

SLAVKO HODAK

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Interview conducted in Zagreb

Here we are, my Dictaphone is on, would you please introduce yourself in the beginning, your first and last name, the date, place of birth, place of abode, and profession.

Slavko Hodak, son of Nikola, born 8, of August 1955 in the town of Dreznik, county of Rakovica. At present time retired, in the time of war commissioned officer of the Croatian Army in the Croatian Air Force. At present time I reside in Zagreb, Ulica grada Vukovara 226B, married, father of two children.

Mr. Hodak, reason of our conversation is Hague indictment against the sextet, specifically against General Praljak. The great part of the indictment is relative to prosecutor's thesis of criminal undertaking, criminal association. Therefore I would ask you to remember the period of the beginning of the war, the year 91. than 92. and I am interest in hearing whether there existed – and if so, what kind of co-operation there was between two states, between Republic of Croatia and Republic of Bosnia Hercegovina? The events where you were present at are connected with which territory?

With territory of Bihac, at the beginning of year 92. Officially I arrived to Zagreb in year 92, and from there on I started to get involved with this territory, at my own initiative, and with the knowledge of my superiors.

What does it mean when you say “with knowledge of my superiors”? Does that mean with knowledge of the men who were with you in the Croatian Air Force?

That's right, with the knowledge of my commanders, specifically General Agotic, who also at one time was in that territory. That was boiled down to mainly acquisition of armaments, infantry armaments and ammunitions, and delivery to Bihac territory, respectively 5th Corps.

Would you elaborate on that... How did that come about. That is year 92. does any activity directed to the territory exist or will it sometimes later ...?

The contacts exist generally between HDZ Bihac and Republic of Croatia. Those contacts are more of a political, informative nature, and in connection therewith in the beginning there was no help in materials until the beginning of war activities on the territory of Bosanska Krupa, which later escalated in the wider territory of Bihac. The intensive acquisition of rifle shooting, infantry armaments, but the delivery was a problem. Due o the fact that the entire territory was surrounded , the only possibilities where I was involved, were the transports by air. At the time we were using our airplanes AN 2, which had very small capacity, somewhere to one thousand kilograms, and at the same time the airfield in Coralici was enabled.

Before that, was there an air field?

No, there were ponds, a straight terrain which was in the beginning of year 92 filled...

(interruption of the recording, continuation)

Now I would ask you to introduce yourself again, because we had recording interruption.

Again?

Yes, first and last name...

Slavko Hodak, son of Nikola, born 8th of August 1955. in the town of Dreznik, county of Rakovica, prior county of Slunj.

All right, that's enough. We stopped at ...

Coralici.

At Coralici. How did Coralici become Coralici? How did it become so essential?

Coralici were in the 6. month of 92 enabled, landing strip was made on a primitive infrastructure. The cadres from the air-mechanics, navigators etc. were enabled. That is in connection with the airport. In the beginning the chief of logistics was Hajro, I can't remember now, brother of Bajo.

Brother of Hadzic.

Hadzicev brat Hajro. That's right. In connection therewith, the airport was enabled by former officers of the Croatian nationality, who were left there and who were the specialists, engineers, etc. Specifically Cavor Branko who...

What?

Cavor Branko, yes. He was otherwise an officer, officer in the engineering. Well, now, the commencement of more serious encounters started, when the 5th Corps was formed, and in the composition of the 5th Corps or more specific 502. brigade, which was made of 2 battalions. One battalion was made of warriors, members of Croatian nationality. The Corps is formed from subjects, on the principle of former County Headquarters of the Regional Headquarters of the Territorial Defense. In the middle of 8th month of 92, Vlado Santic arrives to Bihac, otherwise the president of HDZ Bihac, and immediately joins the 502. as deputy to Atif Dudakovic.

He immediately becomes the deputy?

Immediately he becomes deputy to Atif Dudakovic, using their terminology – to commandant. With coming of Vlado some polemics started among the Croatians, because at the time when Vlado was not present in the territory, Croatians from Bihac, respectively HDZ – Bihac, did form HVO.

That leadership of HDZ was for united Bosnia and Hercegovina, along the line of Stjepan Kljucic. At that time the president of HVO, respectively HDZ in Bihac was Tomislav Dretar.

What?

Tomislav Dretar. With coming of Vlado the relationship among the Croatians was disturbed, respectively among HDZ in the meaning of the legitimacy of the leadership – although Vlado was elected in the local elections for the presidency and in that function was council vice-president of the council of Bihac. It means when the HDZ tipped the balance his faction took that battalion from the joint brigade and formed a separate HVO of the Croatians from the region Bihac. They were mainly members of Croatian nationality, although there were quite a few Muslims, but on the commanding functions were all Croatians. Immediately thereafter, doctor Ante Santic, who was deputy of the HDZ, comes here to Zagreb. In the first variance immediately after elections and later when Vlado was not present, and in the time of Dretar – in reality doctor Santic made main moves in everything and he was inclined to verbally attack Muslim leadership, but in practice they would get along quite well. With coming of doctor Santic, he primarily came because of the armaments, he came to me, and after short discussion, because he wasn't familiar with the structure of Ministry of Defense, I took him directly to the logistics to General Cermak, and into the cabinet of the minister Susak etc. Ante got the agreement in principal to arm this brigade. However, everything remained the words, he got some small equipment, but practically didn't come to realization, soon thereafter Vlado came with the same aspiration...

Santic?

Vlado Santic, with the same goal, however, Vlado got immediately, I can't remember now the quantity, but that happened...

Who did he converse with?

With General Roso

Roso?

Roso. Roso took him to Susak etc; practically he got in the beginning complete armaments for a battalion, because we instructed him before, what is needed for a battalion, simply military manner. Then came, he was already there, Bajo...

Bajo Hadzic?

Bajo Hadzic, Senad Palic, later appeared Biban, he was sent by 5th Corpus, to help, respectively to control Bajo and Palic. At that time

when Santic got everything, the flights already started, meaning our small planes AN2 which could take and transfer 1000 kg of cargo, so everything started, moreover there were more armaments. Collected.

Who were the pilots?

Pilots of the Croatian Air Force. The immediate appearance of Bajo, didn't pose any problems to have him included in the transfer of his armaments which he was acquiring. Now I don't know exactly his lines, but he acquired mainly from the same sources, through Cermak etc. which

means with the approval of the minister of Defense It means, those planes did fly and firstly transferred passengers and wounded from there, and then they were placed in the hospitals. From here went several times Biban and Bajo to there. From here, mainly went loads of medicines, food with emphasis on arms, ammunitions. As the situation developed, as the flights were smooth running, the more was flown for 5th Corpus. In the beginning the transfer of the armaments was half – half, and later mainly let's say 10 per cent for HVO, 90 per cent for Fifth Corpus. And so it functioned to 30.12.2002. when last flight was made from Pula airport. The flights primarily went here from Zagreb, and some were from other locations. With help of the politics, those flights were discontinued, and this transport continued, but via UNPROFOR. I believe that a French...

Who arranged that transport?

I didn't participate, I don't know exactly who arranged...

They were French, isn't that right?

French. I know, Vlado was on good terms with them, the commander of HVO Bihach. One part was carried on foot, pedestrian way, that was through Slunj battalion, respectively brigade over polygon Slunj. However, the emphasis was on the departure and arrival of the civilians, soldiers etc. They were mixed groups which often fell into the ambush.

Are you speaking about the groups which went over...?

That's right, let me mention, the composition of those groups I personally didn't know.

Tell me, before we return to those events, when we already touched on Slunj Polygon. You say you don't know the composition of those groups, but do you know who organized and what did those people who went really get on the territory of Croatia, before they went to Bihac region?

They were armed, it means HVO armed them. In general they were Muslims, who wanted to go there to fight the war. They were armed from the uniform to rifle ...

Did they have any training here?

The infantry part didn't, and this in connection with the flights – there was training of the Muslim mechanics, training, some upbringing, respectively updating of the pilots etc. As far as the infantry training, no. There in those groups were Muslims who were formerly in the formations of the Croatian Army and in good part responded to go down there. That went through Vlado Katic, I didn't participate in it, neither I know exactly and particularly.

I know the guides etc who perished. Because our subjects went within the frame of those groups. Concerning scouting of the terrain and coming back, but that is separate story. As far as the group of Biban, Palic and Hajro on behalf of 5. Corpus and Drago Lovric as representative HVO, the orders about it existed, common orders of the commander of 5. Corpus Drekovic and commander of HVO. Santic.

Ramiz?

Ramiz Drekovic, and the commander of Croatian Council of Defense Vlado Santic. Those orders mainly boiled down to co-operation, authorization and to be known who are the representatives of those forces in the surrounded Bihac. Generally this co-operation on this level, was adequate, without any tension, perhaps sometimes whether there are more shipments to 5, Corpus or to Croatian Council of Defense, that was on the level of those performers, but my interest was that the shipments go there.

What do you actually do at the time?

I am concretely an officer of the Croatian Air Force in the operations division. My duties are in the Croatian Air Force, and they are not at all connected with what we are now speaking of. I voluntarily performed that job... I worked at it in my free time, and routinely with the knowledge of my commander.

You never had any problems with that?

No, no, no I had none, meaning that my functional position had no connection with this. I kept the evidence about the people who were there. The contacts existed, when it was necessary to transfer certain people from there to here, I would give the list of our people who should come here, it concerned the women, the children etc. because that was the only way possible to ...And it functioned that way all the time.

All right, lets be more specific. You are saying, you worked in your free time, willingly. Did you care only about Croatian part of the population, or did you care about everybody?

No, only about Croatian part, only about Croatians.

All right, Which were the dominant problems of the Croatians in that territory, what was really the most necessary, that needed solution?

Deprivation, meaning feeding was most dominant, medical help and those that came...

Well, the matters that were the same as with the Muslims?

Yes, yes, yes, but because the Croatian were in the minority they were afraid they will simply be marginalized, and because of that, my role was always that no flight would come without at least 4, 5 Croatians on the flight. So even if the Croatians would appeal that they are marginalized, we could openly tell them,that is not right. The Croatians participate at 50% in everything as the Muslims do, in as much as numerical reality on the terrain is not approximate.

Was anybody else besides you in charge to supervise or at least direct that help ...

Well, like this ...

... To the Croatians who were in such a small number?

Generally I was the closest one to Vlado Santic, there was also Stimac Josip. He didn't get into the details, because he was co-operating on a higher level – if it was necessary to resolve some problem primarily in defusing those eventual tensions concerning the priority between Croats and Muslims. He was very well connected with Bajro, although I wasn't excluded from that, but let's say we didn't intrude to each other, we would always agree what should be resolved because I had more time than he did, maybe I was more engaged. Because of that reason only, and not because of something else. I mentioned previously Drago Lovric as a representative of the Croats from Bihac, because he was born in Bihac, as autochthon, and naturally he knew closely the people so that was a ...let's say three of us bound, one integrity of knowledge to solutions of the problems. Although doctor Santic and Vlado Santic came quite frequently, using the flights, they were here very often, a day or two, and returned back, so there was a complete information concerning the conditions of the Croats on the terrain in Bihac. Although there were frequent unsettled conditions between doctor Santic and Vlado Santic, concerning political conceptions and taking sides among Croats and relations with Muslims, However, that was not reflected as much directly on the people. They had their groups of people and followers, but in the whole that didn't have any negative effect. Although they were there on the terrain, imprisoned each other, tied so ... Yes, yes, because they are cousins, I think relatives, notwithstanding where this Vlado would take the doctor to Pljesevica, tie him up to a tree and there judge him, but there was nothing further in connection there with. Concerning their rapport with Muslims relatively with Drekovic, there was very correct co-operation, most likely due to the personality of Drekovic Ramiz. He most likely stayed at certain distance from those two, relatively Vlado Santic, so there were no verbal tensions with difference when Drekovic at the end of 93. went to other duty, somewhere in Sarajevo when Dudakovic Atif became the commander – then there were tensions between Vlado, commander of HVO and him, but I and not only I, we assessed it was on personal level. There were physical encounters between those two,

but in drunkenness ...There were couple of fights. Every fight reflected on the formations concerning disturbance etc...

Did that cause any problems, did it represent serious difficulties?

Well, no, no. The formations could have been alerted, but there was never any incident between the formations.

Consequently, disregarding the events happening in the wider region of Bosnia and Hercegovina, concerning the clashes between Croats and Muslims that happened later, were there any serious incidents on this territory?

No, there were no incidents.

How, in your opinion, was conflict in that territory avoided? What were those details, what elements were decisive?

Primarily smart thinking of the Muslim leadership firstly of those commandants and commanders, because Croatian Council of Defense, regarding numbers and strength, didn't represent some serious strength in relation to Fifth Corps, respectively the Muslims.

How many Croats were on that territory altogether in relation to ...?

Well, somewhere 5 to 6 per cent. That is on one side, on the other side there are traditionally good relations with Muslim population, and they were always oriented this way towards Croatia, starting from second World War, and during the aggression on Croatia, when the complete Slunj County flee to Bihac County, respectively County of Cazin, where the population in its entirety was accepted and placed, and later would come

here to Croatia. On the other hand the Muslims saw their only hope and exit towards Croatia, because from there they could get provisions, so those skirmishes of Vlado Santic didn't represent any serious problem, on one side. A while ago I mentioned there was no 100 percent unity among Croatian leadership respectively they were two streams, although on the ground floor, meaning on the lower level, the gentler stream of doctor Santic prevailed. Which means among simple people, where among the soldiers, for example, there were no skirmishes, nothing, because, for example, the Muslims, the town population were supplied the fuel through the lines of the Croatian Council of Defense, and now they couldn't always stop them, collect as well, it never came to that, except a bottle of drink, a case of beer etc. Well now, again with the progress of the situation, let's say somewhere in 93., when the confrontation between Croatians and Muslims in the central Bosnia escalated, the inter-Muslim confrontations started between Fikret Abdic and Alija Izetbegovic.

How does it come to that confrontation? Respectively, when and in what way does it come?

As far as the point in time, I can't remember, but there also comes the rivalry between Alija and Fikret, now I would have to return to pre-election campaign, which Fikret practically encountered while in prison, when in the times of Yugoslavia, he was sentenced for the affair of Agrokomerc, and during that trial the multi party elections were in sight, and the parties were formed, than the SDA with leader Alija Izetbegovic, helped Fikret to get out of prison, so he wouldn't be sentenced. Knowing Fikret, particularly for that region where he had the masses behind him, well now, what kind of inter-party are there, because Fikret didn't join the SDA, I don't know what the agreements were between him and Alija, provided that Fikret on the level of Bosnia and Hercegovina, as far as I can see, got more votes than Alija. But he ceded to Alija, however, later as the situation progressed, Fikret wanted to have the region Bihac under his control, and then it came to confrontation between those two Muslims streams, Fikret's and Alija's. and doctor Ljubljancic represented Alija's stream and there they practically parted, with indications that

Fikret in his co-operation showed much inclination towards Serbs, and now I say, as the confrontations started, and I wasn't on the terrain, it came to separation of the territorial defense of the County of Kladusa on one side, Cazin and Bihac on the other side. And now, with later progression Fikret openly co-operated with cetniks, and on his territory and in his headquarters, there were cetnik officers as collaborators, what do I know, with the progress of this inter-Muslim confrontation, Vlado Santic became very close to Fikret Abdic, so Vlado stayed in Kladusa and Bihac, and he passed over the cetnik territory which wasn't conducive to 5. Corpus, so I'm wondering how did they tolerate him, because they could have thrown him out of the game whenever they wanted. Therefore I wonder why did they tolerate him for so long. Now I don't know whether this is important or not, I'm telling you... I'm telling and that is known. With this it means Vlado had continuous positive role for 5. Corpus concerning logistics supplies, because at the end of 93. Vlado openly sits in the Headquarters of Fikret Abdic, and the Command in the town of Bihac openly communicate with Fikret and with Dudakovic. And provokes. Now, well here, seeing again what is happening in Zagreb, logistics in the greater sense, which means, up here there is flour, oil, sugar, etc, Fikret openly orders here in Zagreb, what quantities, I'm not an economist and do not comprehend this. And with every shipment Vlado Santic is connected. It means, he, whenever something got stuck, then Vlado surfaces and resolves those problems, so from here, as I said, go two lines, one towards 5. Corpus, one towards Abdic. And in the end, here the same people are deciding about one and the other side, with provision that myself, Stimac and Bajo, Lovric, Biban etc. always stayed with this line, with 5. Corpus, but this second line wasn't unknown to me, because I would concretely sit down with Abdic and Jure Klaric in the (hotel in Zagreb) Esplanade, and from there I know about those orders how large they were and where did they go. With this that those orders went also towards Banja Luka through Fikret Abdic. Well, now, that is something more, and I have no concrete information, except I was a witness. I do not know how did this go in the political sense. Well, this was progressing until cetnik's offensive against Bihac, in frame of which on 7. respectfully 8. 3. 94.

Vlado Santic disappears in the manner that the commandant of Dudakovic's Headquarters takes him out towards the restaurant, towards Sedra, restaurant on (river) Una and later I know nothing and further it is not known...