

AUGUSTIN MAREVIĆ

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Conversation is recorded, tape is marked by code

amarevic

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Conversation held in Ploče

All right, the dictaphone is turned on, I would like to ask you to introduce yourself at the beginning of this tape, please state your name, surname, date and place of birth.

My name is Augustin Marević. I am general manager of “Adriatic agent”, maritime agency from Ploče. I've been at this position since 1992 and I believe I have enough information on the reception, storage and shipment of merchandise from Ploče so you can ask me questions and I will answer them.

So, what I wanted to know is, you said you were present here since 1992, you have enough information, you know what was going on, please explain to me, as you would to someone who wasn't present here, what was actually going on in Ploče during the war, so, in 1992 and I'm especially interested in the years 1993 and 1994. Was the Port of Ploče working, did the merchandise arrive, leave, how did it all function?

The Port of Ploče was working under capacity that was conditioned by the arrival of goods at that time. In other words, the goods that arrived to the Port of Ploče were mostly humanitarian, commercial activities stopped then, considering the war situation, and because of the situation in Bosnia none of the factories were functional, they didn't work and therefore no merchandise came in or out. Meaning, there was no import or export. In 1992, there was some humanitarian help arriving by small ships from different Mediterranean countries, a part of these goods was unloaded in Ploče, and the other part in Metković. But the true humanitarian help and large quantities of this humanitarian help, like food and other supplies, necessities started to come in only after the UN, actually their “World Food Program”, opened and set up an office in Ploče. Large quantities started to come in, especially food from America. And this was mostly brought in by American ships; we are talking about wheat, flour, beans, lentil, oil etc. A part of the humanitarian help

arrived from Saudi Arabia, these quantities were not as large and there weren't as many ships as there were from the „World Food Program", but still this was a significant amount for the Port of Ploče, that is, very significant for BiH and the people who lived there. And I can verify with a 100% certainty that each sack, that every trunk, that everything that arrived to the Port of Ploče was neatly forwarded and sent over the BiH border. What happened to these goods after they crossed the border, I don't know at this moment.

We are talking now about the things you know, what you've seen and were present at! When we first met, you told me that you, you are an agent, isn't that right?

That is correct.

So, you said, you were an agent even then?

Yes.

Could you please clarify this a little – in this whole transport business, what job, what are the duties of an agent?

I said agent, but I was actually referring to a maritime agent. And a maritime agent is a person, legal or physical that provides services to foreign ships in domestic ports. Actually, it would be the simplest to say that a maritime agent, in a way, replaces and works in the name and for the ship's commander. All the work a commander should do in a port is taken over by a maritime agent. And he does this in his name, because, naturally, a commander from a foreign country doesn't even know our regulations, doesn't know the people nor the institutions, doesn't know

all that needs to be done and this is my job.

I understand. What's the most common situation a maritime agent faces after a ship arrives? What are the obligations of this maritime agent?

The first thing to do between a ship-owner or the shipping company and a maritime agent is to make some sort of an agreement, oral or written, we can even say a contract based on which the ship-owner names, and the agent, maritime agent accepts to represent him during the ship's stay in the port. Meaning, the foreign ship-owner reports by phone, fax or telex or in any other way and says: „My ship is arriving to the port, are you willing to accept and do this job, assist during the ship's stay?". Off course, this has to be confirmed first and after the confirmation, an agreement is concluded. After the concluded agreement, the maritime agent has to notify all relevant factors in the port and around the port concerning the concluded business and about the arrival of this ship to the port. Among other things, this would be the port authority, the port captaincy, customs house, the Port of Ploče and other relevant services, because there are some services in charge of certain goods, whereas other goods do not require them. For example, this would be the phytosanitary inspector, the border sanitary inspector, the veterinary inspector, and so on. So, depending on the merchandise, the agent has to take all necessary measures and has to notify all before the ship's arrival so that everything can be prepared in order to tie up the ship and start unloading merchandise it's carrying.

And then the unloading is done in the same way...?

When the ship arrives, our duty is to organise and tie up the ship, meaning, in order to bring the ship to the wharf from where it will unload its goods, it has to be tied up and this with help from a pilot, a so called maritime pilot. After

it has been tied up, the ship is authorised free traffic. After this, the unloading can be organised. This is organised in such a way that the merchandise is either directly disembarked into transportation vehicles or through warehouses, and then afterwards into transportation vehicles.

And who organises these transportation vehicles that hold the merchandise...?

This is organised by the shipping agent. This is not under the jurisdiction of the maritime agent. However, the maritime agent delivers the merchandise with a document named “without barriers” to the shipping agent for further management.

This would be some kind of a green light, wouldn't it?

This is the approval, when goods are handed over „without barriers" it means that everything checks out on behalf of the ship-owner and that all obligations to him have been settled and that based on this document the shipping agent can receive a permit from the customs house to deliver the goods to their final destination.

Thank you very much for clarifying this to me. What concerns me now is: in 1993 or 1994, when these ships were coming in carrying humanitarian help, you said these were Arab ships, there were also American ships – did the maritime agent have to know the contents of those ships he was taking over?

He had to know.

Could he really have known?

Well, he had to and could know only by the papers and by what was written in the papers, the papers being the bill of lading and the cargo manifest. Did the ship actually carry that what was written in those papers, I... this is not the job of the maritime agent. But, the assumption is that every ship-owner will try to write down in these papers exactly the contents of the ship. Was there something else on a ship, I really can't say.

But some kind of a system, a check or control system - did it even exist or there weren't any controls at that time? So, if the papers said it was flour – was this verified or did you stick to what the papers said?

In theory, the customs office, our customs office in Ploče has the right to check. In theory. And not only in theory, but also in practice. I just can't remember if it was ever done. It was taken for granted, that the goods were reported correctly.

Tell me this; what were actually the most common contents of the shipments on the ships that arrived in 1993, 1994 that you are aware of?

Well, it was mostly food. About 90% ...

By specification, you mean.

... was food. I said, I've mentioned this a moment ago, in American ships this was mostly wheat, flour, beans, lentil and oil.

This was in American ships?

Yes. Apart from the flour and wheat the Arab ships had a lot of dry fruit, mostly dates and this arrived in huge quantities. However, they also sent certain other

goods, such as blankets, covers, clothes and footwear; this is what I could say now. However, I'm telling you, I also have papers and we can exactly see from these papers, because I have the specification of what goods arrived and in what quantities. Everything, ship by ship.

Did these specifications also indicate the destination of these

goods? Yes.

Yes. What would be some, I know you can't know them all by heart, we shall check later in the papers, but what would be some destinations of this merchandise? Where were these destinations?

It was like this, the discharging port was written in those bills of lading, but there was always a section called "remarks" where it said "Goods intended for, humanitarian help for BiH". But it never said if it was intended for Sarajevo, Mostar, Banja Luka, Tuzla or I don't know where. It mostly said nothing, however sometimes it was exactly specified how much goods were sent to Sarajevo, how much to Tuzla, how much to Banja Luka, how much to Mostar. But most ships didn't have these instructions.

And what happened when there were no instructions? How did you know where were these goods supposed to go? Who made such decisions?

It was here, I said that the "World Food Program", the representative for the „World Food Program”, and this was a captain Kris Vudal from 1992 to 1994, and he approved the orders from the "head office" in Rome, where and how many goods were supposed to be distributed and everything was done according to his orders.

So, the maritime agent had nothing to do with this?

No. That's right.

Tell me, as a maritime agent in the period of 1993, 1994, did you ever come across a paper, meaning specification, by which the transported cargo was military equipment, armament, ammunition, liaison resources, so anything that could be considered as military equipment?

No. No. No, never.

So, this never appeared on paper?

That's right.

You've mentioned earlier an interesting situation with those sacks?

Oh, yes, that's right.

Can you remember?

I certainly can! When the war was at its hardest point, when the war was raging between the Croatian and Muslim forces in BiH, a ship from Saudi Arabia came here bringing, among other things, wheat flour packed in 50 kg sacks. The bottom part of each sack had an inscription written in green, in the Croatian language: "Humanitarian help only for the Muslims in BiH".

Could you repeat please, what did it say?

Humanitarian help only for the Muslims in BiH.

Only for the Muslims in BiH!?

I was then notified from the port, that is, the representative of the “World Food Program” signalled me and said: “Something’s going on down there!” and that’s when I arrived to the ship and saw that those sacks on the ship really did say what I just mentioned. However, apart from this, the citizens were also grudging: "How is this..."

I am curious, how did they react?

Their commentaries were like: “Look at this, we’re at war with them, and the merchandise intended for them is arriving here, the food is for them and what about us!? We should take care of our needs first and then send supplies to them up there!”. However, I am telling you that not one sack was left in the Port of Ploče but all of them were shipped to their designated destinations.

Let me just ask you something, in one of the previous interviews someone told me these sacks contained wheat!?

It could have been wheat. I’m not sure right now if it was flour or wheat. But there was, there was flour as well as wheat, so it is possible it was wheat. I can't be 100% sure right now.

And you say these inscriptions were in Croatian?

That's right.

And it arrived from an Arab country?

It arrived from Jedda, from the port Jedda in Saudi

Arabia.

And they know Croatian over there?

I don't think so. Someone must have written it.

And you said, this was in the sacks?

That's right.

Tell me, is it a common way of transporting wheat in sacks?

Of smaller quantities, yes.

And the quantity of this shipment was?

Well, about 5 to 6 thousand tons.

In sacks?

In sacks. Sometimes the shipments are all scattered. If there are larger quantities in question, then it is always scattered.

And 6 thousand tons is not a larger quantity?

Well, not for the Port of Ploče.

I meant, usually in transportation?

No, these are not large quantities. Large quantities imply 50 thousand tons and beyond.

Yes, that would be this interesting event. Tell me, were there any similar events? Can you remember anything else?

Well, let's say, yes. I remember clothes were also sent, but it wasn't clothes, these clothes were packed in a strange way in some bundles, and then, workers be workers, they opened these packages a little, tore up a bit, and when they say the contents, when they saw clothes were inside, then there was some discussion. "Why should we send this as well, we also have no clothes, we should take it"... But mostly we didn't, we didn't allow this, we took account on, we didn't allow stealing, so to speak. Nothing could be taken without control, that is, in an uncontrolled way. And there was always some control in the sense that nothing was taken, but shipped off to where it was designated, this was not ours and that's that.

In 1993, 1994, during the period of conflicts with the Muslims, were there any indications, were there signals that this kind of cooperation, this kind of help should be ended?

Not to my knowledge.

Was this cooperation ever questioned?

The business of the Port of Ploče, transshipment of these goods, and transshipment of this humanitarian help and the ending of shipping was never brought into question. Never in this sense.

Was the Croatian government aware of these activities here?

Well, I assume they were, but I can't verify that. But I believe they were aware.

It would be highly unlikely that they weren't. It would be difficult to believe they didn't know!

Well of course. That's right.

And so, there were never any indications this was to be stopped?

No. No.

I wanted to know one more thing; these were ships that arrived on a regular basis. Is there any photo or video documentation on the merchandise that was coming in, on these ships, did someone record all of this?

As far as I know, the representatives of the "World Food Program" recorded all of their merchandise. And I really couldn't say where this documentation would be. And I don't know if someone else was doing the recording.

But wasn't there someone in charge, a photographer or someone who would make recordings?

No, no, no.

Someone who would do all this for the Port?

No, no.

There wasn't. Mister Marević, is there anything else to add, have we forgotten to mention anything?

Well, we probably did forget!

I'm sure there are a lot of things we could discuss, but for now, let's say, this short interview, do you think we should mention anything else important?

I don't know, maybe I can't remember now, but should you need anything further, I am at your disposal, at any time.

Thank you very much.

Thank you.

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