

# **GRADIMIR VULETIĆ**

Ljubuški

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The interview was recorded; the tape is marked as code

*gvuletic*

9,09 MB

Duration 28:27

The interview was done in Ploče

**The Dictaphone is turned on. Could you please introduce yourself, that is, your name and surname, date and place of birth?**

Gradimir Vuletić. Born in Rakiku, Republic of Slovenia. 01.01.1947.

**01.01., is it correct!**

That is how they recorded me, it could be I was born a day earlier or later, but that is good.

**Mister Gradimir, what is your occupation?**

I am a clerk, shipping agent, and dispatcher, whatever.

**And what did you do during the war?**

During the war I was head of subsidiary "Tranšped" Split, subsidiary Ploče.

**„Tranšped", is that so?**

Yes, it was a former firm from Beograd, but in 1991 they were registered in

Croatia as “Tranšped” Split and subsidiary Ploče.

**Could you help me with something, what does a shipping agent do?**

The job of a shipping agent is to work on behalf of and in account for the exporter and importer of goods which gravitate through the port of Ploče. Concretely for this, it means representing importers or exporters who transport their goods through the port of Ploče, which means taking care of the paperwork regarding the ports disposition, account for loading, account for unloading, customs clearance etc. And we report it to the client who asked us to do that job.

**Who did you most often work for, that is your firm, during the period of 1992, 1993, 1994?**

It was like this, I got this job from, concretely from Saudi clients who imported humanitarian aid from Saudi Arabia for BiH. I received that job from “Tranšped” Split who recommended them. Because they were working for awhile in Split on some air packages and they wanted to increase and spread, the port in Ploče was suitable and they transferred the job to the port of Ploče and that is how I began that job.

**It means, if I understand correctly, who did you mostly cooperate with?**

Most of the jobs were in the period of 1993, 1994, 1995 with the Saudi clients, High Saudi Committee for Refugees in Saudi Arabia who had their branch in Zagreb. It means, they opened their branch in Zagreb and then began to work. Reason being that Bosnia was insecure so they had their centre in Zagreb and mainly worked with Bosnia. Some of it went to Croatia, but a very little portion. There was a very small amount of goods. I sent a couple of trucks to Zagreb which they most likely gave to the refugees that happened to be in Zagreb. But most of

the goods went to Bosnia. You could roughly see that, I sent something here to the High Saudi Committee, they also had a small branch in Split, and then they opened up in Split, through them I got a job. It means “Tranšped” Split worked for the High Saudi in Split then; because they moved to work here then I automatically worked for them. So I sent the goods, you see, in Split, and to Zagreb, but very rarely, less parcels, but most of it went to e.g. “Merhamet” Livno, then to Tomislav grad, then Bihać, then Sarajevo, then Mostar, then Tuzla, then Zenica, something like that.

**Good, what we are looking at now, we have to mention, is the document that you have, to what year is it connected?**

That is the condition, report that I sent to the Saudi Committee, that was in January 1996, but was related to this example, the report of that, was sent in 1996, was what I did. I also have a report that I also sent in January 1996 regarding the period from October 1994 to that date, meaning January 1996.

**Will you let me photocopy those documents?**

Yes, yes. You can freely take it, it is only a copy which I had sent them because of the report, for they were not informed where everything was or what was forwarded, they gave me an account in global. But they didn't evident it where it all had to go too. So I worked with them, it was there, here for example 10 trips by boat that brought the goods to the port of Ploče and those goods were sent to BiH.

**Excellent, we will photocopy it later. Tell me now: during that period you were intensively cooperating with the Saudi High Committee?**

Yes.

**Did you cooperate with the branch in Zagreb or in Split, that is, did you cooperate with...?**

Like this, they had a branch in Split, a young man, he had with him a translator, he was an Arab from Bosnia, most likely he studied in Sarajevo, where, he went because they didn't know the foreign language then they were coming...

**That man was in Split?**

Yes, he was in Split while there was work in Split. However, when it began intensively in Ploče then he was often in Ploče, even though his residence was in Split.

**What was the name of this man?**

He was called Abdlah, but I don't know his surname. He was a young man, about 20 something years. They go by the line, most likely Sheik's family or something similar, I wouldn't know what his name is.

**And he also had his translator?**

Yes, he had a translator, a man who, I think he studied in Split or somewhere...

**Do you know the name of the translator?**

I might have it somewhere, but by mind, but 12 – 13 years have passed, I can't remember by mind.

**Tell me like this, just so you can explain something to me in more detail. You, the branch in Zagreb, that is, in Split called you or did you call them, how did you make business deals with them?**

It was like this, that job went through Split, I had already said that.

**It means, let's imagine the situation. Some boats from the Arab countries wish to bring some kind of a load...**

Excuse me. Here I have it, I have a memo here, excuse me for interrupting. His name was Abdulah Al Tahi.

**Is that the person who we are talking about?**

Yes. Abdulah, yes. He was the representative in Split, he lived there. He lived there for about a year or two, I can't remember. He ran that, he cooperated with me whenever a boat arrived. He gave me instructions where the goods were supposed to go, for whom, etc. etc. This is when I was sending some accounts, it's not important.

**It was in 1995?**

It was 04.10.1995. He had then come somewhere in 1995 and was there till the beginning of 1996 I'm not sure because they didn't keep, there was one before him but I didn't remember him for he was here for only a short time. But then Abdulah Al Tahi came. Because he didn't know English he had a translator with him who knew English and Arab, so we spoke regarding some problems. Whenever their boat arrived with goods their high from the Zagreb would also arrive. The sheik had also come 2 – 3 times.

**From the Committee?**

Yes. The person who was present would look at the goods, took a few photos of himself with the goods, a bit of propaganda maybe to send to their people in Saudi Arabia to show them that the boat arrived, that it is being unloaded, that

the goods a being sent of, and so forth. It means, someone more important came from Zagreb who had their centre there on some address, I can't remember now, Kraljevac, Sesvetski Kraljevac. They were renting offices there, some business building. It means roughly, each time a boat arrived they would come and be present when the goods are unloaded, to talk with the port in Ploče, with the agency, to make arrangements how it will be carried out. And they organized who was going to come, trucks were organized from their side or mine, depending how they needed it, if they need 5 trucks to take the goods to Mostar then I would find the source or similar.

**What was the main destination, I'm talking about the situations when you had organized the trucks, where were the goods transported?**

It was like this, I have here, it's about the time of the last case in January 1996, and roughly it went during the time of all those boats which were coming. Meaning, it was Livno, Tomislavgrad, Bihać, Sarajevo, Mostar, Zenica, Tuzla, around Vani and a small parcel went to Zagreb for them and if something out of the ordinary was needed.

**Which means the destinations were in BiH?**

Yes, yes. By all means. And they, how much I know, they had their representatives in all major cities who received the goods.

**Who was it, it was „Merhamet", who was he?**

No, they had something, where they had the High Saudi Committee, they had „Merhamet" or in this case „Merhamet" Livno, „Merhamet" Tomislavgrad, and already the High Saudi Committee was in Bihać, in Mostar, in Sarajevo, in Zenica, in Tuzla, in Zagreb I had already said, that was the main one and later, towards the end of 1995 they moved to Sarajevo, everybody. It means, from Zagreb they

went to Sarajevo.

**Did you as a shipping agent know what was in, what were the goods that were on the boats?**

It's like this; I get it when the cargo vessel arrives where the contents are written. On the basis of that, the agent gives me "without obstacles" where it says that you can, means the freight is covered, all costs are paid for, it means we can give the goods for further disposal and dispatching. So on every bill of loading you have the list of goods. I would come on the boat and look, most of them were quite normal, in general what was on the list was in the cargo.

**Did anyone check or was it like this...?**

No, it was like this, because most of the cargo 80% was food, and food is mainly packed or in bags or on pallets or similar then you were able to see it. Rarely were there packages where you couldn't see what was inside. But it was about, e.g. 1 box would come with personal belongings, we mainly sent them to the Saudi Commission or in Split or in Zagreb, I suppose it was for the personal use in the Saudi Committee. But what you were able to see, that was what was sent, most of it was obvious when you saw it, because there was mainly, I tell you, food, clothing, shoes and needs related to that, for example we have tents, tank for water, then ant contagious materials and there were books.

**What kind of books were there?**

Well there were some books for primary schools, for first and second grade, but a very little, there was probably on one pallet. But most of the books were Qur'ani, their religious, their religious books that were intended for that.

**Was the propaganda material?**

Well, the only propaganda that I was able to see was their flag, their Saudi Commission, not of Saudi Arabia but of the Saudi Commission, as their symbol. They usually took a photo of it so they can see it's their boat.

**No, I mean in their cargo, did they have any printed materials...?**

No, no, no.

**...material?**

There were Qur'ans and if they were coming, this was coming, e.g. Qur'an came from Vienna by truck.

**How did it come?**

By truck, they arrived from Saudi Arabia to Vienna by plane and then from Vienna by truck to Ploče. Then from Ploče it was transported...

**How many trucks were there?**

8 tugs,

**8 tugs Qur'ans?**

Yes.

**When was that?**

There was 200 tonnes, it was like this...

**What date was it?**

It was, it was towards the end of 1994, I think, or the beginning of 1995, I'm not sure.

**It wasn't earlier?**

No, no, for sure, because I was transporting something in 1995, I hadn't managed to transport everything, so there was some in 1996, about 1 ½ truck loads to 2. Somewhere around 7, 8 trucks, I think there was 8.

**Where did the Qur'an go to?**

A truck load of Qur'ans went to Tuzla, to Sarajevo, to Mostar, to Zenicu or maybe 2 to Sarajevo, something like that; it means all their larger centres received 1 truck load of Qur'ans. I don't know how many packages but I assume they wanted to satisfy lets say all worshippers in BiH, I suppose they had as much as they needed. I don't know how many boxes, in the boxes, I don't know how many there were, I didn't take note of that, and I take note in kilograms.

**Good. So tell me, the Qur'ans went to...?**

It was nice packaging, I had a chance to see them, I gave some to the customs, something to the port of Ploče, one piece to have, and they gave it as a gift. The Qur'an, on one side it was in Arabian and on the other side it was in Bosnian.

**Bilingual?**

Yes, yes. One side, on one side it was in Arabian and the other side in Bosnian.

**Was it a luxurious issue, hard cover?**

Well yes, luxurious. When a person sees it they would see that it is worth at least 400 – 500 kuna a piece. It was really nice, thick, leather bounding, thin pages. So I wouldn't know what to say, but for me it truly looked beautiful. In a green and dark purple colour, something like that, I think it was like that. **Period of 1993 and 1994 was the period when there was conflict between Croats and Muslims. Did that conflict have impact on your cooperation that you are talking about now, that is on the representatives of the Saudi Committee, on the arrival of boats, unloading, transferring?**

Watch out, it went normally, they were coming normally because they weren't in BiH, then the head, they would come when the boat arrived. But then I think there was another humanitarian organization, they were called IGASA, IGASA worked and their and these others who they were sending, and „Merhamet" and who is it I don't know. However, when they intensified their transport of goods then they opened up their branch and then they worked independently. So before or later I don't know how much they had exactly, the agent would know better because I truly haven't got any information here, I haven't got it to give to you now.

**Good, tell me did, did you notice...?**

But there wasn't, you see we had only one problem because during that period the trucks with goods were sent in convoys, you didn't have these, you couldn't send one truck independently. Then they sent Bosnian trucks, e.g. 15, 20 trucks and then they, then the law, I should say conditions for transporting, it was requested of, there were representatives from Herzeg Bosnia who were

giving the so call permit for the convoy to pass through their territory. And then waited on the border for the permission, you had to pay for something for the permit and they went in the convoy, they didn't go independently. That was referred more to the Bosnian trucks that were sent from up there to pass through. Even though, I can't remember if ours was asked for.

**Did you as a shipping agent receive permission for the passage?**

No, no.

**Who was receiving it?**

They were receiving it, every convoy had his chief in charge and who wrote the permit, I should say took them over, he was doing them, they had their branch at the entrance of the port of Ploče, what was the name of that branch, I can't remember now.

**I didn't understand you now. The copy of the permit for the convoy to pass through; who was receiving it?**

When HB certified, it was certified here, then there was HB, they were certifying, they gave it to the chief of the convoys to every truck and they were allowed to pass the borders on basis of that. I was only doing the custom papers and normally CMR that is the transport document. I didn't...

**As a shipping agent you weren't receiving?**

No, I didn't do that, nor was I receiving it.

**For inspection or for...?**

No, no, no.

**You didn't?**

No, no, I don't have it I'm sure of it. Only the chief of the convoy had it who cooperated directly with this chief because he had to give him the information, the passport number, name and surname, but that didn't really interest me because when I sent the goods I didn't need it.

**So tell me, you as a shipping agent organized the transport from the port of Ploče to the border?**

Yes.

**Further on what happened with the goods, with the convoy?**

You see, when I write the papers to the final destination, it could be Mostar, it could be Zenica, and the waybill on which I wrote had the final destination. They only needed the permit to enter BiH that is Herzegovina.

**Which means you negotiated with the carriers from Bosnia?**

Yes.

**Who did you cooperate with the most?**

I wouldn't know what to say to you, because I often used trucks from this area, but they most often, because this was the representative of Saudi Committee who had his translator, his translator was working for him, done the administrative work, so that he, they had more or less negotiated where the Bosnian trucks are concerned, it means we sent them empty trucks to load goods

to send further up.

**Were they some sort of special firms who had their own trucks and who you cooperated with the most?**

You see, there was no concrete firm, there wasn't for e.g. take "Livnotrans" or „Saobraćajno" Metković or some other, he didn't take any special transporter for the goods.

**Did money dictate?**

No, no, they even had an agreement, we had it to take part and Croatian transporters and Bosnian, and so it wasn't just the Bosnians. You see, I have the registration here DU. DU, ST, ZG, LJU, Ljubuški was there then – their registration was different then today. MA, there was DU, there were quite a few MA trucks, there's no question about it. But sometimes they sent 10, 15, for e.g. to Tuzla or Zenica needed 200 tones of defined goods, then they send 10 trucks to Zenica to load. It used to happen like that when, where there was a bigger need. It was normal to send 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 trucks daily. It wasn't that you had too...

**The period of 1993 and 1994 on average, how often did the convoys leave; I mean often did the boats come whose cargo had to be transported? Was it weekly, monthly? Was it at all on a regular basis?**

To tell you the truth I don't know whether I could now, but like this...

**You see, what you are showing me... That was 1995 and 1996 and that isn't that important to me now.**

Well, I don't know but it was much less then, there was a lot of boats.

**That was 1996?**

In 1995 came...

**What about 1993 and 1994?**

O, there wasn't much then, whether there were 3 or 4 boats a year I don't know. I'm not sure anymore.

**When you say 3, 4 boats, do you mean on what went through „Tranšped"? But there were also other shipping agents, is that so?**

We I don't know who was working, which shipping agent I don't know, I don't know whether „Transadria" have anything, whether they did anything, Jadroagent".

**Good, you're talking about „Tranšped", is that so?**

I believe there was a lot less then during 1994 and further. In 1993 I don't believe that very soon, maybe 1, 2 boats, 3, I'm not sure.

**Tell me, were you present when that shipment of wheat came?**

When was it, just tell me.

**In 1993, 6 thousand tones of wheat.**

As much as what I can remember...

**That is what we were talking about awhile ago, about those bags...**

That was wheat in bags, is that so?

**Yes.**

Usually normal wheat doesn't come in bags. There was something, they had, because the import wheat, they did not package it... Well I, I had to see that, I can't believe I didn't see that, but I truly can't remember, I know something was written, there was something written on every bag.

**But you can't remember what was written?**

I wouldn't know what to say. I'm not sure. I don't know, I don't know, truly.

**Good, you told me that...**

I probably didn't take notice, however it was a long time ago.

**... upon the arrival of every boat, it was taken note of, that a representative was arriving, high representative...?**

It was inevitable, even the Sheik from these 10 trips which I have evidenced 1994/1995, in these 10 trips he most likely came at least 5 times, maybe even more.

**And you say, they photographed that?**

Yes, they most definitely followed that with a camera.

**What did they follow?**

The followed the unloading of the boat; the appearance of the boat; from the outside of the boat; unloading in the warehouse; the ride on tractor trailers and loading of the trucks. The classical things.

**It means, they photographed it and videotaped it with a camera?**

They videotaped it for sure, but they also photographed it.

**Tell me did someone...?**

More important was to emphasize the flag of the Saudi Committee, that it is their goods and in that sense. The name of the boat, they hung the flag, that was roughly them...

**It was evident that for them that was important?**

Yes.

**For it to be documented?**

Yes.

**Did someone from our side – so to speak our side, you can't see whose side is what anymore – was there, well, someone from the port of Ploče, someone from the shipping agency or some of journalists, from the Croatian redaction, TV houses, did someone take photographs of that, followed it, did someone videotape it?**

I can't remember.

**You can't remember whether there was, in that area where there was unloading, someone there videotaping?**

I don't know whether someone was taking photos, but listen, people were taking photos and like this when these goods sometimes, how it normally, this now, but I think it was, I suppose, there was a report: "In the port of Ploče arrived a boat with humanitarian aide from the High Saudi Committee." There were articles. That was for sure. In Slobodna Dalmacija there were articles for sure when the boats arrived. I remember there was a short article usually saying a boat had arrived in the port of Ploče, that humanitarian aide had arrived, around 2000 – 3000 tonnes, that it was a gift from the High Saudi Committee for Refugees in BiH, in that sense. That was for sure!

**Good, Mister Vuletić, thank you a lot, this was a short statement, if I need something more I will ask you if you could try to recall some things, and now I'm turning of the Dictaphone.**

Good, you can.

**Have you got anything else to say?**

No, no.

**Thanks.**

Thank you a lot.