

SLAVKO DEGORICIJA

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**Here we go, we are on. At the beginning of this recording I would like to ask you to introduce yourself: so, your name and surname, date and place of birth, occupation, place of residence?**

I am Slavko Degoricija, born on 18.04.1931 in Kompolje. That's district or county Otočac. So I'm from Lika. I finished the primary school and general-program secondary school in Otočac, teacher-training school in Rijeka and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, department of history in Zagreb. I worked for two-three years, until the army, as a teacher in Lika. This is written in my biography, the details. Then I went to serve the YPA (Yugoslavian People's Army) in the School for Reserve Officers in Bitolj. When I finished that and returned home a crisis erupted between Italy and Croatia because of Trieste. I was mobilized and I spend several months on the front line in Trieste. And I quickly worked my way up. I came as the second lieutenant of the commander of the platoon and I ended up as the second-in-command of the commanding officer of the battalion. So that crisis was a big school for me, and it was very close to the renewal of the war, of the conflict. However the attitude, the fierce attitude of Tito was oriented towards that area, so that at one point an American plane was shot down – and then all the violence ended because they thought that Russians support Tito, taking into consideration the Cominform before that. The negotiations started, the hostilities were ceased and then there were negotiations, agreement, zone B, zone A, Trieste is ours, Trieste is yours. Then we were all dissolved. Then I came to Kutina. For the first time there was a competition for the service in education, until then only decrees existed. So, the Ministry, decree, you go and it's done. And then in 1953 the competitions started. I went to Kutina and I stayed in Kutina for twenty three years. I was a professor there. I was the manager of some schools, I worked in the county, and in the end, somewhere in spring, and because of the suggestion of my street, where I lived and worked, I became one of the first candidates who were chosen for the councilman from the free citizen's list. People laughed at the time, it was allowed for the first time that citizens can candidate on a citizen's list. My people from my street put me as a candidate, and who was I the opposing candidate of or was he mine? The secretary of the committee of Kutina. And then they laughed. Imagine that, professor Degoricija as the opposing candidate of the secretary of the committee. That secretary of the committee was a certain Kajcona Dušan, of course a Serb. And as God is my witness I won. 62-3% me, and 37-8% him. Of course then a huge pressure was put on me to resign, but I didn't. I stuck with that. I said: you can revoke me, remove me from power in the same way that I was elected. And I stayed. That was my important entrance, let's say, into the sphere of politics. Here people probably saw me firm, I didn't give in under that pressure forcing me to move from the secretary's way, but indeed I defeated him in the elections and also in the post-electoral period. And then some turmoils started in Kutina because of the relations between the old and new personnel. Then Hlad Mijo was appointed as the president of the district according to the agreement on the level of politics. Actually he was a very reasonable person. He was a partisan in the Second world war, but very reasonable and he progressed very quickly. Education, he graduated law, and he was extremely agile. And when he came to Kutina, at first the two of us had some disagreements, but later we were good co-workers, and we were friends, then I was a professional for one mandate of two-three years, the Vice President of the district. Then came the Croatian spring of 1971. And Kutina is a specific area where somewhere around 92% of inhabitants were Croats, 6% were Serbs and 2% were Italians, Hungarians, Czechoslovaks etc. so, all of the sudden in 1971 nationalism was everywhere. And then Marinko Gruić, the Secretary of the Committee of the Party of

Zagreb came to a meeting here in Kutina and “you can’t say that there is no nationalism here?”, Tito said there is, and the party also said there is – so then there is. And a fierce conflict between us erupted here. And we stayed in power in Kutina for a long time. So that Jure Bilić determined that on a meeting of CK-KPH (Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia) that this was the last gathering of the resistance to the progress that needs to be taken down. And Jakov Blažević said: “Well, why are you concerned with that, Jure? That Hlad and that Degoricija should be sent to prison with hard labour for 20 years, without court, and you solved everything.” But we stayed until the end of mandate and we didn’t allow them to move us. After that there is a difficult period in my life. That was in 1973. At the time I, because of children, but also because of the environment, to make the job easier for the people, I moved to work to Zagreb. I came to the Automobile and Motorcycle Association of Croatia as the professor of education of drivers. And for a while I had peace here – and then from Kutina came the rumour that I’m nationalist-participant of the Croatian Spring, that I can’t work in such an important social organization, especially not in education, although that wasn’t a sphere of education. That is a sphere of training people for some skills as driving, safety in traffic. And I was suspended from work. I was without work for a year, but I was returned to work by a court order. At the time a quite strong law on working relations for the rights of workers existed, so if the court returned you to your post and if the director wouldn’t give you your job back then he would be committing a felony – you could bring criminal charges against him. I stayed in that Automobile and motorcycle association for a long time, somewhere until 1986, and then a was a bit tired of that and on the request of the people form the Traffic School Centre Zagreb I came to work with them. Here I stayed until 1989. In 1989 a group was formed around Tuđman, CDU (Croatian Democratic Union). I was part of the first group of those people and together with them, on the first congress in Lisinski I was chosen for the President of the Executive Committee of CDU. That was a high function. It was called, in the previous regime, the secretary of CK KP (Central Committee of the Communist Party). That was that party executive organ. I had some thirty people in the Executive Committee, and out task was to create the infrastructure on the territory of Croatia, of CDU. Of course, and because of that when the CDU was formed in Croatia, our task was – according to the decision of the Presidency of CDU – also to go to Bosnia. I entered the sphere of forming of CDU with the individuals who, during the forming of CDU of BH, originated from Bosnia and Herzegovina and were more in contact. But under my supervision they went down there and then there was that immense, I would say, opening of the Croatian people and transfer to CDU – it was a massive entrance. There was enthusiasm. It was quite well organized. I know there were often changes of the presidents of CDU in Bosnia. First there was a doctor, then a professor, then another professor, and then Mate Boban came, and then it went on in this way. And I know that we had many meetings in Bosnia and that we during that time cooperated very closely with Muslims. I was present on many meetings where the Muslim and Croatian flags were tied, and where a large number of Muslims took part in those rallies, that forming of CDU. And I know that in that time, on second line, there was a big conflict on the level of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was going through a difficult inner crisis, above all on the meeting of CK KPJ (Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia) where they separated, Slovenia left the meeting. Croatia expressed support for the Slovenes – and that was the first sign of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. At that time Slobodan Milošević took over the power in Serbia. Ivan Stambolić was removed, who was, we could say, liberal, and those more moderate Serbs were moved – and than was created, formed a certain fierce Serbian right hand around Slobodan Milošević. The similar situation was in Montenegro. Of course, and they immediately entered Bosnia. Those Serbs in Croatia... (Prečani, as they are called), from the beginning they started to rebel against Croatia. Croatia (that’s the most important thing), during the first part of those negotiations,

talks on how to continue in Yugoslavia, suggested the confederative relation. That confederation at the time was attacked the most by the Serbian regime. Conflicts threatened, and there were already those individual conflicts on the line of those towns, villages, districts where the majority of population in Croatia was Serbian. Now they invented a way how to enter Croatia to entirely block it – it was intellectually organized quite well for them, but badly for us, by the Secretary for the Internal Affairs Petar Gračanin. He organized it in the way that in the areas where they were not present, where Croats were the majority, where there were no Serbs, where they didn't know what was going on and in which way and how the Croatian state is organized, they in the name of the Presidency of Yugoslavia formed a professional team to prevent conflict between Serbs and Croats in Croatia. And then president Tuđman, of course, (I think on the meeting of Presidency of the Party or possibly the Presidency of Croatia – the Presidency of Croatia, not the President or on the level of VONS – National Defence and Security Council, it's difficult to say, and maybe on the level of all three parts) – decided to appoint me and Živko Juzbašić for the representatives in this professional expert group for prevention of conflict between Serbs and Croats. Then I was often a guest in the Presidency of Yugoslavia during those discussions. The scheme was thought of very cunningly. They planned to form some 100-120 people of the Federal Secretariat of the Internal Affairs, experts, who would, forming seven groups, incorporate themselves in the territory of Croatia. I – and I have to say also Živko Juzbašić, he is a Serb from Croatia – opposed that fiercely. I don't remember anymore if there were two of five meetings, and fierce conflicts. We demanded – because we have enough forces and structure that the Croatian police can solve all those things on its own – that we for now do not need federal help organs, but the material help, help with arms and help with advice how to prevent Serbs in Croatia not to rebel. And what is the most important: I located straight away huge influence on the territory of Croatia for that rebellion through KOS, Counterintelligence Service of the Yugoslavian Army – the army that already flirted with individual groups of Serbs and helped them in providing arms, giving them support. And the army already then, I have than in the book “It wasn't in vain” an entire chapter, left the barracks and went into the area of civil buildings, subjects. And now confusion was created. Our demand was: “Army into the barracks”, we ask that, and not to go to meetings and some kind of rebellions. However, that part of our request, there was no way for us to agree on that level of that Presidency of Yugoslavia because General Stane Brovet was in charge, probably in the name of Main Headquarters of the Yugoslavian People's Army (YPA), for Croatia. That's a Slovene. I think that he was the intelligence officer and in charge for that political... He was a glass bell that simply recited his military formulas: “We in the Yugoslavian People's... think like that.” And period. There are no more questions or answers. Then I polemized a lot with him about that. And we prevented it for a quite a long time. However, I saw that it won't be possible to sustain it anymore, that part that they don't come to Croatia. One day developed that part of the job in Croatia also on the level of the party, and the level of MIA (Ministry of Internal Affairs) of Croatia, to go with the idea: we accept the suggestion of the Federal Secretariat of the Internal Affairs but with the condition that neither Croats nor Serbs nor Montenegrins should be in those expert groups, because they are already in conflict. So, to have Muslims, to have Macedonians and to have Slovenes. That is a significant moment. Very significant moment. And I said it in one session of the Presidency. That Kostić from Montenegro told me: “Why didn't you say so before Slave?” He says: “Well, there, we have the solution.” And then I turn to the Federal Minister of Internal Affairs, Petar Gračanin and said: “Petar, before you form those groups of yours, your experts, I would like to have a list of names: according to the function, the structure of school and so on, the profession and that. And send it to me in the Ministry of the Interior of Croatia.” And he did it, and my Ministry of Interior checked everyone, even their great-grandfathers. And we found out that 68% of

them were Serbs, out of 105 people. That doesn't bother me. So, that's a moment that had to be played somehow. Živko Juzbašić went with me to the Presidency. A member of the presidency of Yugoslavia is from Croatia, Stjepan Mesić. And we travel between Zagreb and Belgrade often in a plane, and that data on the national composition of that group against Gračanin I didn't give to anyone. When we came to the Presidency I said that I want the Secretary of the Presidency to read the conclusion of the previous session. They didn't allow it: to read what, there is nothing to read, well we know, we are not dumb, we know what we concluded, they attacked me. I said: "No. I'm leaving the session if you don't read the conclusion." Well then in the end, after all the scuffle, they said it should be read. And when they read the conclusion, and to conclusion sounded like this: "The expert professional groups will be formed, seven of them for the territory of Croatia, some hundred people, but they can't..." But, that "but" is the devil... because they can't be Croats, Serbs or Montenegrins. I took the list from my bag and said: "Here gentlemen, Petar Gračanin, the Federal Minister sent me this list of people here. 68% of them are Serbs." Oh, what to do? What now? I said: "I don't know what you will do, but I know what I will. To the plane and to Zagreb. And you keep agreeing." Well now, you see, they still don't give up on that idea, but they used a more perfidious way for the Federal Executive Committee, the government to appoint as inspectors and to send them to Croatia. Now they needed a lot of time to form that, while they were appointing, while they... that entire procedure that decides on that passes, and we prepared ourselves in Croatia to accept it under the condition that we set, and they thought that it will be as they want. However, we beat them to it and they were paralyzed. Wherever they went they were accompanied by our men and they couldn't do anything. After several months, based on my report, it was dissolved. I mean, how persistent were those federal states all structures were directed to the fact that, no matter what, they keep everyone besides Slovenia, hold Yugoslavia together – but under the dominance of Serbia and the politics of Serbia. Because all of it was dictated by Slobodan Milošević, so how and in what way to block certain regions. So that the rebellion of Serbs in Croatia was planned in Belgrade. Bosnia will be divided 60% to Serbs and 40% to Muslims and Croats. So it... not to be vulgar, right, and so on. So, he had that concept of Great Serbia... the creation of Great Serbia always through nomination of Yugoslavia. So, that was since long ago a great idea of Nikola Pašić, when the first Yugoslavia was created, the Yugoslavian committee and that resolution was created around that Pašić, and then he said: It's good, to the Yugoslavian committee, it can be like that. "If a great Yugoslavia is being created, in that great Yugoslavia I want a great Serbia. If the world doesn't allow a great Yugoslavia, but a small Yugoslavia is formed without those parts of Croatia and so, but in this small Yugoslavia I want a Great Serbia." Well, that idea of Great Serbia, so not only from \*\*\* what's in the book, so not from your or our extermination, from Moljević, border Virovitica – Karlovac – Karlobag. So that was all in 1941, and even earlier, so in 1918. Therefore, that idea of Great Serbia started then, and through those other documents, all the way to Slobodan Milošević – and Slobodan Milošević formed it in another way, through the document of SANU (Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts), so that academy, Ćosić and so on. And that idea of Great Serbia in that context always looked how and in which way to form that, of course without Slovenia. That's why they didn't accept the concept of Tuđman and Croatia, the confederation. Now, the entire thing did not develop according to the script as they imagined it. Yugoslavia falls apart. Tuđman creates an enormous reverberation with the idea "all non-Serbs get out of the Yugoslavian Army". People started to run away in Croatia so much that nothing was left of that army. That invitation by the president Tuđman in 1991 had an enormous reverberation. General running away started. From this invitation of his The Wall of Love is formed in Croatia, women who protest, who now make a terrible mass movement, political movement for peace, against war, for dissolution and abandonment of the Yugoslavian Army. That movement of women –

mothers was also formed in Serbia. At one point from Belgrade, I think it was May 1991, some 10.000 women and fathers went from Belgrade to Croatia “to take their children home”. Then the politics of Slobodan Milošević, the police, the army, all the devils tried to stop those women, \*\*\* in the buses, I don’t know, made impossible their arrival etc. But anyway somewhere around 2.000 of them arrived to Zagreb. I waited for them at the toll-gate, so at the ramp. And I want to take them to the Zagreb Fair. But Života Avramović, he was at the time the commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> military district, and his members of KOS (Counter-intelligence Service), the officers after all managed to prevent the arrival to the Fair so they went to the Army Centre. Army Centre can receive five hundred, six hundred people, not more, and there were 2.000 of them. A nightmare was created, terrible. You should have experienced that. When all those people, 2.000 Serbian parents entered the YPA Centre, they didn’t want to listen to anyone. They wouldn’t listen to Života, or Andrija Rašeta, or Prašević, or Klečević. They swear, curse you and the state, you and the army, send it all to hell. “I want to take my child home!” And now I, all alone, from Croatian Government and politics... You sit with them in the YPA Centre on the landing, on that stage. Nine of them, I alone. Who is that civilian? Everyone is asking: Who is that civilian? And now I ask to speak. And I say: “The Croatian Government, Croatian state, Croatia – is giving you its full support, material, moral and every other kind of help to get your children, and to take your children home.” Applause, screams, uproar in the hall...

### **What was your duty at the time?**

At the time I was the President of the Executive Committee of CDU and the President of the District Committee in the Parliament. And I was very close to become the Deputy Minister of Home Affairs.

### **But you were not at the time?**

Not yet. And now there is some kind of response, and it lasts somewhere until after midnight in the Army Centre. And in the end, I come to the stage again and say: “Now you said everything you wanted to say. Now I invite you all to dinner and to go to sleep, to have a roof above your head and not to be in the open or in the bus, let’s go to the Fair.” And in the Fair, there in that big restaurant we prepared dinner for you. People went there, and the next day they spread all over Croatia – as they could, and picked up their children, and that army, and those YPA conscripts, they all went...one day, two, three and five. So, simply the army fell apart. All superiors Croats, Albanians, Muslims, Slovenes, all of them slowly run away from the army. So that, let’s say, I will give an example, in Dugo Selo there were 75 tanks. It was a tank unit. I knew by chance that commander of that unit. After those meeting he was left with 14 crews. So, he has 75 iron cans of some kind (tanks), and has 14 crews. So, simply, they became deranged. At that time conflict erupted on all levels. In the book I analyze that in detail, how it went, that continuity. The biggest conflict happened in several points. The first point was Pakrac – because they with their politics, Slobodan Milošević with Serbs from Croatia, determined that Pakrac should be the centre of “Krajina”, i.e. Serbia, i.e. Pakrac should be the centre of the way Virovitica – Karlovac – Karlobag, and not Knin. The first rebellion of Serbs in Croatia happened in Pakrac. We dispersed that fiercely within two days, and that idea failed. It was military destroyed, defeated. And then also politically. Now here some Serbs presented themselves who saw that they had no force, that the army can’t help. So, all of that was now seen on a small scale how that intellectually organized, planned way of oppression of Croatia will not pass. Now, after that Vukovar happened. Everyone predicted that Vukovar will fall after three days, and the longest after thirty. Vukovar survived for 100

days. Nobody counted with that, not even international factors – that Croatia will give such a fierce resistance to oppression and that they lost there so many people and equipment. They lost a lot of equipment, that weaponry, those tanks, and here they actually broke their neck. That's the essence. And now we, of course, always had complaints that we didn't give enough for the defence of Vukovar, that this, that that, that... But with what? We didn't have the means. What was the biggest problem for Bosnia and Herzegovina and also for Croatia was the weaponry. Because the weaponry of the Territorial Defence was taken away from the civilian forces and put under the jurisdiction of the military buildings, barracks, those warehouses and so on. So, our goal was now very important – besides political formation of the infrastructure in order to take over the competent power on the territory of the state – the goal was the arms build-up. And now many forces were engaged through the Ministry of Interior and our diaspora in the whole world to get weaponry. That went quite well. The diaspora played quite a big role here. And in that way Croatia, let's say, formed itself in the military way. At first that ZNG (Croatian National Guard), like we were not allowed to have the army until we reached out independence and international recognition. But then we build up arms. People arm themselves. Groups arm themselves. People arm themselves and give resistance. Give resistance to that aggression. Now comes, well, to the open war between Serbia, i.e. Yugoslavian Army, Yugoslavia and Croatia: first of all in Slovenia, then in Croatia, and after that in Bosnia and Herzegovina. So, a plan is being followed which was already made somewhere. And that plan was in the headquarters, the headquarters of the Yugoslavian army and Slobodan Milošević. And they provoked that, helped as much as they could. However they didn't count on it falling apart this much, the Yugoslavian Army will be destroyed in one fierce collision, that people will run away – breakdown. They didn't count on that resistance of people. I again mention the Wall of Love, women also in Belgrade, and parents, and in Zagreb, were against the war. And Tuđman the entire time from the time when CDU was being formed, from the beginning of the organization of the elections with the entire team and structure of the party and the state, what is the most important thing – Tuđman was holding speeches all the time, warning all the time: “Peace, peace, peace... Green table, for peace... let's separate in peaceful way. In peaceful way.” And offers that confederation when there is no other way, offers a peaceful separation. And accepts what is most important the commission of Badinter and the plan of Badinter that Yugoslavia can't survive anymore, and that Yugoslavia should separate on the line of AVNOJ (Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia) borders. And the first one who accepts Badinter's commission was Croatia. And after that also Alija accepts, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbs in Bosnia do not accept it. Serbs in Croatia do not accept it. But, so, most people, one and the others accept it. That's the most important moment to point out: Badinter's plan in not used enough by the defence lawyers of our people in Haag. I think this should be elaborated further and a great significance should be given to it. It's true that in the heads of people, the individual politicians the more familiar thing was Banovina and the division of Yugoslavia in this way – but that's passé! Behind that Banovina or the division of Yugoslavia another Yugoslavia was created, another borders were created, another states were created and other nations in Yugoslavia. Based on that, Tuđman concludes: Banovina is a better suggestion – but it's not real. The reality is Badinter's commission. And that's the official position of all Croatian official bodies: the Parliament, and the Government, and CDU and any other politics. So, Badinter's commission, AVNOJ borders and a peaceful separation. That's the prayer book that is prayed every day. And never outside of those borders and that context, no one ever went outside – not even Tuđman. Never. Remember that this part, this moment is very important. Well, why am I saying that now? Because Croatia, consolidating its ranks, somehow sees the attack on Bosnia and Herzegovina, and sees the danger for itself. And goes to build Bosnia and Herzegovina with Alija Izetbegović based on the same concept.

So, on the concept that Croatia is being built on, the infrastructure and to keep BH as a whole consisting of three constitutive nations.

**So, again according to Badinter?**

According to Badinter's idea of the breakdown of Yugoslavia. And on that line I go to Bosnia as the President of the Executive Council of CDU. I think I was there for fourteen days, maybe more, maybe less, I don't know. That was, as far as I can remember... as far as I can remember that was the end of January and the beginning of February 1992. My seat was in Bugojno, but I went to Prozor, I went to Vakuf and some other smaller places. I don't know anymore. We held, well I don't know, hundreds of meetings of CDU in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where we spread that idea of president Tuđman, the idea of CDU of Croatia, the idea that was also accepted by Alija Izetbegović: united, undivided Bosnia and Herzegovina with three constitutive nations. And that should be divided on a referendum, as it was also decided in Croatia, if they want to stay in Yugoslavia or leave Yugoslavia with a referendum. So, the same postulate but in another way. Those meetings of mine, those talks, and that, they produced many fruits. Because on the referendum that was held on 29.02.1992 over two million people went to the polls – but Muslims, Bosnians and Croats. All Serbs, I can't say all Serbs, but most Serbs abstained. Bosnia and Herzegovina was created on that referendum where 63.7% of voters on the electoral roll voted.

**63.7?**

63.7. And from those 63.7 – 99.4% voted for the untied, undivided Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Can you repeat just the number please.**

99.4% out of 63 that voted...99.4% voted for the untied and undivided Bosnia and Herzegovina. So, in what way was Bosnia and Herzegovina formed as united, undivided country? With whose votes? If Croats had abstained as Serbs did, there would have been only some forty percent left, that's how many Muslim i.e. Bosniak people there was at the time besides Croats, and so on. Because, I think those are not correct, precise statistics that there was at the time according to the census 40% of Muslims, 30 and something percent of Serbs, and officially, 17.6 or 5 percent of Croats. Now, when you add up that 62%, and 40% are Muslims, and 23 and something percent voted on the Croatian side without Muslims for the united...And there is 17% of them. That means that from 17 to 23 percent that voted on the list of referendum were also Serbs. There was no one else. Muslim were all for. And the Croats were all for. And now, that extra that appears between the proportional inhabitants that are Croats and Muslims is larger then the one on the census. That means that also a part of Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina also voted on the referendum for the united and undivided Bosnia and Herzegovina. That's the essence. From that moment on everything was idle talk and illusions about the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Because if there was ever a necessity to divide Bosnia and if there was a chance to divide Bosnia – that was above all on the referendum and with the referendum. I personally participated in that, on that referendum. According to that, Croats with the list, literally with the list voted for the united Bosnia and Herzegovina. And now illusions of Dušan Bilandžić, or anyone else about the division of Bosnia, of Tuđman with Milošević – oh come on, please, and Tuđman sends his President of the Executive Organ of his party for a month to Bosnia to try to persuade, to hold some kind of meetings...of course and the entire leadership of CDU. Bosnia and Herzegovina was in that context on that line. So, that's another seal that there is no division of Bosnia by Croatia, and

that Croatian people were for the united, undivided Bosnia and Herzegovina on 29.02.1992. All the stories further develop the way they develop. Croatia mostly liberates itself also from the army, the army leaves Croatia. The army leaves after that agreement that Tuđman made above all. That agreement in Sarajevo on 02.02 that the army will retreat from Croatia. And than that agreement that was signed in Split, i.e. on that ship. Army slowly leaves Croatia – it's true that they go to Bosnia and Herzegovina, they concentrate there. But it's in the phase of breakdown. According to that, it needs a lot of time to concentrate, not any more on the level of the Yugoslavian People's Army but on the level of Serbian Army. And also the Serbian Army experienced a terrible defeat. And Milošević. That data nobody, at least I haven't heard that anyone has used it: I had in the Secretariat of the Internal Affairs several of our Croatian people. The reciprocity was in the Federal Secretariat there were so many Croats, so many Bosnians, so many Montenegrins, so many of that, and there were also our personnel there. Our personnel were our personnel. I will not say even today the name of the man who informed me and minister Boljkovac that the latest data – I think that was somewhere at the beginning of 1992, the end of 1991 – when we received the data that there are 300.000 first-recruits from Serbia, Serbs, left Serbia. 300.000 first-recruits! First-recruits are people who are called to the army in the first wave, in the first dash... It's usually some seven, eight percent of the nationally capable for the army, maximum of ten percent. If within Yugoslavia there are 7 million Serbs or so; if it's 300.000; then it means that the half of first-recruits left Serbia – and Serbia has nothing to attack fiercely Croatia with, nor Bosnia and Herzegovina. That's the other catch. So, the breakdown of the Yugoslavian Army on the appeal of Tuđman; and second, escape. Milošević tells the story: "Serbs can't work, but they can fight". And now it was proven that they don't want to fight. They escape. And here this rupture is created, and the strengthening and forming of the Croatian army...

### **Would you like a break?**

...building up arms... Just to drink some coffee. Because also in Bosnia and Herzegovina the Army of BH is formed. Well, now comes a period that's not completely clear to me. That's why about it I'll... not talk. The conflict of Muslims and Croats in Bosnia. We should see the entire thing... How do I see it? Conceptually. Serbs occupied one part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, quite a big one. They pushed back Muslims, Bosniaks and Croats from that eastern and northern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There was a lot of running away. Those are those so called refugees. Where do the refugees run to? They run towards southern parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. And they run to Croatia. Croatia at the time, according to my records, somewhere in 1992 has refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina – and they were mostly Muslims – some 600.000. That was an additional burden for Croatia, impossible to overcome. But never the less Croatia found a way through its diaspora, through its diaspora also in Europe, and in America, and in Australia a lot of humanitarian help that those people... well and help of other states. I personally... That was mostly lead by Mate Granić, and he knows these details better that I do, but I also participated in that. I know I went to many countries, went to ask for prefabricated houses to accommodate those refugees, to form some kind of oases where possible, then division on families, then on houses, on towns, on apartments... and in that way to form same kind of assembly centres where they will be temporarily placed – because Europe did not accept the live force, people. The overseas countries also accepted people who wanted to go. People didn't want to run far from their homes – and that moment we do not point out enough in favour of the Croatian state. So, there was no discussion on the joint criminal undertaking, on contrary Croatia does everything to solve the conflict within Yugoslavia in a peaceful way, in a peaceful way and behind the green table. And at the same time in the places where war focal points were created accepts

all refugees and displaced persons, no matter the nation, affiliation, citizenship etc. So, there is everything among those runaways. The majority however were Muslims, because at the time they were in eastern and northern Bosnia the most threatened. If some kind of joint undertaking of Croatia existed – that was then saving, saving those poor exiled people. At the time I was filling the post of the President of the District Council, President of the Executive Committee of the CDU, councillor in the Parliament, then I became the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of the Interior, and then after that I became the Minister for the Rebuilding of Croatia. At that time I was the Minister for Rebuilding. Instead rebuilding bridges, schools and so on – we took care of the people, how to accommodate them, to make sure they are not hungry, we went abroad to ask help for them and so on. And that was great material help. But people were rarely accepted. No. Mostly Norway, you will be surprised Czech Republic, Slovakia, partly Hungary. But those stronger countries rather gave material help then... and houses, caravans and all – but you stay where you are. That's that part of Croatia towards Bosnia that was organized in this way. The other part: Croatia is among the first countries that recognized Bosnia and Herzegovina. I think that recognition came somewhere already on 07.04.1992 and we founded the embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina already on 23.09.1992, and that the first Croatian ambassador was Zdravko Stančević. And then it changed the way it did. Bosnia and Herzegovina first made a decision and founded a temporary Office in Croatia and that was, as far as I can remember, somewhere in the first half of July. I think it might have been on 19.02.1992. So, everything was in 1992. And that was on the level of two embassies, two states and that president Tuđman will, when it was formed and that embassy was established, personally open the embassy, the embassy of Croatia in BH on 14.06.1994. So, he personally. So, when we talk about the relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, those are those relations. Always, and invariably, and everywhere: the united, undivided Bosnia and Herzegovina. Well, now, there is a "but". On one occasion president Tuđman did state, and everybody is mentioning that now claiming that he was dividing Bosnia. "If it occurred to someone not to be united, undivided – united and undivided – Bosnia and Herzegovina, but that it should be formed in another way, then Croatia will know how to protect its historical, geographical, political, economic and other interests." Then it was rumoured about some kind of small Muslim country around Sarajevo, Muslim state. That according to my knowledge, according to my judgement was the propaganda of Slobodan Milošević because he wanted 75% of Bosnia for Serbia. So, the idea of Great Serbia on Bosnia: Serbs should get 75% of Bosnia. Alija Izetbegović: Sarajevo and the circle around it. And the Turkish Croatia – that means Bihać and something down there around Mostar – Croatia. Franjo Tuđman a priori judged that and refused. That's beyond dispute. There are many documents about it. And the most integral illustration of the relations of Croatia and Bosnia was presented in his report. I think that was on May 30<sup>th</sup> 1993 in the Croatian parliament. His speech about Bosnia and the Serbian question I literally published in my book, from word to word. And I claim that that position that he presented at the time in the Parliament, that it was his position and the position of the official politics of Croatia – and it was identical from the first day of 1990 until that appearance in the Parliament in 1993. His position was always like that. No other.

**You were the close co-worker of the president Tuđman?**

I was...

**You were often with him, is that right?**

Somewhere until April 1994 I was so to say with him every day. Because he extremely appreciated that function of the President of the Executive Committee, and that Executive Committee, and my work in the Executive Committee. And he appreciated me the most and gave me the function of the commissioner, the president of the delegation of the Republic Croatia in negotiations with Serbs and with international factors, from the United Nations to the European Council, those commissions, associations that were on the level of UNPROFOR, observers and so on. I was in that function the leader of that delegation for four years. I think that my first meeting was somewhere in February, the official one, of 1992 in New York with Cyrus Vance. I know I waited for 03.03. So, I waited for 03.03 in New York with Vance, when the agreement in Daruvar was signed. That agreement has been prepared for two years. It was prepared by the international forces, first the United Nations, then UNPROFOR and so, according to those changes of those international forces and associations on the territory of Croatia. And the biggest credit for that had general Zabala who was in the sector west. Because according to the Vance plan for Croatia, Croatia was divided in four zones: north, east, west and south. The west was around Pakrac, Daruvar. Here were, the Norwegian was for the civil questions. He was called Fisher, I don't know his name. And the military commander of the sector west was Zabala, general from Argentina. We met God knows how many times: from that attack on Pakrac, the rebellion of Serbs until the Daruvar agreement. Also a big role had Džakula Veljko, a Serb who organized a rebellion and the president of SDP (Serbian Democratic Party) in Pakrac, who saw when the Croatian special unit put to flight all of that, what force they have, and what force Croatia has. He is a convert: from the organizer of the rebellion in Pakrac he became according to me one of the most important negotiators for the peaceful solution of the Serbian question in Croatia. My theme number one of the book is: peaceful solution of the Serbian question in Croatia and it goes through all the parts of all 18 units. And I point that out: that was the official politics of the Croatian state and its organs – the president, the parliament, the government and all other bodied. And not only that Croatia formed this delegation of mine, but especially with that it formed a delegation for the negotiations with the army headed by the general Agotić, Rašeta – Agotić. That's the known thing. Especially the government had its team of people, a State Committee for the Solution of the Serbian question containing 70 people was formed in Croatia, it was headed by Joža Manolić. And those 70 people were Croats, and Muslims and mostly Serbs. How and in what way? And we also published the integral text of that agreement in my book: How to solve the Serbian question. That text talks about, I would say, to the smallest detail that the solution of the Serbian question is in Croatia. And of course: not only that this text of that program, that agreement was signed only by Croats, but also Serbs in it. The same way the Daruvar agreement was signed by the Serbian side, three, four districts around Daruvar, Pakrac, headed by Džakula, and Croats, and international factors. So that, Croatia offered many contacts, ways but always to solve in a peaceful way behind the green table. My 52 meetings on the level of New York, Geneva, Vienna, Lillehammer, Budapest, and in Croatia: Topusko, Daruvar...who knows...Zagreb...where we all had sessions, Geneva, mostly in Geneva, the most often in Geneva. That delegation that I was leading with the international factors, always under the auspices of UNPROFOR or some other international organ, and the leading people of the international associations were: Cyrus Vance, Stoltenberg, Owen, Voebek, Arens...You have 150 of them in my book. They were always participants in all occasions and on all levels of that delegation, and the meeting. And always the first sentence in the preamble was: peaceful solution of the conflict that erupted between Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Tell me, can we go back to that statement of Tuđman, the statement that starts with “if”.**

Yes.

**Do you know in what situation was that statement given? To whom it was given? How did it come to that? I what context?**

I think that it was given before the Washington agreement. Because at the time there were some ideas on several levels. I called that axis or connection, Bon – Paris. There were some ideas on how to solve that Bosnian question. Then there was the initiative from Italy. I don't know, Italy, Italy with Paris, with France, with Germany. And then there was an idea on the level of Czechoslovakia. It was still Czechoslovakia. Hungary. Then idea, right, how they would solve it. And from Washington... I may be wrong concerning the time, but I wouldn't say, when the idea of engagement by Clinton I think, or still Bush. It's hard to say. When that one who was in Dayton the main negotiator from America, the politician... I will remember his name – Holbrook, I'm blocked a little bit. When the Dayton agreement was created, and before it the Washington agreement, then there were those ideas that it would be good for Bosnia and Herzegovina... the ideas from the outside. Here, to my ears came also some statements because I was in the Ministry of the Interior, international intelligence, counterintelligence services were very present on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia. And their jobs were not always clean in the spirit of the recommendation of the resolution of the Security Council. I write about that in my book. Details. So that, I think that partially also the conflict between Croats and Muslims was on that line. That dirty work of the counterintelligence services. Because, look, Daruvar agreement when it was made, I'm in a session with Vance and my team in New York. And the two of us came into conflict. He doesn't allow me to talk about the past, the history, the culture but "we Americans wish and want only pragmatism. We are a practical nation." And I told him: "Please don't be angry, don't be offended. You can not talk about the past because you don't have it. You are only 200 years old. And we have our past. We had the Kingdom, and you are now creating the Croatian state with your vague formulations. In 925 our king was crowned by the pope, and it wasn't some kind of king from Hlebina. The King. The pope crowned him in 925. Now you say that the Croats did not have sovereignty roots. What are you talking about?" and so on. Our union with Austria, and with Hungary – Hungarians. That's a long story. And with Yugoslavia. But another story is that we had a state in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and the king that was crowned by the pope. Well, now I told him that. And he told me: "But I'm not interested in your past. I'm interested in pragmatism." I took out from my bag Daruvar agreement. "It's still warm", I said. "Here you go. In English." He read it. Tombery was sitting next to him. He asks: What? Tombery knows nothing about it. He asks me: "Did Tombery know about that?" I said: "Tombery is not my office worker. Tombery is your office worker, not mine. And my office workers who did this now in Daruvar, yesterday, there, they sent me the agreement and yours didn't send it to you. That's your problem. And that's the agreement signed by Croats and Serbs, and it was confirmed by the international factors Zabala and Fisher who are leading there the one military, the other civilian sector. And he doesn't know what to do with himself. He says five minutes or ten minutes, I don't know, time out. Everyone goes to his room and come back. And he is standing. We are all sitting down, he is standing. I think to myself: why are you standing, who...are you standing, right? At one moment he said: "Mr. Degoricija..." I said: "Yes?" "I owe you an apology." "Excuse me, why? For what?" "Well, do you accept the apology or not?" I said: "I have to know the reason and then I'll answer." And he repeats..."I accept the apology, why shouldn't I. Why?" "You were right. This agreement is the most that was accomplished at this point." I said: "Thank you very much." And he sat down. He asked me how we will pull this through. I said: "Simply." I liked to make a rough joke. "Four ice-cream men", that means those white observers, right, civilians

without weapons, “on the bridge near Okučani so that neither Karadžić, nor Martić could come to the area of the sector north. And all is solved.” The assembly of Serbs in Okučani sanctioned the agreement with three votes against and 60 for. So, it’s solved. And he told me: “Well, but I don’t have the mandated according to the article 16 of the charter of the United Nations.” I said: “I’m not asking you to act with arms but to put civilians.” And then he said: “But still I don’t have the authorization.” I said: “Then I leave the negotiation in New York. I have nothing to talk about anymore. We will \*\*\* signed agreement, confirmed by Croats and Serbs and the international factors, and you act as you know.” Because, what I want to say with this now? That not even all international factors wanted with a great wish and heart to create peace in this area. After all they needed some kind of distance to think how and in what way one part, especially the English, and also partly the French...Mediterranean goes to Sarajevo to a meeting. To support what? They go to save Yugoslavia, right. What did Carrington and the group from England do but always protect some kind of Yugoslavia? Therefore, it wasn’t possible to save it anymore because it fell apart, but they are looking for some kind of possibility after all...but to keep a distance or to preserve the existing situation and to create in that area favourable condition to act, to create that under... It is one way of thinking because he was well informed about everything that was happening to Tuđman in those international factors. That was one way of thinking. If it occurred to someone to shape and reshape Bosnia and Herzegovina in another way, then the Croats will know how to protect its historical, geographical, political, economic and other interests. So, not to take that out of context! Tuđman wants to divide – no, he warns the international factors: do not even try that because then we will also know what position to take. And all of this that we are doing, we are doing in order to solve everything in a peaceful way. I remember a meeting of VONS. It was, how to say that, he was beside himself, upset when he found out that the first conflict between Croats and Muslims erupted. He sent dozens of people to Bosnia, down there, those Herzegovina and Bosnian people; right now, no matter the price the conflict should be stopped. Stop the conflicts! Where now, look...also in his ranks there were people who didn’t think the same way. One of them responded to my book and he scolded me that I attacked a man who was the only one who wanted war, and wanted to solve everything in BH with war. So, it took eighteen years and he still hasn’t realized that the Croatian politics and Tuđman’s politics did not want war, but the peaceful way, without blood, without victims and so on. So, I will personally say something else in favour of president Tuđman because of that joint criminal undertaking. If there was anything in the world that he hated – and he didn’t, I think that he didn’t know how to hate – I personally think that he hated the war. He was shocked when he heard about any victim that could have been avoided. I heard him say hundreds of times: Uh! And look, one time Volebek Knut, Tuđman and I were talking, and he told Volebek that he is an exceptional person. Volebek was the ambassador, he was the minister of foreign affairs of Norway, he was in the function of United Nations, and he was extremely engaged here as the co-chairman of the negotiations with the local Serbs. Of course and when he had some results, that first, Topusko ...that’s almost his work. And then in Vienna. And then in Lillehammer. Then he saw that he was destroyed on that line...Achievements almost only to sign the agreement. It was all agreed in Vienna. Only to sign. Serbs. They did not sign. And then he decided to go to Belgrade to see Milošević and ask him to react, not to inhibit those Serbs from Croatia to sign and that Milošević didn’t want to receive him. So, he was so carried away with this peace idea because he saw that we wanted peace. When president Tuđman in his and my presence said: “Well, if I could, if I could make Balkan similar to Scandinavia, then I would then I would go peacefully to the other world.” Volebek remembered that, that what Tuđman said. And the two of us exit present’s office, and he asks me, he says: “I want to ask you something.”, “Ask.” We were very close. And even now we keep in touch. “Did Tuđman really mean what he said?” I said:

“Yes.” He tells me, he is looking at me and says: “I believe you. I believe you.” So, if somebody is saying something now about the joint crime, undertaking – then this sentence should be rubbed in their noses: “If I could make Balkan similar to Scandinavia.” That means to make Scandinavian countries.

### **Of course. And in that way solve...**

In that way solve the hundred year's war and so on. So, those were his words. Those were his thoughts. That was his idea. The fact that he was a determined man, that he was a statesman par excellence. He thought for a long time, he consulted for a long time in order to give his opinion, and then he wouldn't change it that easily. So that this part is. And that's why I in my book, and it should be read, wrote also Tuđman in people and with people. That's another Tuđman. That's the direct Tuđman, with a smile on his face, who likes to make a joke, who even likes to have a glass of wine, make a toast and get together with people without any necessity for safety. And above all he was brave. He was brave when in 1991 he went to Belgrade with Manolić and Mesić, when he could have been arrested and sentenced for an anti-state act in Yugoslavia. Somebody guaranteed him, I think it was Kadijević, that he will not be accused and that he will not be arrested, and he went. I went with him to several front-lines... Directly, on the front-line, a hundred meters from the Chetnik pillbox, showing that he is for the peace, for the peaceful solution... “Slavko, do all you can, use all your contacts so that they would accept peace and that we will go with peace.” And now they say that he, I don't know, expelled them. He didn't expel. Tuđman stopped Serbs from moving out. Publicly. He couldn't come among them because they didn't allow that he comes and makes speeches. But he did it publicly on television, on radio he said: “Don't go anywhere. Stay here. Your home is here. Here is...”, and so on. But Belgrade organized everything. Therefore, those unfortunate Serbs of ours, I quote that in several places in my book, and individuals and groups of people that I negotiated with. They believed in the force and the power of the Yugoslavian People's Army, in the help of Russia to save Yugoslavia and they blindly believed Slobodan Milošević, those gatherings, those big speeches and so on. That carried them away, carried them away, carried them away. And I always reminded them of Pribičević, on his idea, his way, that until 1924 he was for Great Serbia and for the kingdom. And after that there was the agreement with Maček and so on, coalition and so on, and a peaceful solution, and to solve the Serbian question, nowhere else but in Croatia. So, Serbs in Croatia have to solve their minority question and so on in Croatia – and not to sow, plow, dig in Croatia and pray to God that the rain falls in Belgrade. That's that device. There, so we said that concerning those recognitions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we mentioned the embassies, one and the other i.e. the committee. We said... what else did we say? That relationship of Tuđman and Alija. I can say another thing privately. I had some three, four incomplete meetings with Alija Izetbegović when I either received him or accompanied him in Geneva, then in Zagreb. And I was present on the meeting of one... I think it was VONS, yes it was VONS when Alija Izetbegović offered Tuđman: “Let's make a deal. Let's make a deal to create between us Muslims...” – then they were Muslims not Bosniaks – “and Croats a union, even if it were customs union. To guarantee you that I think seriously and that I'm not pretending, there we will accept as the commander-in-chief of the army of Bosnia and Herzegovina general Špegelj.” So, also this kind of talks existed. But, listen. Was it political time, moment to create such a union? Tuđman wasn't in favour at that moment. He said: “Let's finish first that terrible aggression on Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Let's talk after that about the interstate relationships”, and this, and so on. So, when today I listen to some of those people... I claim – and until today nobody disproved me – and in my book I say this: there is no spoken, or written, or video recording of the idea that Tuđman divides

Bosnia. And when an academic or someone else says: I don't have any arguments, I don't have documents but I think that Tuđman was dividing Bosnia – then it is nonsense. Those are evil spirits who want to spite Croatia. Therefore, if the international factor takes all the resolutions of the Security Council, if it takes the minutes of all 52 meetings of my delegation and the international factors, they will find that the first sentence that Croatia uttered on all those occasions was: “to solve in a peaceful way”. And internationalization of the problem of the breakdown of Yugoslavia was urged by Croatia. Point that out. Write this fiercely to those people who defend there. So, the internationalization of the problem of the breakdown of Yugoslavia was asked by Croatia. Jović, the Presidency of Yugoslavia and Serbia opposed this. “Every foreigner who comes to this country will be treated as the occupier.” – these were the words of Jović in the Presidency of Yugoslavia where I was present. And when I said: “If we can't agree to solve this Serbian question in Croatia let us internationalize it, let us call the international factors to come. Arbitration.” And he told me: “Listen Degoricija, be careful what you say in the Presidency of Yugoslavia. Every foreigner who comes to Yugoslavia will be treated as the occupier. And don't play with that.” So, those were the words... and it has to be pointed out – that's the essence of my every word and sentence in the book – that aggression was carried out against Croatia with the goal of conquering its territory and the wish to establish Great Serbia on that territory. So, it was a conquering, imperialistic goal towards Croatia. And that Croatia is, and in that context especially Bosnia and Herzegovina, that they were victims and that you can not talk in any other way but about the aggressor and the victim; and that this victim with its force – not with anybody else's help – but its own force, its own organization, its own people confronted that aggression and broke that aggression. And it broke it also in Daruvar, and in Vukovar, and in Gospić and on all other fronts, and in Knin on the final line when the last operation was happening. And the last operation passed through all except Petrova Gora like through the Swiss cheese. There was no resistance because they organized a month ago, you also have a document in my book, that retreat of all Serbian soldiers and civilians. And that was separated. Men separately. Women and children separately. And only that general Bulat and that crazy Mile Novaković organized resistance on Petrova Gora, they didn't want to leave it. You know how they ended up when Petar Stipetić became the commander of our forces and gave them an ultimatum: or you surrender or you will be destroyed. Then they surrendered. And there was some wondering, political and military. But individual. So, we can not talk in Haag on the international level about the individual excess. Croatia sentenced the individual excesses and the carriers of the excesses – was it hard or strict enough or not, that's another story. But it did from the very beginning, at the very start. There were individuals – yes. Yes. And the ones who wanted revanchism, and who wanted revenge and so on. I personally received an incredible shock when a man from the area of Vukovar came to me and praises my undertaking of peace and understanding. And he told me that he congratulates me. I'm thinking, well why you came here now to congratulate me on my negotiations and that. He said it's the only way and it will end like this – but I, Degoricija, took a vow. Do you know what a vow is? I'm thinking: “God, what will you say?” “I took a vow. They killed nine of my loved ones.” And what am I supposed to tell him? What to tell him? I stayed quiet, he and I, we looked eye to eye. All the family, father, grandfather, grandmother, daughters, I don't know what, killed his children – and he took a vow. And what can you do now? So, there were such cases. No one can deny that and no one ever denied it. But the official politics always asked, searched for a way, advised. I went to the 5<sup>th</sup> military district with Rašeta to negotiate sixteen times. The Way of Love, 30.000 women below the 5<sup>th</sup> military district cheer, cheer so that they make the place reverberate, and I have to pass through them to get to Rašeta. Everybody knows me. Everybody knows me. They don't exactly look at me nicely. And it is night. And it is night.

Someone sends me to hell. Someone sends me somewhere. Someone says: Leave the man alone, let him do his job, and so on. And I pass through them to the 5<sup>th</sup> military up there on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, to Rašeta, and I say to Rašeta: “Do you want to enter history? Rašeta, not everyone gets the chance. You are the only one who has the chance to enter history to save Serbs in Croatia, your people. Let’s go to the balcony and tell these people to turn from Gotovac to us; that Rašeta and Degoricija agreed that the 5<sup>th</sup> military district will be under the command of the Croatian state. And we solved everything in Croatia. The Serbian question and everything. Everyone who wants to stay will stay here. We have the authorization. Everyone who wants to go will go in the way that they will be escorted out and not even lose one hair from their head. Let’s go Rašeta.” I know that KOS is taping him and me what I’m saying, but I’m saying it just so that they could hear it. I want to... And he is looking at me and he says: “Do you really think that I could do it?” And I say: “Why not? You have here, I know now \*\*\* number 60 people. Are they with you or against you? Are they for my idea or against it? It’s all the same to me. There are 60 of them. I snap my fingers and 300 people come in here. Commandos. And nothing will happen to no one. Nothing. Every one of them will say what he wants. You say what you want and you stay at the head of the 5<sup>th</sup> military district in the Croatian state.” He was quiet. Of course that Kadijević heard it too. Because they were eavesdropping on our conversation. It wasn’t without response. On the second or third day he came to me, unannounced. We always announced ourselves... and I thought – it’s over. Now. There, now, now the man will say what I suggested. However we drank, I think, a litre of whisky. We drank for four hours and he got up and said: “Well, I’ll go now. It was enough.” I said: “Andrija, you came with an intention.” “Tomorrow is another day.” “It is, but come on, tell me now. Come on now, tell me now.” “Tomorrow is another day.” And he stayed on that “tomorrow is another day”. And that night, at midnight I’m informed by the special phone: “On the border there are Andrija’s wife and daughter, they are going through Slovenia to Hungary and Vojvodina. What do we do?” “Let them through. Let them through.” Midnight. I called from bed the president’s office: “Are you asleep?” “No.” “Here I am:” I said: “President, it’s over with Andrija Rašeta.” “What? Has he agreed?” “No. wife and daughter went to Vojvodina through \*\*\*. I let them go.” “And you think it’s over?” “Over. He decided to stay with Kadijević and YPA.” And our contacts ended that day. And we met 16 times. So, sixteen times the direct representative of the president Tuđman went to see Andrija Rašeta, he was the second-in-command of the commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> military district, and that Života Avramović was the commanding officer \*\*\* no connection. That’s a drunk. He was actually a big nothing. Sixteen times. Sixteen times some three, four, ten hours of conversations. Persuade him: let’s do this the peaceful way. And now someone is talking about the joint criminal undertaking? They don’t know what they are talking about! Here, so, there were also such contacts and on other levels. And others. I’m talking about what I know, where I participated. And Rašeta appeared later in some interviews. The question was what he thought about the talks with Degoricija and so on. And he said: “Unfortunately, past tense.” Listen to this: unfortunately. So, there were people who we did have contact with, but of course the majority was... I told him that honestly: the idea of the Great Serbia with you, brothers Serbs, fell on fertile ground. But you are very mistaken. YPA will not save you. Russia will not save Serbia. Therefore, what are you talking about? The relation of forces, us and you, 21 compared to 1. Finger on the forehead! And we will not use force, but I’m here so that we could agree. You understand what I’m talking about? The relation of forces is... We could have organized the Storm a year before we did. The relation was the same. The effect would have been the same. But we didn’t, because we asked for the peaceful solution. And sacrificed. Of course, and bought time to organize, and to build up arms and so on. That’s, there, my message. It exists, those details that I’m not interested in now. I’m especially not interested in those individual military actions, activities. Because Peter Stipetić can testify a

lot better about it, Lošo can, many of those generals and people who were concerned with military questions can. And those individual small disputes that existed on the level of hundred villages, towns etc., we solved that the same way as always... there is a story like this – like that, right. We could have gone more fiercely in those individual actions of the troop destroying of their partial units and so on. However the politics was: not to escalate, not to start conflicts, if possible avoid conflicts with YPA. In Pakrac I was approached by the commander of ZNG, the special unit, and he said: “Degoricija, within 15, 20 minutes I will mine all ten tanks of the YPA. They’ll all fly into peaces.” I said: “Are you crazy? What’s wrong with you, by God? Well, do you know the message of the president Tuđman? No matter what avoid the conflict with YPA.” Tuđman’s saying, it is known that when he negotiates that he negotiates too much, that this, that that, that I don’t know, that he went to Milošević, he said: “I will negotiate with the devil himself just to stop the war, and that we stop having victims, and not to spill blood.” Well you have to understand that: why the president of a state and armed forces that have 200, 300.000 soldiers, well armed. He doesn’t have to bow to everyone. I think that among those international factors it should be good to hear and see general Valgren. That’s a Swede who was only for a month the head of the military forces of the United Nations on the territory of Croatia and for the whole Yugoslavia, who absolutely had in his head how to solve the question of the conflict in Croatia. However, just because he had those ideas he was replaced within a month. That Valgren was extraordinary... I describe him well in the book. It’s worth reading to see what that man... The first thing he said was: “Degoricija, how many border crossings do you have towards Serbia and other countries?” I said: “Some 15, 16.” “How soon will you be able to close them?” I said: “In 24 hours. Let’s do this. And there is on logistics.” Well, I said: “Shell we, general?” “I’m not allowed to.” Screw that. So, there are those things that should be used, that Croatia, but I always point out, that on all levels all the time and on every place there was one single thought: to solve the conflict and the Serbian question in Croatia in a peaceful way. To solve in a peaceful way the united, undivided Bosnia and Herzegovina. That was the general genesis of Tuđman and Tuđman’s politics. Of course, not of some people from Bosnia and Herzegovina...they accepted it but they didn’t act like that. The unpleasant came out of that.

**Mr. Degoricija, when we were preparing our conversation then we included in the thesis that you will mention the Sarajevo agreement.**

Yes.

**The recognition of BH by Croatia, the forming of the embassy, we touched that a bit...**

We said.

**Do you think that in this part we should ...?**

It’s not necessary.

**It’s not necessary? Good. And the meetings Tuđman, president Tuđman – president Izetbegović. Is there anything else in this part...?**

We have that this existed, there are transcripts, that there were maybe hundred of those meetings and gatherings.

**Were you maybe present on them...?**

Not much. Always the same. It was always the same. No matter what to act internationally and together. No matter what to solve it in a peaceful way and to internationalize the problem. There was anger from Alija towards Belgrade, and towards the creation of the BH Army. And we knew what was being done. And that arms build-up of the BH Army went through Ploče and through Croatia.

**You knew about it then?**

Absolutely, everyone.

**President Tuđman knew about it?**

Everyone, everyone. Everyone knew it and everyone approved that BH army should be created and that BH... Now there were some mean things from Alija's side. But I can't go into details. How much those Mujahedins were necessary for Bosnia and Herzegovina, that's another story. A long story. How tactical were, let's say, certain leaders of Croatia, the Croatian part of Bosnia and Herzegovina towards Alija – it's again hard to judge that because I don't have enough arguments to judge it. But there was some clumsiness, and there was disobedience of the Tuđman's ideas. There was disobedience. It was mentioned the other day by general Tus, and general Stipetić, that military part. They mention the double command of the Croatian forces and in Croatia towards Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. So that I don't want to get into this. But it's obvious that I know, I know some political occasions of that... Look, Tuđman ordered to the military forces and to us politicians: no matter what save Bosanska Posavina. I was present in his office when the television editor and director Vrdoljak came to inform him that our army was leaving Bosanska Posavina. He literally went crazy.

**The president went crazy?**

He was foaming at the mouth. What's that? Yesterday you informed me that \*\*\*\*\*. Who ordered that? Who was...? It stayed like that. And the commanding officers who were in that part of our army brought the command to retreat. I haven't seen it. And there was talk about some kind of, how was it called, humane relocation. I don't know what that was. It never occurred to Tuđman. But people, individuals, were talking in the name of the President's Office. They were talking in the name of the Presidency, in the name of the party, in the name of VONS. And the wrong things.

**Were those the people who had the right to talk in the name...?**

They didn't have the right. They didn't have. They didn't interpret Tuđman's thoughts. My book is for now received very well. The media attention was more than expected. And there, it's been two months since 2000 books were sold. Yes, yes. Now I have to bring out the second edition. And even from Canada, even from Australia, Switzerland, from... there, yesterday I received a call from Belgrade from a certain, he says his name is Stefanović, I don't know how: "Slave, we know each other..." "What is it, tell me?" "You wrote that book very well. Come on, send it to me so I can have it." I say: "Listen, I have several authors' copies but the book is in the bookshops so find someone from the town to send it to you, buy the book. It's cheap. It's 100 kuna, I said. Don't make me send you the book, I said. You can, the book is on the market, the book is everywhere so, well, right, don't make me send it to

you.” I mean, I can but there is no need. So, what do I want to say? There are some people who say that I said several things about Šušak that were too rough. I don’t think I have. Because I’m not talking about anyone personally. I’m talking about facts, about political actions, about military actions, about the safety actions, about acquisition of weaponry, about the actions in diaspora. So, I’m stating facts. If he is part of those facts he has to be mentioned by name and surname, and that’s that. Therefore, I intended to avoid subjectivity as much as I could. It’s hard to be objective, but then I tried to corroborate that with documentation, the things that I’m saying, what I’m claiming, with newspaper articles, some kind of resolutions, some kind of solution, contract or some kind of document that will confirm what I’m saying. Because I know that memoir material and memoir expositions are always subjective. A person can not be objective. But there, that subjectivism \*\*\*\* and I think that I avoided most of it through all that documentation. Yesterday I met a professor from the Faculty of Law, extraordinary personality and he congratulates me in the middle of the street. I say: “Professor, why are you congratulating me? For the love of God, what’s going on?” He says: “Extraordinary. And I would just like to know where did you get all that documentation?” I say: “Professor, I did many things in my life and I saw that it’s very important...” And one of my professors in the University when I was still a student said: If you want to engage in small research, or God forbid, scientific work, then what ever you find that is interesting cut it out and put in a folder. In a folder. In a folder. You know? I made those folders walking around. Now they take up half of my house, and I don’t know what to do with it. I have to arrange it and give it to an archive somewhere etc. because I exhausted myself working on that two, three years and so on.

**But, after six months of rest you will...**

It could be. I will probably try to enlarge it. There are things that I avoided on purpose. But good, I suppose it has to be this way. Because the other message of professor Barada was, and this one I remembered: The history of events is written on the graves of participants. Memoirs yes, but history no. you know. And that’s a big truth. Because for a man to investigate, says...I haven’t, I don’t pretend that it’s a scientific work but it has scientific elements. Because my footnotes, analysis of participants the 700 of them with small biographies it’s not really harmless. There are 150 footnotes in there. There are 160 or 170 participants, international subjects. It’s not just... And I put a lot of information on them. How much the scientific institutions and individuals were used, that’s in there too. And those 150 footnotes make for almost a third of the book. And the footnotes are what explain the terms you used and haven’t explained completely.

**Good. Mr. Degoricija, we are somewhere at the end of our conversation, tell me this: do we have the permission to use your book?**

Absolutely, I recommend sending as many as you can to Haag...

**At least two more editions, let’s say, two editions...**

Yes, yes...

**And there is an important thing here, let’s say it although it has been present in all of that that we were talking about: that book was based on facts, your personal experience, so...**

Notes.

**That's right. It is...**

Archive materials.

**No speculation?**

No.

**It's all facts, based on documents or personal knowledge, and every part of that book is...?**

Measured three times to see if it should be said or not.

**Perfect. There that is... Mr. Degoricija, I interrupted you. Tell me..**

I think that if it's possible for the people I Haag to use it that they have a strong basis of the evidence material that the Croatian politics headed by president Tuđman was absolutely at first for the confederative system, then the separation based on Badinter's idea, and the separation in a peaceful way behind the green table and not conflict and war. And that there is no word about the association and the criminal undertaking. That, who made up that sentence, I had a hard time to remember it, and it's directed in a mean way towards Croatia because the Croatian official... I am not talking about individuals. And the Croatian official politics headed by the president Tuđman and CDU, and government, and parliament, never, never wanted... and always before every action he consulted the international factors. And about the Storm the Americans have to talk. They have to talk because it was arranged with America but, I think, also with other international factors. And it was said: Yes. And even physical help was given. But that's not my part. That's the part that corresponds to other people who know more about it, who worked on that. And there are. I gave, I think, ten years ago, or more, when Haag was created and when the investigators from Haag started digging in some yards and looking for some bones then I gave an interview in Slobodna Dalmacija. It's entirely here in the book that Haag is breaking the Croatian spine on \*\*\* the line \*\*\* were Serbs. And I said: Don't dig in those yards. Look for the bones in the area of Balkan. You have some from the prehistoric man until today. Go for the scientific investigation. Involve the scientific institutions, experts, people, and archives. Every smallest detail should be investigated. Everything is written you just have to find it and document it. That is written in my article from ten years ago. Today I think the same. And every thesis when it's put in front of the people on trial, the people you talk to then to go... and my wish, and my... I am personally against memoir materials. But I'm forced to write a book. But I didn't want pure memoirs but instead documentary as much as possible. Because the goal is to show people exactly that idea that archives exist, that documents exist, and that everything can be fundamentally proved and analyzed. And for this what you do there is a lot in my book\*\*\*\*. Will anyone use it or not...that's another story.

**Mr. Degoricija, thank you very much.**