

IVAN PAVLOVIĆ

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Conversation is tape recorded; recording is marked by code

ipavlovic

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Conversation held in Ploče

All right, it's turned on, I would like to ask you to introduce yourself at the beginning of this recording, and please state your name and surname.

Ivan Pavlović, Captain Ivan Pavlović, I am the general manager of the Port of Ploče since 1990, except in 1999 when I was absent for 6 months. Therefore, I was in a way a part of all these war events in the Port of Ploče and I had insight into everything that arrived to and that passed through the port and so I can help with these matters.

Can you please tell me when and where were you born?

On 14/03/1953, in Studenci, Ljubuški, my parents arrived from Ploče in 1950, their residence was Ploče. My father was a dock worker; he arrived on foot, so I have been connected to the Port all my life.

You have strong ties to it?

Yes.

In 1992, especially in 1993 and 1994 – what was going on in the Port of Ploče?

At that time, the Port of Ploče was entirely dedicated to the transportation of humanitarian help or other kinds of help intended for Bosnia and Herzegovina. At that time, there were no, I would say, industrial products, there was no railway, the roads were blocked and in that sense the Port of Ploče was the logistics unit of the humanitarian help for BiH, let's call it like that. And moreover, what's probably the easiest to say: no one has ever, absolutely never, neither to me as the

general manager of the Port or any other state body like the customs, police, every good was registered – no one from the then RC government ever suggested we terminate this. What's more, the RC government encouraged business to be held normally, that people who were threatened in Bosnia, who had no food, water, this and that, that they should get this help on time. I believe they had all of its support and that never, I don't even believe that those who were in power then in Sarajevo, Sarajevo was surrounded, I'm thinking mostly about the Bosniaks, they did not have not one objection, like, if something was transferred through the Port of Ploče that it never arrived to where it should have.

Tell me, when you say the government politics of the RC in a way demanded the Port of Ploče to act in such a way – was it the same situation during the conflicts between the Croats and the Muslims?

Absolutely, we often, even I made contact to the then appropriate ministers and there was not one objection ever coming from their side so that we should take some measures and end this humanitarian aid. On the contrary, they demanded business to be carried with good manners as if there were no conflicts between the Croats and the Muslims in BiH.

Who were these men, these ministers you were working with then?

Well, let's say, I think that Mudrinić was already there during these conflicts, before him there was Davorin Rudolf, and then, I'm not sure when was Lužavec appointed, anyway the Minister of defence was mister Šušak and so.

You had contacts with him as well?

Yes, yes, he never made any problems either. Usually people around him say he made decisions like this or like that, however, we contacted him personally, I personally contacted him, there were never any objections to prevent the help for BiH.

Does this mean that the Port of Ploče was actually in a way an extension, that is, in function of state politics?

Absolutely. Look, the Port of Ploče was, as it still is, a part of the sovereign territory of the RC. In the Port of Ploče, apart from us who do business, there is the customs, there is the Croatian customs, the Croatian police where all merchandise needs to be reported, and they have all necessary documents. So, these are state bodies, basically if they wanted to put an end to this, they would have done so, without much problems, at that time. I believe this to be a unique situation, that there were conflicts arising between the Croats and the Muslims at that time, and that a state behaves in such a way and that it lets it happen, I don't know of any similar cases throughout history.

I assume I will find the documents here...

Well, probably.

But, could you remember, do you know approximately where from did the ships with this help arrive at that time...?

The first, in the beginning help arrived mostly from Islamic countries, from Turkey and it was the BH government agency, the BH that was in Ploče, which allocated this help. After this first period, other Islamic organisations arrived, I don't know, "Merhamet", I don't know all of their names. "High Saudi Committee" and others. In the second phase, the "World food programme" also came, as

logistics support, in a way, they transported this food to Metković where it was taken over by the UNHCR who distributed it to the BiH. So, these organisations, there were a dozen of them, those humanitarian ones, then there was the „Red Cross" or the „Red crescent" or the „American Care", I'm not sure, there were a lot of these organisations later on and I think that no one, absolutely no one, were they of Islamic or Christian faith, never had any problems with their work in Ploče.

And what was most often, what were the contents of these cargos in most cases?

I would say food over 90%. There was some medicine, there were, I know of a few exemptions, there were some religious contents, as Qur'an, there was food, flour, to be precise, it was a great event in the Port of Ploče, because the flour sacks had an inscription on them, in Croatian and in Bosnian, I believe, as you wish, saying: „Only for Muslims in BiH". So it was mostly food, food or medicine, sometimes blankets, clothes, footwear and likewise, but mostly food.

And you've mentioned this situation with the shipment of Qur'ans, we've actually talked about them before we turned on the dictaphone, can you be more specific as to what was actually going on, how did it happen?

Well, actually, I didn't know, a while ago a shipping agent who held all the reports, I know there were a lot of Qur'ans in the Port, he said those Qur'ans arrived by plane to Vienna, and were shipped from Vienna by trucks to the Port of Ploče. As a matter of fact, there were about 2 or I don't know how many millions of those Qur'ans in our warehouse.

2 million?

I have no idea, I think this shipping agent will know more about the amount distributed in BiH.

So, these Qur'ans were transported

through your... ?

Yes, yes.

When was this?

Well I think it was in 1993.

In 1993. I am also interested in this episode with the sacks of flour, what was it, and what kind of a shipment was it?

It was a shipment, as far as I can tell, arriving from the Saudi Arabia, those were sacks of flour with the inscription on them saying they were intended for the Muslims from the BiH.

It said that?

Exactly.

So, this food was intended for the...?

Muslims from BiH.

And that was, their destination was clear?

Yes.

When was this shipment?

Again in 1993.

What was the most intensive work period for the Port of Ploče, during the war I mean?

Well, all those years, 1993, 1994, maybe even 1995. It was mostly humanitarian help, we didn't do anything else. It all came down to that. In the beginning, as I've said, there were more of these humanitarian organizations, let's say, Islamic and Christian and so, whereas later on those were the "World food program", UNHCR and others, let's say organizations and UN agencies that took over.

You've mentioned the BiH government agency in Ploče. When did this agency exist and where was its office?

They had an office here in this building, in the offices of „Jadroagent", it was one agency, I think that it was formed in the very beginning of the war, as early as 1992, by the BiH government and it dealt with the redistribution of this humanitarian aid. So, in a way, this humanitarian aid that arrived, they distributed it to predetermined destinations in BiH, probably by order of the BiH government.

And how long was this agency active?

I think for about 2 years approximately, it didn't last until the war ended, but I think it was active in, let's say 1992, 1993, definitely then, and it stopped working in 1994.

Tell me, can you remember some people that arrived, that were working

for this agency?

Well, I can remember, remember 2 Croats, but I think there were Bosniaks as well, I can't remember exactly, I believe their contact was the ambassador in Zagreb, Biserka Turković.

And the names of those people that were...?

One of them was Raguž, I don't know his first name, he wasn't the one in power up there, he was his cousin, and I think he lives in Split now. I know those Croats, one of them died, Dragan, he died recently, one of them was from Mostar, but there also was one Bosniak, one or maybe two, I really don't know.

Who were they, maybe you can remember them?

I don't, but the people from the "Jadroagent" agency will know for sure. They'll know their names because they were working with them. They had their offices there.

Tell me, have you as, when you were general manager, have you, did this cooperation of everything that was going on in here, of all the cargo that was heading for Bosnia, was it in any way connected to the BiH Embassy in Zagreb?

Well, not too much, not too much, they gave their orders through this agency.

Meaning this agency was cooperating with them?

Yes, yes, they did through this agency; look, there were some expenses that these humanitarian organizations or the BiH government agency was paying.

IVAN PAVLOVIĆ

Mister Pavlović, I believe this was a short, quick deposition that...

All right, I think you could get more concrete information from the people that were working with this merchandise and so.

Could I please ask you to, when I receive more information, documents, should it be necessary, could I ask you a few more questions?

No problem.

Would that be all right?

By all means, I would be glad to help.

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