton began to become more actively involved in the crisis in former Yugoslavia. This led to the cessation of hostilities between the Bosniaks and Croats, and in mid-March 1994, Izetbegović and Tuđman signed the Washington Agreement, establishing the Bosniak-Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and agreeing on its confederal arrangement with the Republic of Croatia.⁶⁷

At a meeting with representatives of the HDZ of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia held on 11 June 1994 in Zagreb, Tuđman stated that it would have been ideal for the Croatian side if the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia had encompassed "what we wanted" and what the Croats defended against the attacks of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Lašva Valley, following which Herzeg-Bosnia could have joined Croatia. In this, he was clearly referring to the state of affairs during the time of the "Union of Three Republics" peace plan. However, Tuđman noted that if this had happened, a large number of the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina would have been left outside Croatia.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Mario Nobilo, *Hrvatski feniks, Diplomatski procesi iza zatvorenih vrata 1990.-1997.* (Zagreb: Globus, 2000), 562-584.

⁶⁶ "Radi Hrvatske moramo sačuvati HDZ," *Vjesnik*, January 29, 1994, 14, 27.

⁶⁷ Mate Granić, *Vanjski poslovi, Iza kulisa politike* (Zagreb: Algoritam, 2005), 87-98; Nobilo, *Hrvatski feniks*, 562-583, 605-618.

⁶⁸ Minutes of the meeting of Croatia's state and political leadership, the leadership of the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia, the leadership of the Croatian Democratic Union and the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the representatives of Her-

Tuđman explained that, by signing the Washington Agreement, Croatia gained the alliance of the United States and Germany, and that the implementation of this agreement was in the interest of Croatia and the entire Croatian people. Thus, the “narrow vision” of the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia must not jeopardise Croatia’s main concern – the restoration of control over those areas of its territory that were under Serbian control. To restore Croatian control over those areas, Zagreb needed the assistance and understanding of the international community.⁶⁹

However, Tuđman optimistically concluded that the Washington Agreement had effectively given Croats “half of Bosnia.” The Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina would enjoy complete equality with the Muslims/Bosniaks within the Federation, while the confederal arrangement with Croatia would ensure that Croats were the “ruling people.”⁷⁰ Such thinking would later prove to be misguided.

The end of the hostilities with the Bosniaks strengthened Croatia’s international position. This placed Zagreb in a favourable position when Operation Storm was launched in August 1995. Simultaneously, the Croatian forces’ advance towards Banja Luka after Operation Storm aligned well with the US’s diplomatic plans for establishing lasting peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Conclusion

In the context of the Yugoslav crisis and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Franjo Tuđman did not believe in the statehood and viability of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He viewed its partition between Croatia and Serbia, along with the existence of a “statelet” for the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the optimal solution. Such an outcome would allow a significant portion of the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina to live within the Croatian state. Tuđman also believed that fulfilling Serbia’s territorial ambitions in Bosnia and Herzegovina would eliminate Serbia’s claims over Croatian territory. In this, Tuđman often referred to the solution reached in the Cvetković-Maček Agreement, specifically the establishment of the Banovina of Croatia in 1939. However, he failed to recognise that the Cvetković-Maček Agreement was a

zeg-Bosnia with the political leadership of Croatia, held in the Presidential Palace on 11 June 1994., *Stenogrami o podjeli Bosne*, ed. Predrag Lucić, vol. 2 (Split; Sarajevo: Kultura&Rasvjeta d.o.o.; Civitas d.o.o., 2005), 143-198.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

provisional solution forged under historical circumstances that were very different from those in the early 1990s.

Naturally, Tuđman adjusted his thinking to broader circumstances. Furthermore, his stance led him towards negotiations with the Serbian side regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina, even though the Serbs simultaneously harboured territorial ambitions over Croatian territory.

Tuđman supported those individuals from amongst the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina and within the HDZ in Bosnia and Herzegovina who agreed with his vision; more specifically, those who were expected to carry out his policy of creating Croatian enclaves in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and later the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia.

The possibility of fully establishing the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia arose after the outbreak of general war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. Croatia then aided in defending areas populated by a substantial number of Croats against Serbian attacks. After those initial months, Tuđman sought to end the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina through international mediation, whereby the territory of Herzeg-Bosnia was supposed to be under the rule of the Croatian Defence Council. The peace plans proposed by international peace mediators during 1993 also envisioned some form of decentralisation or internal division of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although these plans ultimately failed, they escalated the Croatian-Muslim conflict. The Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina were unwilling to accept the authority of Herzeg-Bosnia or the Croatian Defence Council, and sought to bring those territories under their own control. As a result, the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina pushed the Croatian Defence Council out of substantial territories in central Bosnia.

In addition, Zagreb faced international criticism for its support of Herzeg-Bosnia and the Croatian Defence Council. Under these conditions, the Croatian-Muslim conflict ceased in early 1994, leading to the establishment of the Bosniak-Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This improved Croatia's position, which proved crucial in 1995, when the wars in Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina ended. Although Tuđman believed that, following the establishment of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Croatian side would manage to maintain dominance within it, such expectations would ultimately prove to be unfounded.

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