

JURE KAPETANOVIĆ

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Zagreb

The conversation was lead in Zagreb, in the restaurant "Trnjanka"

We will not cry now, we will not cry, we will be fighters. Will we?

Yes...

Will we be fighters? Good? Let's do it this way now, just introduce yourself to me at the beginning of the recording.

Jure Kapetanović. What else do you need?

Where and when were you born?

18.07.1946, Split.

Tell me in short what's your occupation, what did you do before the war and during the war?

Actually I finished teacher-training school, and after that the teacher-training college. After that I worked as an educational worker for two or three years. After that I went to the Flight control, to the school for the flight controller. Then I finished the Flight Control School, got all those licences, worked until 1987. I was the instructor of the Department for Technology and after 1987 I went to INA Tours and here we started creating Croatian Airlines. We created Croatia Airlines, then the war started, I went to the army and I was in the army basically until 1996 – but I was sent from the Ministry of Defence to the Ministry of Traffic when NATO operations started. Basically there were problems in the cooperation with NATO when the air space was blocked with flights for Bosnia. Then Mudrinić and the late Šušak asked me to come to the Ministry of Traffic. At the time I was in Dubrovnik, mobilized for the restoration of the airport in Dubrovnik. Then in 1993 I became the advisor for Mudrinić, and from 1994 till 1996 or 1997 I filled the post for the Assistant Minister for the Air Traffic. At that time our Ministry was responsible for the air space, basically for the entire air traffic – and military, and civilian, the flight control and everything – so that all those jobs were actually transferred from the Ministry of Defence to us.

From 1994?

No, no earlier. It already started in 1993, when I came. We introduced all of that. Why did the late minister Šušak give that to us? Probably because of the knowledge of languages. Every flight controller speaks English – and then I was some kind of coordinator for the cooperation with foreign troops, and Vlado was my assistant. So that we controlled all of that, all those actions that were done – was it NATO, was it other countries that were assigned. That was until 1997. Then I joined DarinJer-Benz as the consultant for Croatia and Bosnia. In 1998 I went to Bosnia as the consultant in the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina. And in 1999 I joined EUROCONTROL, the European Agency for the Safety of the Air Traffic where I work even today. There, it's like that...I was just writing my CV.

Tell me this, we were talking before I turned on the dictaphone. What I want to know and what is the context of our conversation is everything that is known, things that are not known – but that definitely existed! – in the sense of the cooperation, contacts, the help of Croatia to Bosnia during the conflicts, during the war years.

What I know, I wasn't personally involved to that extent... that was in 1992, those were the activities from Lučko towards Čoralići, towards Cazinska krajina down there, and that went, I think the plane was called "cassa", "cassa 212"...

There was "cassa", there were "antonovi"...

Yes, "antonovi"...

And "air-tractors" were...

Yes.

Now, when you already mentioned "cassa". The story about that "cassa" is quite strange.

Yes, I know that.

You know that story?

Yes...

How did that "cassa" arrive?

I think that Muslims bought it.

And then it disappeared in August 1993, when it went to Köln.

It went up there and then they simply moved it from us.

So, what? They borrowed it to us?

In that sense, yes. But I think that at that time they were slowly building their own. I think that at that time it wasn't relying on such a tight cooperation. But from 1993, what I know, we cooperated with the Muslim side very tightly as far as flight control was concerned. Vlado knows a lot more details about that because he occupied himself with that, Vlado Bracevic. We had a free hand, we had that "green light" from the Ministry of Defence to help them really with everything.

You say from 1993?

As far as I know. It was probably also in 1992, Vlado knows, but I wasn't there. I was in Dubrovnik and Zadar, on the rebuilding of Zadar and Dubrovnik, so that I wasn't involved in that. And the whole time, until the end of my mandate in the Ministry, we really cooperated tightly with them and actually prepared everything for them.

What does that mean? Can we have some more details? What does "we prepared everything for them" mean?

It means that we... If you want that the International Organization of the Civil Aviation, ICAO, that they recognize your area of flight information, that they recognize your airspace,

you have to submit the so called amendment on air navigation plan. That means that it's a new state – and of course they didn't have any experience and they didn't know. We prepared it for Croatia, but then we also prepared at the same time the air navigation plan for Bosnia as a sovereign state. Our experts did that. That plan we... it lasted for quite a long time, that recognition of the airspace. I think it was recognized only in January 1996. I think it was January 17th. But, already in 1993 and 1994 we fought huge battles with ICAO in Paris – that's the regional office of the International Organization in Paris and Montreal, asking that the airspace of Croatia and Bosnia as sovereign states should be recognized. And all that time we never made a difference: parallel as we pushed Croatia we also represented Bosnia. Basically, in some way, they authorised us to defend their interests.

And what happened to the papers about that?

They have to exist somewhere. Certainly at that time I could not decide if I'll support Bosnia or not, it was a political decision and it was coordinated with the Ministry of Defence. I remember well the General Assembly of ICAO in Montreal in 1995, I think it was September 1995. We were there together with Muslim representatives. We even... one anecdote... We asked them if they'll stay in the same hotel with us so that we can make the reservation.

You asked...

The Muslims, yes. Then they said that they won't, that they have friends among those Islam countries, sheiks, and when they come they rent those villas, hotels, apartments – and that they'll go there so that they don't have to pay. We landed in Montreal, my colleague Meić, me and the little Stanko Mišetić. Somewhere around midnight the phone rang, our Šečić who was the director of the Management for the Civil Aviation called and said that we have to talk. He came to our room and said “we don't have a place in the hotel”. They haven't found those sheiks, they haven't found anyone, they had nowhere to go – so that they slept with us those two weeks. On my folding bed, I took one sheet from my bed and he slept there.

So, instead in the sheiks place...

That's right. Instead to sheiks they came to us. Then, on that Assembly, a representative of the American State Department was assigned to us who helped us during that session. Now I, unfortunately, can't remember his name, nor do I have those papers... but the cooperation between us and them was very, very good. They all lived here with us, in our houses, we all paid here for food, telephones and all together. On the other hand, in 1993 or 1994, we had a meeting with Koschnik in Mostar. We tried to reduce that tension between Croats and Muslims. We even tried to encourage the opening of the Mostar airport, in order to melt that tension a bit. Šečić was here too, and Cico, and Bakir Karahasanović – today the director of the Sarajevo airport. He was, and he is a wonderful person. And they, they were with us all the time – we were that straw for them. They had no one else but us. That entire time.

So that cooperation really lasted the entire time?

Absolutely. Without a break. Look, during the time of the bloodiest conflicts of Croats and Muslims they came to us, we had a fantastic cooperation: we helped them, gave them guarantees to exit Sarajevo. I even went to see them in Sarajevo during the war, together with my colleague Meić, passing through that famous tunnel, through Igman, through that shelling – just to show our sympathies for the suffering they endured there. That was April 31st and

May 1st 1995. The Flash happened then, and then the shelling of Sarajevo started. On the other hand we had a very active cooperation with their military representatives. Kulić was active there, Omer Kulić, at the time the military pilot of Alija Izetbegović, then there was Musić – I think he was a colonel, and Begić – today a general. They were here a sort of headquarters for the delivery of weaponry and coordination with us. We had to approve all those flights, we had to approve it in the flight control. Look, we had controllers, monitoring-teams in the flight control. So, we had to hide all of that from the others. Some countries, of course, watched it tacitly but all had to be...

When you say “hide from the others” – who do you mean?

Well from the countries that did not favour us. Some countries favoured us, some didn't...

Which countries favoured us?

Among the countries that favoured us were certainly the United States of America. And the countries that didn't favour us... that was certainly Great Britain.

Does that mean that the ones who favoured us knew there was cooperation?

Well everybody knew. Everybody knew...

Tell me this: a fact is that a huge number of flights went from Croatia to Bosnia that were called humanitarian flights but were actually flights carrying weaponry and ammunition.

Not only towards Bosnia, look – there were a lot more flights that went from abroad to Croatia, and then it was transferred by land to Bosnia. That's why we assigned two special airports that worked only by night for that purpose.

Which airports were those?

Rijeka and Pula.

Who were the people that worked on that in Rijeka and Pula?

In Rijeka was Paščenko, the director of the airport...

Paščenko?

Mario Paščenko, and in Pula was Lenko Uravić, and after him Aldo Šetić was the director.

There, we continue the recording, Mr. Kapetanović... well, now, just a moment, we came to Rijeka.

Rijeka and Pula.

And what did we say? Who was in Rijeka?

Paščenko, Mario Paščenko was in Rijeka, and Lenko Uravić was in Rijeka and after that...

Uravić?

Uravić, yes, and then he was replaced by Aldo Šetić. And they would have to know, there should be...

They knew - what?

They knew about the planes, because it was their obligation. So, the transport planes that brought the weaponry for Muslims to Pula and Rijeka. Because they organized the unloading. So, there had to be people to unload, to receive and dispatch the planes – and in the end, they paid them, the crews paid them those services so that they also have to have those records.

Tell me, you know those people?

Of course I do.

You are in contact with them?

I was their assistant...

But are you still in contact with them?

Yes.

Will you help me to get in contact with them? Will you recommend me?

I will, my Lada, I will, I will...

Good. Now tell me more: what other important things were happening – at least to say the important things today in the sense of cooperation, weaponry that went. We mentioned convoys, is that right? Do we have the information about that? Do you know anything about that?

No, unfortunately I don't. But I know, let's say, this part, the medical part that we did: those flights from Divulje to Bosnia and transport of wounded Muslims to Split and that. The colonel Sunjić and brigadier Raos should know about that, Matko Raos and Mario Sunjić. They were informed about those details because their platoon did that.

And Katavić?

Katavić also, but I think that Raos knows more. The sensitive operations were done by Raos. Among us there was not so much confidence in Katavić, as in Matko Raos.

Raos is – where?

In Split.

Do you have his phone number?

I can get it for you. And Mario Sunjić. He is in Zagreb. That's a man from Mostar, he lives here on Savica. I don't know what else I could tell you...

Well we have only started!! Are you hungry and in a hurry to get to the other table?

No, no.

Then tell me this – at least to give a general outline. At one point the airspace of Sarajevo was connected to Zagreb. Is that right?

Yes, yes.

How did that function? And how did it start?

That's... Even, you see, that's a good... But that was before I came. I think that decision was from 1992 when the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia... we, yes Croatia actually did the air traffic in Bosnia and Herzegovina – but how those war operations actually started, there was actually no possibility for Croatia to do that. Later, when came.... It wasn't ESFOR, but IFOR... or whatever they were called, then the representatives of the UN controlled the Bosnian airspace from Pleso, from the flight control in Zagreb.

Good, but supposedly there is some kind of letter of thanks?

There is, there is, yes, there is a letter of thanks written by the aviation authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina and addressed to Croatia.

What year was that?

I think that could have been 1993. 1992 or 1993.

And in this way they expressed gratitude – for what?

For the entire cooperation, for the help that Croatia gave to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Do you know where that letter of thanks is today?

Vlado might know.

Vlado doesn't know. I asked him.

Not even Vlado knows where that ended up?

No.

But I think that Cico certainly knows, he knows when it was sent. Cico certainly knows, or Bakir Karahasanović, the one that is the director of the Sarajevo airport today.

Good. Let's go this way now. What do you think, who we have on the Muslim side that participated in the cooperation with you and who I could possibly talk to?

Ismet Šečić is in Bosnia...

Šečić?

Šečić. Ismet. Now, if he would... He is actually the ex-member of the party, later he became somewhat green (Muslim). He was familiar with that, but I don't know if he would want to confirm it here, he is quite a strange person. But Cico Mahmut, today he is the adviser of the director of Sarajevo airport – I believe that he certainly would do it. Then Bakir Karahasanović...

Bakir?

Bakir Karahasanović, today the director of Sarajevo airport. He would certainly do it and he knows all about it. I think Denis Ozić, a young man, he is today in Eurocontrol. I think he could talk about it too, he knows about it. And from the Croatian side, a person who could know is Enver Mušinić who worked in the Croatian flight control, because he helped them a lot in our name, in the name of our group he helped there. And from the others, there is Vlado, Vlado Bračević, and probably Bruno Lazić – he was the assistant director until the end of 1993. He is not in the flight control anymore but I think that Bruno could know many details about what was happening.

Do we have the phone numbers of those people?

Yes, yes. Vlado has them. I also have them. I will call those people and personally talk to them so that you could then... now I don't know if there is anyone else from the Muslim side, but... look, all those people when they would come to us they were our guests. They slept in our homes, for example in mine, in my apartment, they slept down there for months. We would bear the costs, helped them the entire time. That was more than an inter-state cooperation.

Good, but how did on that whole cooperation, on that whole relationship that lasted, how did the conflicts that lasted at the time affect this?

Well look, we didn't have those problems. We had the green light from my Minister from the Ministry of Defence – and no one ever told us anything like “stop the cooperation” or “don't help”. No, that never happened.

So does that mean that the Croatian state top was completely informed and that it supported all of that?

Yes, absolutely – absolutely, yes. Look, Mudrinić certainly knows that. You really should with him... Ivica Mudrinić. Mudrinić certainly knows that and I think that Mudrinić knows about those flights, how they were arranged etc. Because we, the entire time, we didn't do it alone – After all it was cooperation and arrangements with our partners abroad – first of all with the United States of America.

They knew all of that?

Absolutely.

And supported?

Supported! Look, supported? They also insisted! Oh well, I can not say that... If I say that they insisted on the armistice between us and the Muslims – then someone else can say that we made peace just because someone else pressured us...

But Croatia could have refused that cooperation.

Yes, yes, but absolutely we never had any obstacles for that cooperation. It's difficult now, you know, after all it's a distance of ten or twelve years... But never, not even in one moment did we have any obstacles that made that cooperation incomplete. We even came to Mostar, what I told you before – I think that was in 1993 or 1994. We had a meeting with Koschnik, we and the Muslims together. Šečić was there, there was Bakir Karahasanović, there was Cico Mahmut, Koschnik received us, we visited the airport in Mostar. That's one illustration of everything that happened, on all those international assemblies where we represented their interests as the sovereign state of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

And how do you today, after all, see this thesis of “Croatia as the aggressor on Bosnia”, about the “criminal plan”?

Well look what is... you can pin that on anyone today, because according to my judgement – I'm no expert or politician – but I don't believe that anyone knew what will happen to Bosnia, what will be done with it. Because if you look at it, if you read books... You have Simps (???), you have Carrington, you have Wance, lord Owen – they all had some kind of idea: is it the division on cantons?, division on two entities?, three entities, every one of them was preparing for all kinds... No one could keep their arms crossed and say “well now to hell with it all”. Look, in case that Muslims had come, those extreme ones, that they came to the seaside – they would cut us off in the same way as the Serbs did. We couldn't defend Croatia there, in Neum, three meters from the sea.

But call it “the criminal plan”?

Well, that's... It's frightening that... I haven't heard it, however, why not pin it to Owen too? Or anyone else.

I will not bother you much anymore because I suppose that you would gladly go to the other table that I dragged you away from – but tell me just about those humanitarian flights that were...

There were those humanitarian flights, but not to that extent. We would call them humanitarian flights. When they would give me the permission then they would write “humanitarian flight” – but we knew what it was about. Because every shipment that came for the Muslims was searched. Look, we wouldn't be the only ones who searched it! We were not the only ones who searched it – members of other states would search it too because many were afraid that there were chemical weapons in the heads...

I have to ask you a concrete question. In the warehouse in Sestete, one group continuously, during the entire war inside the humanitarian help, in the powdered milk, children's food packed ammunition, weaponry, explosives and that went...

Well, I don't know about that.

Did we know that at the time?

People talked about it. Yes, yes. It happened. But what I'm talking about, those are those flights that came. We absolutely knew what was coming. It was not my task in the Ministry. My task ended with the securing the safe acceptance, safe flight control and dispatch of planes – but I knew through other sources and my other contacts that every shipment that came was searched here by us – because there was some fear that from Iran they would send something to Bosnia filled with chemical poisons, or atomic... and that was searched not only by our experts, but also foreign experts. Foreign military representatives, let's say.

Can we conclude that those things that went – and that were not chemical weaponry or atomic weapons – that we knew about them? We knew that that weaponry existed.

Yes, yes.

And it was known what those humanitarian shipments actually contain?

Yes. Well we knew it wasn't humanitarian. Every flight – we exactly knew what was inside. You know? There were no secrets. We just called it humanitarian flight.

And how did you know what was inside?

Because that was the deal between us, the Ministry of Defence and the Muslim representatives.

And who were the Muslim representatives here that you worked with?

That was, well... Begić here, and in the Ministry of Defence was that team around Zagorac. It was Ivan Bobić, and Boro Poturić...

And Ilija...

Ilija Brkić.

That's right. Where are they now?

I believe that Brkić is in the Ministry of Defence. And Boro Poturić who was also relatively informed – he is, I think, a private lawyer. He had a law office.

You are not in contact with them?

We are in extremely good relations but I haven't heard from him lately... and I, for the last six months, since it hit me... I haven't much... I haven't come round yet.

Zagreb, June 2005