

## NIKICA VALENTIĆ

**We are turned 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, place of residence. And we can start with the functions that you...**

I am Nikica Valentić. I was born on November 24<sup>th</sup> 1950 in Gospić. Place of residence is Zagreb, Jordanovac 71. I'm married, have two children, two grandchildren, and today I'm a co-owner of a small company that mostly deals with building construction – that's the work I did the most in the last 30 years. That was in a way my speciality as a lawyer. My obligations in the new Croatian state, non-political, begin somewhere during 1991 when I was appointed as the general manager of INA Ltd, the biggest Croatian company, once the biggest Yugoslavian company, petroleum industry, what by itself sets strategically the interest of such a serious company. Until 1992 I haven't filled any political posts. I wasn't even member of CDU (Croatian Democratic Union) until 1992, 1993. Because of good results of INA in the war which secured stability, because of the altogether management of INA, because of one tolerant attitude towards different opinions, president Tudman suggested me, and later according to all authorities he also appointed me for a mandatory of the government. In April 1993 I become the Prime Minister and I filled that duty until November 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> 1995. I stress the dates so that I can limit my testimony on the period I know something about. Already at the beginning I would like to point out that I will strictly and only strictly talk about the things I know at first hand. Indirectly I could testify about everything, but that wouldn't be neither correct nor could it help at all, and especially not to determine the truth. I resigned on the post of Prime Minister the same day Knin was liberated. I'm saying that, additionally, for the reason that I was never a professional politician. I was a businessman, man of work. In the ex-Yugoslavia I founded from nothing a company that was later one of the biggest investors in ex-Yugoslavia. I had a big lawyer's office. In 1990 I became part of the first democratic elections, because in the 1970-ties I was quite active in student events. That was my moral obligation. After INA I became the Prime Minister. When every politician would emphasize, after the won war, after the euphoria for the nomination in the new elections, I asked the president to accept my resignation. I didn't want to be a professional politician during the time of peace and I returned to my old line of business. I founded a corporation out of nothing, and today my firm is one of the smaller firms in Croatia. I do the job I did without break, somewhere from 1976 until today, except for those few years that I spend in politics. So, that's the period I can say something about.

During the time I was filling the post of the Prime Minister I categorically claim that no one ever in my private surroundings, to start from the simplest form, and then through meetings, different committees to the meetings of the Council of National Security and the government sessions – no one never, not even for fun, let alone seriously, mentioned the possibility of intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I can certainly say that because I was a famous person who supported the cooperation of Croats and Muslims. That conflict that erupted in Bosnia I consider one of the most tragic conflicts in Croatian history. During the history Croats and Muslims were never on the opposite sides until that conflict. That conflict left extremely harmful effects for Croats and Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as for the relations of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. I'm the last person, and all Muslim functionaries know that, who would at the time tolerate such a discussion, such suggestions or such decisions.

I have to say that I as the Prime Minister, according to the constitution of the time, was not the chief of executive power. The chief of the executive power was the president of the state who

had a lot broader powers than the president of the state has today. My main task, and because of that I joined the government, was the economic stabilization of Croatia. Namely, Croatia had a galloping inflation as the consequence of the war, had lines for brown bread, had the decrease of real salaries to 100 marks, the pensions of the time were some 60 marks with the further tendency of decrease. It's known that the inflation is the most unjust tax that above all affects the poor and that it could have reached those few thousand percent per month. From the first day I came to grips with the preparation of that anti-inflation program, with the preparation of reforms. We managed to finance the war, and that is from the real sources. We managed to stabilize the currency. We managed to introduce the convertible kuna. We managed to accommodate 600.000 refugees and displaced persons, a big part of them came from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and they were not only Croats but also Muslims. We managed to train the army for the liberation of the country.

It is not unknown to the people who engage in this more professionally than me that the main strategy, before the liberation of Knin, was to help Bihać, to avoid the attack on Bihać – and not only to help Muslims in Bihać, and also to help Croats. I never heard that someone questioned the help to Bihać as the key point of defence of Bosnia. I'm a layman for the military strategy, but I learned this much: if Bihać had fallen Knin would be in danger, and that defined politics of Milošević and Šešelj would become truth. Actually the war would have been lost. Consequently I repeat: officially, unofficially, privately, I never heard of such a statement that you asked me about.

**Is it true that the international community on many occasions, especially during 1993, asked from the Croatian political top, i.e. the late president, to use his reputation and the political position in order to influence the Bosnian Croats and end the conflicts of Croats and Muslims in BH?**

I don't have any direct knowledge about that. I haven't talked often to the international factors about the problems of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That was not within my jurisdiction. That was the jurisdiction of the Office of the President and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who, as the state ministry, answered to the chief of the state about political questions, and to the chief of government about the financial questions. So, this relates to the army, and the police, and rebuilding. And that concretely functioned between me and the president. I fought for the limitation of the budget, that it can not be penetrated as people like, that every person is responsible for the item of the budget that is assigned to him. I succeeded in that with great efforts. That's how we stabilized the currency. The political contacts with the diplomatic representative body were supervised by the foreign minister of the time with the consent and coordination of the president Dr. Tuđman. So I don't have any direct knowledge about that.

**Is it true that the Republic of Croatia helped Croats in Bosnia in different ways?**

The case of many refugees is known. From the exodus from western Bosnia when we had refugee camps near Karlovac. It is known that we in Dalmatia, in Istria accommodated refugees. I think it can be exactly proved, precisely where the Croatian government helped with the accommodation, even the financing of the refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. And not only Croats who came in large numbers but also a considerable amount of Muslims. I'm not sure how it was paid for. This went through the Office for Refugees, the government Office for Refugees, Croatia paid, but if anything was ever refunded I don't know. I am convinced that at the time Bosnia hasn't paid anything. I think that 99% was financed by the Croatian state through the Office for Refugees. Maybe there was some refunding for medical treatments, I allow that, but maybe later. Not during the war.

I can give you an example here, exact, or two examples, of the way that the Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian government cooperated. It is known, and that's no secret, that the Prime Minister of the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina of the time, Mr. Haris Silajdžić, and I as the president of the Croatian government, that we visited together many countries including many Muslim countries. For example, we went to Kuwait, we went to Malaysia. I went to Iran. I contacted Iran regarding the common things, with the recommendation of the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, looking for support and help in the defence of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Consequently, that was not only one time. It was on several occasions. I already once, during one of my appearances, asked the question about the kind of aggression of one country against the other if the Prime Ministers of those two countries search together for the help to defend both countries. Consequently, that's the indisputable argument. That's the indisputable fact that Mr. Silajdžić and I lobbied together for help both to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Another example I was directly involved in was the help to Bihać and general Dudaković can testify to that. I think that at the time he was the commander of the Bihać corps. On many occasions, certainly more than four, five, maybe ten, I can not guarantee, he called me during the biggest crisis and asked for help, and my support as, they used to say, the tried friend of Muslims. So, as the man who thought that he has to do everything – when the conflict already erupted – to consolidate and to defend ourselves together from the Great Serbian aggression. General Dudaković called me at four, five o'clock in the morning and asked with panic in his voice for help. Clearly I couldn't decide that. I influenced, I helped to deliver by helicopters the kind of help that could be delivered by helicopters to Bihać. A case of a crew that unfortunately got killed is known. It was a Russian crew. Then a hypothesis was created that we paid Russian crews. I don't know anything about it. I wasn't informed of the way those crews were financed. As far as I know they delivered helicopter help to Bihać some ten times. Mr. Dudaković expressed his gratitude every time. He claimed that we saved Bihać. There, I gave you two examples that show the concrete support of the Croatian government to the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**You mentioned common activities that you had with Mr. Silajdžić. When was that?**

Well it was, I would say, maybe the second half of 1993 and 1994, and already less in 1995. Already in 1995 Croatia was economically stronger. The biggest crisis was in the second half of 1993 and in 1994. That was the time when Croatia was in terrible economic problems. The standard decreased. Some 600.000 refugees, displaced persons, 250 or 300.000 soldiers who were in jeans, trainers, who needed to be equipped, to get enough equipment.

**Can you tell me do you remember those atmospheres, those departures, those trips? You travelled together?**

Yes. By the government plane. The plane of the government of the Republic of Croatia.

**Together? Mr. Silajdžić...**

We stayed, I can even say, good – it's hard to say friends, because friendship is something more that is created for a long time – but we stayed in very, very correct relations. I have to say that Mr. Silajdžić acted very correctly at the time representing Croatia in front of our Muslim hosts. Not only when I was present, but I also saw it in the reactions of the hosts after they talked privately. Probably he also interceded for the alliance of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the defence from the common enemy. And he was sure, convinced that I also act as honestly as he does. And in the end, the actions of the Croatian government also

showed it. I have to say something else here. I was not present during the talks of the late president Tuđman with Alija Izetbegović, but it is impossible that such politics was lead without president Tuđman giving it his support.

**Those mutual activities of yours happened during the second half of 1993, then in 1994. That was the time when the conflicts between Croats and Muslims lasted, the tensions...**

Yes, but with different intensity.

**They didn't reflect themselves in your cooperation?**

They did on the general atmosphere. On one side Muslims were seen, also those around religious communities, around Mešihat, that I knew, they were talking about some Croatian incorrectness's - and on the other side our Croats with panic warned about some events that according to them were incorrectly done by the Muslim side. Regardless of those fatal conflicts, I repeat, that cooperation lasted. It would have been a lot easier if that conflict never happened, that is clear. But that's exactly what I consider important, that I in the name of the Croatian government under those circumstances represented the state in the contacts with the Muslim leadership.

**And your hosts who you visited? What were they like during those meetings?**

Those were chiefs of states, governments. Very serious help arrived as the consequence of those, and not only those contacts.

**You mentioned Mr. Dudaković and you say that he called you. Can you approximately tell me when that happened?**

I think it was somewhere in 1994. Really, I can not say now which month it was. I should check the archives, remind myself. As you can see today I'm occupied with other things, burdened with the survival on a brutal market. It's clear that my war involvement is something that I'm proud of, something I'm connected with very much, but that's history for me. For the last thirteen years I've been orientated in another direction – the business direction.

**Not one official representative of the Republic Bosnia and Herzegovina ever stated that he considers the Republic of Croatia as the aggressor on Bosnia or accomplice in the conflict between Croats and Muslims. Do you agree with that? Is that correct?**

I can not positively say if it's true – but I don't remember. I never saw it, and I certainly never heard that any of the functionaries of Bosnia and Herzegovina stated in front of me that Croatia is the aggressor on Bosnia and Herzegovina. I was present on a few meetings between the representatives of the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the representatives of the community of Herzeg-Bosnia of the time and the Croatian government. I was, as far as I can remember, on two or three meetings. It's a very serious accusation and I would have remembered it.

**Is it true that the Republic of Croatia simply adjusted its political attitudes and plans towards Bosnia depending of the development of the situation, i.e. that there was no plan of annexation of the part of Bosnia and Herzegovina to insist upon?**

I already answered and I repeat: if there was a plan of annexation of a part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I as the Prime Minister would have known about it. I have no knowledge about it. I believe it never existed, not even in theory. I wasn't present on any meetings where this was talked about and even less where a decision has been made. There were probably a hundred important sessions of VONS (National Defence and Security Council), the government and different organs where the entire politics was discussed. So, as far as I know: there was no plan. And were there any stories, was there any gossip? To talk analytically about the causes of the tragic conflict of Croats and Muslims for me it's still too early. But my personal opinion is that there was also primitivism, and war crime, and intelligence deceits. One example: in a program on Z1 television, somewhere in September, October last year, the program is called "Otvoreno" (Openly) and is hosted by Mr. Tihomir Dujmović. That program is designed so that the one guest is from one political option, and three from the other. I rarely appear in the media, there is no need. What I know I've said a long time ago. What I'm maybe not sure about and find out, maybe one day I'll do, I'll write something. I don't have a tendency towards writing memoirs. So I accepted that program so they wouldn't tell me I'm afraid, because that thesis appeared and polemics about Tuđman, about freeing ourselves of the ideology of Tuđman. So the people who were, let's say, on the other side, who were supposed to grill me with questions were: Mr. Zoran Pusić, then there was Mr. Ivan Zvonimir Čičak, and there was Mr. Slavko Linić. So, a very respectable group. I just because of my correctness, moderateness I think at the surprise of everyone I did quite well, so to say. Those are people who know how to destroy. But I wouldn't talk about that show if it weren't for one question asked by Zoran Pusić concerning Ahmići. I said some five years ago, in one interview: "If the Croatian government, whose Prime Minister I was, not ordered, but only knew about Ahmići I would kill myself". And then Pusić told me in that program that it looks like I will not have to kill myself because it was undoubtedly proven that a western intelligence service participated in that. That program was shown publicly. Even today I stayed in correct relations with many people from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even today I consider that that tragic conflict was harmful for everyone and that we should do everything not forgetting anything, not sweeping it under a carpet, to overcome this conflict. Because the long-term interest of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croats, and Bosniaks, is to build mutual cooperation. They are politically, and geopolitically, and geo-strategically, and in a culturological way and however you want acquainted one with the other.

**Is it true that the Republic of Croatia was one of the first to recognize the sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina right after the declaration of independence?**

I was not the Prime Minister when the international recognitions were, so to say, falling both of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. I joined the government, so, in April 1993, but I think that Croatia was among the first, but certainly among the first ten countries that recognized Bosnia and Herzegovina. And that was honest, spontaneous as I found out later. No one serious could think that Croatia could protect its borders and questioned somebody else's. What happened with that whole mess in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the intent of Milošević to military conquer, with the estimates of the Bosnian leadership that there will be no war we could also start a serious discussion. The question is also if Bosnia was preparing on time for the war. But, to the concrete question, I think that Croatia was among the first ones to recognize Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that it was seen as a strategic interest in the common defence from the politics of the time that you could see from far away.

**We are near the end of our conversation. The motive of our conversation, there I'll say it now although maybe I should have said it at the beginning, the motive of our**

**conversations is the bill of indictment that was brought in Haag against the Six, and in that bill of indictment the prosecutors thesis was stated about the existence of the criminal project, of the criminal association, what in the end leads to the Croatia as the aggressor on Bosnia and...**

I think that this is absolutely both factually and legally unsubstantiated bill of indictment. That bill of indictment can not survive not in one of its segments. That bill of indictment will fall. Its groundlessness will be proven. Unfortunately, that is the method of negative argumentation, what is not usual. We are in the position that the accused have to prove that there was no criminal project. I as a relevant witness stated the information that invalidates this thesis. I repeat, what kind of criminal project is that if not once, but continuously during two years, two and a half years, the Prime Minister honestly and mutually with the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina worked on the strengthening of that cooperation.