

Causes of the 1991 Croatian War of Independence

Croatian transcript:

Aleksandar: Možda bi bilo dobro da kažeš zašto je uopšte došlo do rata, zato što ljudi koji budu ovo gledali možda neće razumjeti...

Zoran: Da, da. Pa mislim, sad postoje mnoge teorije zašto je došlo do rata. Jedna od poznatih teorija je da je Slobodan Milošević, koji je bio na vlasti u Srbiji, tojest nominalno je bio šef... Mislim da tada nije bio predsjednik Srbije, nego je bio šef Komunističke partije Srbije kad je došao na vlast. To je nekako bila najvažnija pozicija u to vrijeme. U tom društvenom sistemu je bilo „ko vlada partijom, taj vlada i državom“. On je htio da Srbija zadrži, da Jugoslavija ostane na okupu zato da bi svi Srbi živjeli u jednoj zemlji, jer srpske manjine postoje u većini republika bivše Jugoslavije. To je bio jedan od razloga.

Drugi razlog je bila nekakva privredna hegemonija koja je postojala u to vrijeme, znači, dobar dio izvoza, ekonomije sa područja cijele bivše Jugoslavije je išlo preko specijaliziranih državnih firmi za izvoz i uvoz i finansijske transakcije koje su se uglavnom nalazile u Beogradu, i koje su radile te dogovore i uzimale provizije. Pa naravno i politička vlast, mislim vojska koja je, ovaj, omogućavala ostanak komunista na vlasti i koja je... Do kraja osamdesetih su iz nje iz viših ešalona vojnika maknuli ne-Srbe. To se tada zvalo „diferenciranje“, znači, „izdiferencirali“ su neke ljude. I ovaj...

I onda je on naumio da pošto-poto to sačuva sve, znači, uz upotrebu sile. I onda ide ta priča, nikad potvrđena, da je James Baker, tadašnji državni sekretar [Sjedinjenih Američkih Država] u svojoj posjeti Beogradu koju je organizirao tadašnji ambasador, ja mislim Warren Zimmerman, da je, ovaj – nešto je Lawrence Eagleburger tu bio isto, spominjalo se i njega – da je dao prešutni, prešutni, nekakvo prešutno odobrenje da Amerika neće intervenirati ako se upotrijebi vojna sila protiv tih, kako su ih oni zvali „odmetničkih republika“, republika koje su se otcjepljivale.

Znači, bilo je nekoliko rundi pregovora tadašnjih vodećih ljudi tih republika, gdje na stolu su bili nekakvi prijedlozi o opstanku Jugoslavije kao nekakve labave federacije koja ne bi bila centralizirana, koja bi imala samo neke funkcije zajedničke, vanjske poslove, monetarnu, fiskalnu politiku i tako dalje, znači kao zajednica nezavisnih država. To Milošević nije prihvatio, njegova... Mislim, njegova ta elita kojoj je on pripadao. Postojao je prijedlog Jacques Delorsa i Evropske unije da se po nekakvoj ubrzanoj proceduri tadašnja Jugoslavija, u svrhu spašavanja nje same i građana, da se primi u Evropsku uniju. To su isto Milošević i ostali uspješno minirali.

English translation:

Aleksandar: It might be good to first elaborate on what led to the war¹ in the first place, because the people watching this might not know what took place...

Zoran: Yes, yes. Well, honestly, there were many theories about the reasons for the war. One of the famous theories states that Slobodan Milošević, who was in power in Serbia, at least nominally... I don't think he was the president of Serbia then; I think he was the president of the Communist Party of Serbia when he took the power. It was the most important political position at that time. That system was based on the logic which said: "the person who rules the party also rules the state." He wanted Serbia to... Yugoslavia to remain unified so that all Serbs could live in one country, since there are Serb minorities in most former Yugoslav republics. That was one of the reasons.

The second reason was this economic hegemony which existed at that time, where a large number of exports and other trades and transactions from the entire area of former Yugoslavia went through these specialized state-owned companies for import and export which were mostly located in Belgrade, and which conducted the deals and made a certain profit that way. There's also the political power, I mean, the military which enabled the communists to stay in power, and which... By the end of the eighties, non-Serbs were removed from the higher positions in the army. This was called "differentiation", so they "differentiated" some people. So, then...

So he decided to protect his interests at any cost, which meant, by the use of force. This is when the never confirmed episode took place, when James Baker, the then-State Secretary [of the United States], who was visiting Belgrade, all of which was organized by the then-ambassador [of the United States in Yugoslavia], Warren Zimmerman if I remember correctly – I also think that Lawrence Eagleburger² had something to do with it, he was mentioned as well – he [Baker] gave some sort of a silent permission, saying that America won't intervene if military force is used against those, as they called them, "renegade states", republics which were seceding.

So, there were several rounds of negotiations between the then-leaders of those republics, where certain proposals were on the table about the survival of Yugoslavia as some sort of a loose federation which wouldn't be centralized and where only some of the functions would be shared, such as foreign affairs, monetary and fiscal policies, etc. So, it would've been a union of independent states. Milošević didn't accept that, and neither did his... this

¹ The interviewer and the speaker refer to the Croatian War of Independence, which was fought from 1991 to 1995 between forces of the independent Republic of Croatia and what was left of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

² Lawrence Eagleburger was a Deputy Secretary of State under George H. W. Bush. He was in office from 1989 until 1992. Eagleburger was a strong supporter of the Serbian side in the conflict, earning himself the nickname "Lawrence of Serbia", given to him by the European press.

political elite that he belonged to. There was a suggestion by Jacques Delors³ and the European Union to have the former Yugoslavia swiftly admitted into the European Union for the purpose of saving the country and its citizens. However, Milošević et al successfully ruined that plan as well.

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³ Jacques Delors is a French politician who was the President of the European Commission, the executive branch of the European Union. He was in office from 1985 to 1995. Delors is known for his involvement in the attempts to prevent the war in former Yugoslavia, and later, as a participant in several peace negotiations during the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s.