

**UNITED NATIONS CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN
CROATIA:**

The Peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem

A THESIS

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Introduction

“The Balkans were the original Third World, long before the Western media coined the term. In this mountainous peninsula bordering the Middle East, newspaper correspondents filed the first twentieth-century accounts of mud-streaked refugee marches and produced the first books of gonzo journalism and travel writing, in an age when Asia and Africa were still a bit too afar afield. Whatever has happened in Beirut or elsewhere happened first, long ago, in the Balkans.”

- Robert D Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts*

There is nothing mythical or unchangeable about the economic, social or political structure of the Balkan peninsula. It is not an inherently problematic region, and its history is in no way a guarantee of its future. It is, however, undeniable that the Balkans have a rough reputation as the problem child of Europe and that many people, including intellectuals, hold a disparaging view of the region. Going from death in war to poverty in peace, the Balkan states are often described as the powder keg that sparked the Great War and as the last major source of instability in Europe.

Many people in the English-speaking world and beyond are ignorant about Balkan history and rely solely on a vague perception of a poor, hate ridden, region to form opinions about its past, present and future. As a historian I feel the responsibility to offer the reader a positive story coming from Balkans, and in this specific case the story of the Peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem.

Croatia, my home country, is small but geographically diverse. Because of its horseshoe shape, the country covers the Pannonian basin in the east and the Dinaric Alps along its coast and middle part. The area that first saw large scale warfare at the beginning of the 1990s was Slavonia,

the region bordering Serbia and encompassing the Croatian part of the Pannonian Basin. A flatland historically associated with farming became the site of the first European city, after 1945, to be completely demolished by artillery fire and booming. The city of Vukovar became the symbol of the Croatian struggle for independence. For the first-time, foreign journalists took major interest in the happenings in Croatia and what they transmitted to their audiences were apocalyptic images comparable to the ones of Dresden and Berlin after WWII. These were imprinted in the memories of thousands of people but serve only as half of the truth about what happened there during the 1990s. In a truly incredible way, the city of Vukovar and the region around it, would seven years later experience a peace mission that would defy all of those who doubted it. Still occupied by Serb rebel forces and Yugoslav regular troops, the region began in 1996 the process of reintegration into Croatia that was completely peaceful and based on agreements.

In the pages to come I will explore the history of the 1996-1998 UN peace action in Croatia called the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem. My summary and analysis of this two-year long process will give the reader insight into the processes that allowed for such a resolution and the people who implemented it. Indeed, this interesting but neglected piece of Croatian history might convince us to look at the larger Balkan area as a place like any other – one capable of both good and bad.

A short introduction to Croatian history since 1918

The Croats are a Slavic people whose history begins with myths surrounding the tribe's arrival in Europe in the 7th century AD. In order to save me the trouble of summarizing centuries of history I will begin my recount in the 20th century, specifically, the year 1918 and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In the years following the Great War, Croats were joined with the rest of the “south Slavs” living in the lands previously own by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This newly-created country was called The State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs and would, only a month after its creation, cease to exist. The decision makers redrawing the borders in Europe decided to join this entity with the Kingdom of Serbia and created from this union The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The new kingdom was dominated by Serbs. Their dynasty was installed on the throne, and the centralized nature of the state concentrated all power in Belgrade (the capital of Serbia and the new Kingdom). As things started to deteriorate in Europe towards the late 1920s, the Serbian King Alexander proclaimed a dictatorship and changed the name of country into “Kingdom of Yugoslavia”.

The Croats saw these developments as dangerous and many started opposing the regime. The leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, Stjepan Radić was murdered in the parliament in Belgrade in 1928, along with several other Croatian politicians. These and other similar developments created the seed of what would become the Serbo-Croatian enmity. The political fight over influence continued until 1941, when the Axis powers invaded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

After Mussolini's Italy took the Croatian coast, the Axis powers installed puppet regimes and divided the territory of Yugoslavia into the Independent State of Croatia and central Serbia which was directly under the command of the German Wehrmacht. During the years of the Second World War, despicable crimes were committed by all sides. The puppet state of NDH (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska¹) was controlled by the ultra-nationalist Croatian party called Ustaše (Insurgents). The party was born during the years of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia as a terrorist organization with the goal of fighting for Croatian independence. These ultra-nationalists soon started to emulate Nazi Germany and countless Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and Croats (those who opposed the Ustaše) were slaughtered in concentration camps including the most notorious one, Jasenovac.² Simultaneously, Serb nationalists known as Četniks plundered and killed Croats and all those who opposed them in a similar gruesome manner to the Ustaše.³ With time, however, anti-fascist Serbs and Croats united under Josip Broz Tito and his communist party and liberated the whole of Yugoslavia from the fascist forces (Italians, Germans, Ustaše and the Četniks⁴).

With the end of WWII, a new Yugoslavia was formed – the communist Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In this new state Tito ruled supreme. A cult of personality was created and people who deviated from the communist mantra of “Brotherhood and Unity⁵” were

¹ Independent State of Croatia

² There are huge controversies around the number of people who were killed in Jasenovac. It is safe to say, however, that the number of victims was probably around one hundred thousand people, mainly Serbs, Jews and Gypsies.

³ WWII in Yugoslavia was extremely complicated. Even though Ustaše nominally controlled most of the territories they in fact lacked such capabilities. Tito's Partizans took advantage of that and hid in the woods from where they waged a guerrilla style warfare against the Germans, Italians and the Ustaše. Serbian Četniks were also active from such areas. Incredibly, there were instances of collaboration between the Ustaše and the Četniks as well as between Četniks and Germans.

⁴ The Četniks were the army of the Serbian king in exile but I group them with fascist forces because they were nationalist and were known to collaborate with the Ustaše and the Germans in order to fight the communist Partizans

⁵ This refers to the nations of Yugoslavia – Croats, Serbs, Slovenes, Muslims, Macedonians and Montenegrins were to live in a state of Brotherhood and unity.

marginalized or imprisoned. For decades, nationalism was suppressed successfully until Tito's death in 1980. With his death came the last decade of the communist Yugoslavia. Its economy suffered greatly, and communist bureaucrats did not have an answer to that challenge. Towards the end of the 1980s the world was experiencing even greater change as communist regimes started to break apart. This new democratic wave swept the people of Croatia and Slovenia who demanded that Yugoslavia be remodeled into a confederation of democratic and free states⁶. The Serbs saw this as a challenge to the centralist nature of the federation and resisted any kind of deals that would take away power from Belgrade. When it became apparent that Serbs would not be willing to compromise, Croatia and Slovenia declared independence.

Soon after these declarations, wars started. The first one was the Slovenian 10-day war, which as the name suggests, ended pretty quickly. The Serbs were not a significant minority in any part of Slovenia and thus Slobodan Milošević, the new president of a still communist Serbia, allowed for Slovenia to exit Yugoslavia without bloodshed. Croatia, however, was a different situation. Serbs made up around 12% of the Croatian population and were clustered in villages and rural areas close to the border with Serbian and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In these spaces, local Serbs started revolting and disobeying the central government in Zagreb – the Croatian capital. Efforts by the Croatian police to end the rebellion were blocked by the Yugoslav National Army. Soon after, with the excuse of protecting local Serbs from the fascist Ustaše⁷, the JNA (Jugoslavenska Narodna Armija)⁸ launched an all-out attack on Croatia. Planes, warships, tanks and other modern weaponry was used to crush the newly-democratic Republic of Croatia and

⁶ Croatia and Slovenia conducted democratic elections in which the communists were replaced by rightwing parties.

⁷ Since the beginning of the Croatian War for Independence Serbs accused all Croats and the government in Zagreb to be fascist and anti-Serb

⁸ Yugoslav National Army

occupy the parts of it in which Serbs lived. At the time Croatia had no army and very little means to stop such an aggression. However, through the stubborn defense by the Croatian police and volunteer fighters, Croatia managed to stop Milošević's army before it could fulfill its goal completely.

Croatia was recognized as an independent nation in 1992 and the U.N. send peacekeeping forces to separate the Serbs and Croats on the front lines. One third of Croatia was under occupation. The city of Vukovar in the region of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem experienced some of the worst fighting and was completely devastated.



The map above shows areas of Croatia occupied by the Yugoslav National Army in 1991 (red). The part on Croatia's eastern border with the cities of Beli Manastir and Vukovar was liberated in 1996-1998 with the Peaceful reintegration, while the parts on the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina were liberated through military actions (Operation Lighting (May 1995) and Operation Storm (August 1995)

The Erdut Agreement

The Basic Agreement, also known as the Erdut agreement, was signed in two different towns in Croatia on the 12th of November of 1995.¹ The agreement established a framework for resolving the conflict in Eastern Croatia by guaranteeing the reintegration of the rebel held zone into the constitutional order of the Croatian state through explicitly peaceful and cooperative means. The Croatian representative Hrvoje Šarinić (chief of staff for Croatian President Tuđman) signed the agreement in Zagreb while Milan Milanović, one of the local Serb leaders, did the same in Erdut, a city in what would soon become the transition zone (Serb held territories in eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem). The importance of the Basic agreement cannot be understated, especially for the thousands of people whose lives it saved and for the hundreds of thousands who because of it did not become refugees or were able to finally return home. The first steps towards such a resolution came in September 1995, when the US ambassador Peter Galbraith, on behalf of the US government, tried to create an overall settlement for the conflicts in the Balkans.² In his interview with the local media on September 13th 1995, he stated that he spent hours negotiating with the local Serb leader, Mr Milanović, in eastern Slavonia. They discussed a potential framework for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.³ In his press briefing, ambassador Peter Galbraith added that he took the Z-4 Plan⁴ as a basis for negotiations and that in addition the US, were collaborating with the Russian Federation and the European Union in the talks.⁵ The first concrete outline for a path to peace in Sector East came from ambassador Galbraith on September

¹ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Ininitus, 2015), 72.

² *The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997* (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 214.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ The Z-4 plan was conceived to solve the conflict between Croatia and the Serbian rebel zones of middle and south Croatia, but the plan was rejected by the Serb leaders in those areas. Later on, the Croatian army would liberate those areas through Operation Storm and Lightning.

⁵ *The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997* (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 214.

18th, 1995 in what he called a “Memorandum on eastern Slavonia Settlement”.⁶ In it he outlined that the settlement would consist of two documents. The first a document would be a bilateral agreement between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Croatia that would include mutual recognition, normalization of relations, economic cooperation and a statement that the problem of eastern Slavonia would be resolved peacefully and in accordance with an agreement between Croatia and the local Serbs of eastern Slavonia.⁷ The second document would be an agreement between Croatia and the eastern Slavonia Serbs that would provide “for an international administration for a two-year period followed by autonomy within Croatia”.⁸ The details of the memorandum included a proposal of conducting a referendum, after the end of the UN-controlled transition period and the return of the Croat displaced persons, that would have given local Serbs in majority Serb municipalities the right to create an autonomous “special district”. The amount of autonomy that this proposed district would have had was not detailed. Instead, the memorandum ended with a number of human rights provisions, most importantly the one outlining the establishment of a Human Rights Court.⁹

On the 22nd of September, following the memorandum, ambassador Galbraith provided the first draft of the Agreement on eastern Slavonia. The most important element was the establishment of a transitional period during which the Sector East would be controlled by the UN. During this period the following tasks were to be completed: the demilitarization of Sector East, the establishment of a police force that would be equally split along ethnic lines between Croats and Serbs (except in areas where neither were a majority, in which case those other ethnicities

⁶ The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997 (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 217.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 218.

would be represented in the police force), the administration of a census that would determine the ethnicity and exact numbers of people in Sector East with the right to attain Croatian citizenship, the establishment of Special Districts in those areas where Serbs or other minorities hold a 50%, or more, majority and the establishment of a Human Rights Court.¹⁰ The Special Districts that the agreement envisioned would have had control over land planning, urban development, promotion of development of economic activity, construction and maintenance of communications networks and other utility services. Additionally, it would control environmental protection, cultural affairs, administration of health and social welfare programs as long as such administration is in compliance with Government of Croatia regulations, science and the use of modern technology, procedures and methods to protect human, civil and ethnic rights and the establishment of institutions within the special district to perform the activities listed.¹¹ In short, these districts would have had an assembly, a President of the district assembly and district courts. These would then control the political, economic, cultural and social development inside the districts which in practice would have meant the establishment of a state within a state. These conditions were completely unacceptable to the Croatian government. In response, the Chief of Staff of President Tuđman, Hrvoje Šarinić, sent a diplomatic note saying that Croatia would prefer a military solution rather than an agreement along those lines.¹²

Having accepted the fact that his first draft was a failure, ambassador Galbraith, joined by UN Mediator Thorvald Stoltenberg, continued the negotiations and on October 3rd, 1995 the delegation of the Croatian government met for the first time with the local Serbs to hammer out a

¹⁰ The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997 (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 225-28.

¹¹ The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997 (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 227.

¹² Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 67.

set of basic guiding principles for a potential future agreement on Sector East.¹³ They agreed upon a number of principles; first that a transition period should be established, as well as a transitional authority backed by the UN. International forces should be stationed within Sector East during the transitional period with the goal of maintaining peace and enforcing compliance with the final settlement. Sector East should be demilitarized, and the only military presence within the region, during the transitional period, should be the international forces. The transitional authority would facilitate the return of refugees and take steps to reestablish Croatian institutions in Sector East (that included telephone service, post offices, banks, pension offices, passport and citizenship offices etc.). The transitional authority should establish a transitional police force in which Croats and Serbs were represented equally, and fundamental freedoms and internationally recognized human rights should be respected to the utmost degree by the Croatian government. All Croatian citizens and those eligible for obtaining citizenship should be allowed to return to their place of residence and live there in conditions of security¹⁴, and all persons would have the right to receive a compensation for their destroyed property. The international community would be present to monitor and guarantee the faithful implementation of human rights in the region, and after the transitional period there should be elections for the local administration.¹⁵ These principles do not encourage political autonomy, but instead aim to lay out provisions on which both sides could agree at the time. Ambassador Galbraith described the basic principles as: “a skeleton that will now have to be fleshed out in subsequent negotiations.”¹⁶ American diplomacy pushed hard to establish a path for conflict resolution in Sector East, because Americans believed that, as assistant

¹³ The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997 (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 250.

¹⁴ This provision was meant to secure that the displaced Croats have the right to return to Sector East as well as the Sector East Serbs (those eligible for Croatian citizenship) have the right to return to other parts of Croatia from which they may have fled in the previous years.

¹⁵The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997 (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 251.

¹⁶The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997 (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 256.

secretary of state Richard Holbrooke said during his October 3rd press conference in Zagreb, “eastern Slavonia threatened the possibility of a peace in Bosnia.”¹⁷ This attitude was informed by the fact that the Americans knew that President Franjo Tuđman’s highest priority was to solve the issue in eastern Slavonia and that he would not engage in negotiations about a peace in Bosnia before he knew there was a path to reintegration of the Sector East into the Croatian constitutional order.¹⁸ Furthermore, during a meeting between President Clinton, President Tuđman and President Izetbegović (BiH) in New York on the 24th of October 1995, President Tuđman stressed that a deal for eastern Slavonia had to be included in any kind of deal about Bosnia.¹⁹ President Clinton accepted this, and his attitude created political momentum both in the international community and among the parties involved to solve the issue as quickly as possible.

Indeed, further progress was coming. On November 1st, presidents of Croatia and Yugoslavia, who were in Ohio for the Bosnian peace negotiations, urged ambassador Galbraith and mediator Stoltenberg to continue the negotiations over eastern Slavonia. The presidents signed a statement recognizing their full respect for internationally-recognized human rights for all citizens of their countries, and the rights of all refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes and to recover their property or to receive just compensation. They also supported the peaceful resolution of the problem of eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem as rapidly as possible on the basis of negotiations between the Government of Croatia and the representatives of the Serbian people in the area.²⁰ Armed with this statement, ambassador Galbraith and Mr. Stoltemberg headed back to Croatia to negotiate the final version of the Erdut Agreement. After

¹⁷ The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997 (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 258

¹⁸ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Ininitus, 2015), 69-70.

¹⁹ Richard Holbrooke, *To end a war* (New York: Random House, 1998), 216, quoted in Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Ininitus, 2015), 71.

²⁰ The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997 (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 266.

some additional drafts the final one was presented, by Peter Galbraith, to both sides on the 12th of November 1995 in the following form:

Basic Agreement

On the region of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja, And Western Sirmium

The Parties agree as follows:

1. There shall be a transitional period of 12 months which may be extended at most to another period of the same duration if so requested by one of the parties.
2. The U.N. Security Council is requested to establish a Transitional Administration, which shall govern the Region during the transitional period in the interest of all persons resident in or returning to the Region.
3. The U.N. Security Council is requested to authorize an international force to deploy during the transitional period to maintain peace and security in the Region and otherwise to assist in implementation of this agreement. The Region shall be demilitarized according to the schedule and procedures determined by the international force. This demilitarization shall be completed no later than 30 days after deployment of the international force and shall include all military forces, weapons, and police, except for the international force and for police operating under the supervision of, or with the consent of, the Transitional Administration.
4. The Transitional Administration shall ensure the possibility for the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes of origin. All persons who have left the Region or who have come to the Region with previous permanent residence in Croatia shall enjoy the same rights as all other residents of the Region. The Transitional Administration shall also take

the steps necessary to reestablish the normal functioning of all public services in the Region without delay.

5. The Transitional Administration shall help to establish and train temporary police forces, to build professionalism among the police and confidence among all ethnic communities.
6. The highest levels of internationally- recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms shall be respected in the Region.
7. All persons have the right to return freely to their place of residence in the Region and to live there in conditions of security. All persons who have left the Region or who have come to the Region with previous permanent residence in Croatia have the right to live in the Region.
8. All persons shall have the right to have restored to them any property that was taken from them by unlawful acts or that they were forced to abandon and to just compensation for property that cannot be restored to them.
9. The right to recover property, to receive compensation for property that cannot be returned and to receive assistance in reconstruction of damaged property shall be equally available to all persons without regard to ethnicity.
10. Interested countries and organizations are requested to take appropriate steps to promote the accomplishment of the commitments in the Agreement. After the expiration of the transition period and consistent with established practice, the international community shall monitor and report on respect for human rights in the Region on a long-term basis.
11. In addition, interested countries and organizations are requested to establish a commission which will be authorized to monitor the implementation of this Agreement, particularly its

human rights and civil rights provisions, to investigate all allegations of violations of this Agreement, and to make appropriate recommendations.

12. Not later than 30 days before the end of the transitional period, elections for all local government bodies, including for municipalities, districts, and counties, as well as the right of the Serbian community to appoint a joint Council of municipalities, shall be organized by the Transitional Administration. International organizations and institutions (e.g. the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the United Nations) and interested states are requested to oversee the elections.

13. The Government of the Republic of Croatia shall cooperate fully with the transitional Administration and the international force. During the transitional period, the Croatian Government authorizes the presence of international monitors along the international border of the Region in order to facilitate free movement of persons across existing border crossings

14. This Agreement shall enter into force upon the adoption by the U.N. Security Council of a resolution responding affirmatively to the requests made in this Agreement.

DONE this Twelfth day of November 1995.

SIGNED:

Milan Milanovic

Hrvoje Sarinic

Head, Serb Negotiating Delegation

Head, Croatian Government Delegation

WITNESSED:

Peter W. Galbraith

Thorvald Stoltenberg

United States Ambassador

United Nations Mediator

After reviewing the document, the Serb head negotiator Mr. Milanović signed the agreement at 1:00 PM at the Yellow house in the city of Erdut while the Croatian head negotiator Mr. Šarinić signed it at 5:00 PM that same day in the Presidential palace in Zagreb.

The major factor that lead towards the signing of the Erdut Agreement was that, President Milošević, wanted an end to the international sanctions imposed on his country. That and a new balance of military power in the wider region, generated momentum for brokering a peace deal in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This momentum was recognized by the Croatian President Tuđman, who then attached the issue of Eastern Slavonia to any kind of progress in Bosnia. This tactic played well as it forced the United States to put significant pressure on the Yugoslav President Milošević to recognize the fact that Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem were integral parts of Croatia and that no referendum could be held about the fate of the region. The international sanctions that the United States imposed on Yugoslavia established major leverage over President Milošević, who realized that the only way to get rid of them was to reach a peace deal in Bosnia. Now, because of Croatian insistence of settlement in Eastern Slavonia, he had to cave in and order Eastern Slavonian Serbs to sign the Erdut Agreement.²¹ In other words, the Erdut Agreement was made possible by the political interests of President Milošević, clever tactics by President Tuđman and the complete dedication of the world's sole superpower.

²¹ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 70.

Immediate aftermath of the signing of the Erdut agreement

After the signing of the Erdut Agreement there were still a lot of important questions awaiting answers. Would NATO or the UN be the “international force” that would “maintain peace and security” in Sector East?²² Who would be at the head of the chosen international forces? Which countries would be sending troops? Who would finance the transitional administration? These unanswered questions were a major source of doubt about the success of the Erdut Agreement. A lot rode on the presumption that both the Serbian rebels and the Croatian government would earnestly engage in the implementation of the fourteen points.²³ Furthermore, the vague nature of the Erdut Agreement provoked a worry articulated by the U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali who insisted there was a real danger that Zagreb and Belgrade would interpret the Erdut Agreement in different ways.²⁴ Because of such ambiguities, calls for caution came from many sides, especially within Croatia. The mayor of Vukovar in exile, Mr. Jure Kolak, stated that “Life has taught us [citizens of Vukovar] that we cannot believe in the signature from the opposite side [Serbian rebels]” and added “These people [citizens of Vukovar] ask themselves who can take this administrative right to adjust their individual tragedy to the negotiating reality in which they would have to live together with those who expelled them from their homes?” Nevertheless, he did express satisfaction with the saved lives and hoped that the demands of the refugees would be respected.²⁵ Others like Mato Šimić, the president of the Community of Refugees of the Osijek-Baranja county, stated that he was “a cautious optimist” and that “there is no alternative or better

²² The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997 (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 270

²³ The Government of the Republic of Croatia, 015-05/96-01/01, Notes on the current activities of the USA in U.N. regarding the implementation of the Erdut Agreement, December 4 1995, quoted in Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 80.

²⁴ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1025, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1995/1028.

²⁵ *Vijesnik*, Zagreb, November 14, 1995.

solution” to a peaceful reintegration.²⁶ The three major opposition parties in the Croatian parliament each expressed a different degree of skepticism. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) president, Ivica Račan said that he, in principle, gave his support to the Agreement but warned the public to remain cautious: “There are a lot of open questions about this Agreement”.²⁷ The leader of the Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSLP), Dražen Budiša, judged that “the Agreement did not fulfill the expectations of the Croatian public and that it is a consequence of the starting polar opposite attitudes of both sides [Croats and Serbs] and hard negotiations under the supervision of the representatives of the international community.” He concluded that this Agreement did save lives but that its future depended on whether the Serbian leadership from the occupied zone would truly reintegrate into Croatia.²⁸ Similarly to the SDP, Zlatko Tomčić, the president of the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) thought the Agreement was a positive step towards peace but warned about the open questions around the powers of the transitional authority and asked how this authority planned to solve the issue of returning Croat refugees to the region when at the moment their houses were occupied by Serbs who fled from other parts of Croatia.²⁹

On the other side, the international community reacted somewhat more optimistically, stressing the fact that ending the war was a major achievement. The Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* reported that the war had been stopped in the last moment and that the occupied territories were coming back to Croatia while *Il Messaggero* stated that what happened was a historical agreement between Croats and Serbs. Furthermore, the Italian media presented three facts as most important to learn from the signing of the Agreement. First, they observed that it was

²⁶ Vijesnik, Zagreb, November 14, 1995.

²⁷ Vijesnik, Zagreb, November 14, 1995.

²⁸ Vijesnik, Zagreb, November 14, 1995.

²⁹ Vijesnik, Zagreb, November 14, 1995.

the first time the Croats and Serbs had reached any kind of agreement, which could indicate the final end of the war. Secondly, they pointed out that the emphasis was on keeping Eastern Slavonia multiethnic which meant the weakening of the logic of ethnic cleansing. They also observed that the Agreement was achieved under the pressure of the US which once again proved that it is the only capable mediator in the middle of Europe.³⁰

The German media reported that the Agreement was above all about removing the threat of further military conflicts, and that it assumed a peaceful reintegration of the territories into Croatia. They also stressed the importance of a sincere intent to implement the articles of the Agreement and mentioned that Germany had not been part of the negotiations.³¹

The French media took the same approach in that they approved of the Agreement provided it was implemented but raised several questions regarding its vague nature. French media also underscored the fact that Europe had very little to do with the Agreement.³²

The United States, on the other hand, expressed great satisfaction with the Agreement. Mr. Stoltenberg stated during his and ambassador Galbraith's remarks to the press on the 12th of November that "the most important thing, I think, is [that] we have the beginning of the end of the war in former Yugoslavia. We have seen an agreement signed that provides for a peaceful solution and an international presence. I genuinely hope that this will have a contagious effect on the whole area, because this gives protection and security and hope for the future, not only for the people around here, but for all former Yugoslavia and, I dare say, far above the borders of Yugoslavia." Ambassador Galbraith joined him in saying "I think this is a historic signing. This is an agreement

³⁰ Vijesnik, Zagreb, November 14, 1995.

³¹ Vijesnik, Zagreb, November 14, 1995.

³² Vijesnik, Zagreb, November 14, 1995.

that is based on respect for the human rights of all the people of this area. It enables all displaced persons and all refugees to be able to return to their homes. And for the first time in this conflict an issue has been resolved peacefully – by signature and not by the bullet.”³³ As for the media reaction, *The New York Times* wrote that this Agreement was a Croatian triumph but also added that many diplomats doubted whether Serbs would want to remain in the area after the Croatian government asserted its full control.³⁴

Among the Serbian media outlets, the narrative about the Erdut Agreement was shaped by expectations of what the public wanted to hear. Thus, there was no talk about a reintegration but instead about an agreement that guaranteed the survival of Serbs in Eastern Slavonia. Along those lines, the head of the Serb negotiating team Milan Milanović stressed that “the Security Council and the UN administration remain, together with international forces, in the region and that meant – no Croatian police, no Croatian customs, no any kind of Croatian institutions”.³⁵ In a somewhat contradictory manner, the Serbian *Večernje novosti* (*Evening News*) interpreted the Erdut Agreement as a document that would serve to normalize the relationship between Croatia and SR Yugoslavia, but also stressed the words from the previously mentioned Milan Milanović as reliable. The Serbian newspaper *Vukovarske novine* (*Vukovar newspapers*)³⁶ underscored, in its 4th of December 1995 edition, under the title “The Agreement is achieved” the words of Milan Milanović that the most important thing is that a UN administration is part of the deal and that through “wise politics” the Serbs should struggle to achieve their goal. In a different article from the same edition of the newspaper, the authors specify that this goal seeks the integration of the

³³ The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997 (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 272.

³⁴ *Vijesnik*, Zagreb, November 14, 1995.

³⁵ Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 33.

³⁶ published in the occupied territories from 1992-1997.

territories into Yugoslavia.³⁷ These words by the head of the Serb community in the occupied territories speak volumes about the polar opposite, Croatian and Serbian, attitudes towards the Erdut Agreement and its implications. Arguably, however, either the Serbian leaders knew they were deceiving their people and were doing so only to benefit their private interests at that moment or they were acting in that manner so as not to scare the masses away at the very start of the process.³⁸

The Secretary General report pursuant to the U.N. Resolution 1025 and the creation of UNTAES

During the months of November and December 1995 the U.N. Security Council had to decide the details regarding the implementation of the fourteen articles of the Erdut Agreement. On November 30th the U.N. Security Council, passed the Resolution 1025, and in it stressed and reaffirmed “its commitment to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Croatia and emphasizing (this word was underlined) in this regard that the territories of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem, known as Sector East, are integral parts of the Republic of Croatia.” With this resolution the U.N. welcomed once again the signing of the Erdut agreement and requested the Secretary-General to “submit for consideration by the Council...a report on all aspects of the establishment by the Council of an operation consisting of a transitional administration and a transitional peace-keeping force to implement the relevant provisions of the Basic Agreement including on the possibilities for assistance from the host country in offsetting

³⁷ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 75-76.

³⁸ The argument being that if the Serb leaders told the local Serb population that the Erdut Agreement was leading towards a full reintegration into Croatia without any autonomy they may have panicked and left the area before they could have been won over by positive outreaches from the Government of Croatia.

the costs of the operation”.³⁹ Following this resolution and request by the Security Council, the Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali reported on the 13th of December 1995 the recommended scope, goals and needed resources for the successful implementation of the Erdut Agreement.

The Secretary General started by stressing that conflict resolution in Sector East deserved “full international support” as it would have allowed the displaced persons to return to the area, and because the stability of Sector East had great impact on the prospects for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He then went on to point out the “deep-rooted mistrust” among Croats and Serbs. Lawlessness in the Serb controlled areas and a fear among local Serbs of a Croatian military action explained why he recommended that the U.N. should employ a substantial military force to “generate the mutual confidence necessary for the parties to take the difficult steps required of them” under the Erdut Agreement.⁴⁰ In the rest of the report the Secretary-General outlined what exactly the parties that signed the Erdut Agreement requested from the Security Council and followed that by recommending that adequate resources be provided to fulfill such requests.⁴¹ The Secretary-General mentioned that the Security Council was requested to establish a Transitional Administration that would 1) “ensure the possibility for the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes of origin”; 2) “help establish and train temporary police forces in order to build professionalism among the police and confidence among all ethnic communities”; 3) “organize elections for all local government bodies”; and 4) “maintain international monitors along the international border of the region in order to facilitate the free movement of persons across

³⁹Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1025, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1995/1028.

⁴⁰ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1025, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1995/1028.

⁴¹Ibid.

existing border crossings”.⁴² He qualified these tasks as “complex” and warned the Security Council not to underestimate them.⁴³ In order to peacefully reintegrate the region “into the Croatian legal and constitutional system,” which was what he underscored as the goal of the transitional period, the U.N. Security Council should establish a peace mission consisting of 9,300 combat troops and 2,000 logistic troops that would operate under the Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.⁴⁴ He explained that only under those circumstances would the international force have the “sufficient combat power and robust rules of engagement to enforce compliance if required” especially in regards to the demilitarization of the region.⁴⁵ According to the Secretary General Boutros Ghali, a potential reduction in troop strength would be possible only in the post-demilitarization phase, and would still be “contingent upon the effectiveness of the confidence and security building measure and the cooperation of the parties”.⁴⁶

In the rest of his report to the Security Council, the Secretary General outlined other details including his recommendations for the leader of the international force and what the relationship between the transitional administrator and the military component of the peace action should look like. In his opinion, the transitional administrator should have total executive power and would not have to obtain any kind of consent for his decisions, although he should work under the direction of the Secretary-General and report to him.⁴⁷ Towards the end of his report, the Secretary-General

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1025, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1995/1028.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

wrote that the Transitional administration should establish “implementations committees” to deal with different aspects of the reintegration and detailed the goals of each committee.⁴⁸

Aside from the recommendations of the Secretary General Boutros Ghali a strong influence on the shape of the new peace mission was from the country’s most intimately involved in the deal. Croatia, the US, and Yugoslavia exerted a lot of diplomatic pressure before and after the signing of the Erdut Agreement to ensure the Security Council resolution bringing it to life was aligned, as much as possible, with their interests. For example, Croatia was very disappointed with previous U.N. peace initiatives which they saw as corrupt and inefficient, and thus President Tuđman requested that the transitional force be led by the USA. He did this during the initial negotiations in Dayton, Ohio where such an idea was not accepted by the American administration. They were already going to be significantly involved in Bosnia and did not want to expand their troop commitments even further. Upon having his request denied, President Tuđman then demanded that the transitional administrator be an American general and the UN and US agreed. Furthermore, it was decided that the mission in Eastern Slavonia was going to be “under the security umbrella of the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR), in Bosnia”.⁴⁹

On the other hand, Yugoslavia actively worked to prevent any reference to the reintegration of Sector East into Croatia in official U.N. resolutions and documents. Yugoslav diplomats argued that there was no need for that as the Erdut Agreement did not mention it. According to their argument that such a position would only anger radical Serbs throughout Serbia and Eastern

⁴⁸Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1025, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1995/1028.

⁴⁹Christine Coleiro, *Bringing Peace to the Land of Scorpions and Jumping Snakes: Legacy of the United Nations in Eastern Slavonia and Transitional Missions* (Clementsport: The Canadian Peacekeeping Press, 2002), 72.

Slavonia making the implementation of the Agreement more difficult.⁵⁰ This argument obviously did not succeed, as in every U.N. document relating to the establishment of the Transitional administration, Croatian sovereignty over the region was recognized. However, it does say something about the ambitions of the Yugoslav leadership at the time. Their diplomatic activity suggested that they still might have harbored hopes that during the Transitional period the Serbs in Sector East would have had the opportunity to choose a different outcome than reintegration into Croatia.

Nevertheless, most of the decision-making was still in the hands of the US. The UN Secretary General was not pleased with the prospect of having yet another U.N. peace mission in the Balkans, since previous ones did not bring much success. Indeed, in his report to the Security Council, he even recommended that the deployment of the military component “best be entrusted to a coalition of Member States rather than to the United Nations”.⁵¹ Still, upon the insistence of the US, the final decision was that the UN should be spearheading this new peace action. Evidence that this was a US position was revealed in the November 14th US ambassador cable relating to the USUN views on how to implement the Erdut agreement. The document outlined two possibilities for the future structure of the transitional administration and the international force. The first one placed both the Transitional Administration and its military component (the IF or International Force) on the “current UNCRO presence in Croatia” while the other positioned the two outside the “U.N. framework”.⁵² The second possibility outlined in the document was to replace

⁵⁰The Government of the Republic of Croatia, 521-03/96-88, Notes on the diplomatic activities of the FR Yugoslavia in the U.N. regarding the implementation of the Erdut Agreement, January 1st, 1996, quoted in Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 83.

⁵¹Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1025, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1995/1028.

⁵² “1995-11-16B, OSD Paper re Implementing a Peace Agreement in Eastern Slavonia,” Clinton Digital Library, accessed April 21, 2018, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/12596>.

the United Nations Confidence Restoration Operation in Croatia (UNCRO) with the Implementation Force (IFOR), the coalition made for implementing the Dayton peace agreement in Bosnia which was spearheaded by NATO and the US. Before reaching a final recommendation on the US position, the document established that placing the Transitional Administration and the International Force on top of already existing U.N. frameworks in Croatia would enable a fast positioning of both the civilian and military component of the Transitional Administration into Eastern Slavonia. Also, it was assessed that the U.N. was good at civilian tasks such as organizing elections and human rights monitoring while “NATO rejected such tasks as part of its mandate in Bosnia”.⁵³ Furthermore, a non-U.N. transitional authority in Eastern Slavonia would cause issues regarding its financing, the relationship between its high representative and the U.N., and issues regarding the relationship between the military and civilian component of the Transitional Administration. Finally, all that would have also meant “the deployment of U.S. troops to Croatia as well as Bosnia”.⁵⁴ Based on these observations, the US ambassador suggested that “the U.S. adopt the position that both the transitional authority and the international force be U.N. operations.”⁵⁵

The final plan was revealed on the 15 of January, 1996 when the Security Council voted the Resolution 1037 establishing what would from then on be called the **United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia** or UNTAES.⁵⁶ The Resolution 1037 was not a document establishing anything unexpected but rather one that was heavily based on the Erdut Agreement and the report by the Secretary General pursuant to the Resolution 1025. In Resolution

⁵³ “1995-11-16B, OSD Paper re Implementing a Peace Agreement in Eastern Slavonia,” Clinton Digital Library, accessed April 21, 2018, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/12596>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1037, January 15, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1037\(1996\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1037(1996)).

1037 the Security Council reaffirmed that Sector East territories were integral parts of Croatia and determined that the military and civil components of UNTAES would act under the Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. This was justified by the desire to “ensure the security and freedom of movement of the personnel of the United Nations peace-keeping operations in the Republic of Croatia”.⁵⁷ Other key determinations of the Security Council in Resolution 1037 regarded the decision to let the Secretary-General appoint a transitional administrator who would have had “overall authority over the civilian and military components of UNTAES.” It also established a military component of UNTAES that would consist of up to 5,000 troops instead of the requested 9,300.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the Security Council determined that the demilitarization of Sector East would happen “within 30 days from the date the Secretary-General informs the Council...that the military component of UNTAES has been [fully] deployed” and in article 14-15 established the basis for the cooperation between the Implementation Force mission in Bosnia and UNTAES. In doing so the Resolution 1037 followed the decision made during the initial negotiations in Dayton Ohio, to put UNTAES under the security umbrella of NATO forces in Bosnia.⁵⁹ Otherwise the establishment of the civilian component and the determination of their tasks followed precisely the recommendations that the Secretary-General outlined in his report pursuant to the Resolution 1025.

January 15th, 1996 was the day UNTAES was created, but formalities and practical issues regarding the deployment of both the civil and military component would continue for the next four months. In fact, the first and most important phase of the UNTAES mandate, demilitarization,

⁵⁷ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1037, January 15, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1037\(1996\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1037(1996)).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

did not commence until May 1996. In the next part of my thesis I will explore the first steps that the transitional administrator made during this initial period of adjustment and stress some key decisions that proved consequential for the future success of UNTAES.

Analysis of the signing of the Erdut agreement

The Erdut Agreement was a consequence of many factors that worked together to create a climate in which it was possible to negotiate a conditional surrender of local Serbs in Eastern Slavonia. I believe that conditions in Croatia during the Fall of 1995 were perfectly suited to the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem. Looking at the decision we can differentiate that it was made at the global, national and regional level. First, there was the international community, with the US as the major influencer, Croatia and Yugoslavia – two countries de facto at war with each other, and the local Serbs inside the region of Eastern Slavonia. There was no one factor that decided the outcome. In order to better explain some of them I will now present the needs and wishes of all sides going from the US and the international community towards the local Serbs.

The US was the sole global superpower during the 1990s and especially so during the second half of that decade. The about-to-be-renamed European Community¹ was still a heterogeneous political entity that had little authority behind its name. Its mediation efforts during the Yugoslav crisis had failed repeatedly. On the other hand, for the United States there was a lot of prestige at stake in the Western Balkans. If one looks even closer at the US, one sees that the administration at the time had a lot riding on not losing that prestige since during the crucial Fall of 1995 American elections were one year away. What could be seen as American prestige from

¹ The European Community was about to become the European Union.

afar could be recognized as Bill Clinton's approval ratings from a bit closer. His administration has been working very hard to achieve a major goal: Peace in Bosnia. This Balkan country had been engulfed in a fierce war since 1992 and had seen some of the worst massacres and war crimes imaginable. Srebrenica, the site of one of the modern-day genocides, happened during July 1995 and was one of the catalyst that brought the United States to the table as the lead negotiator/mediator.

In 1995 the balance of power between Croats, Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia was conducive to a compromise, so the US wanted to reach a deal immediately. The urgency of this can be assigned to the fact that Presidential elections were coming up in November 1996, and President Clinton's interest in a foreign policy success. Thus, the Dayton peace agreement went underway in November 1995, and its success was a top priority. To reach a deal, however, President Clinton had to have all sides equally dedicated to peace. To secure that, he had to work on solving the key problem President Tuđman stressed – that of Eastern Slavonia. The Croatian President was clear in his message that no lasting peace could be reached in Bosnia without having a guaranteed framework for solving the problem of the last occupied parts of Croatia. Dr. Holjevac-Tuković reminded us what the American diplomat Richard Holbrooke said in his book – that he presented some potential peace plans for Bosnia to President Tuđman on their way to Dayton but that he seemed uninterested and that his main goal at the time was to get Eastern Slavonia back. US Ambassador to Croatia Peter Galbraith and his UN colleague Throvald Stoltenberg worked towards crafting a deal between the Government of Croatia and the local Serbs. The main starting position of these two negotiators was the Z-4 plan conceived to solve the problem of other occupied parts of Croatia before the military victories of the Croatian army in May and August 1995. This plan set out a state within a state solution that would give Serbs all the rights of statehood but

would give de jure control of the territory to Croatia. Unacceptable to the victorious Croatia, this was a zombie plan doomed for failure. Still, Americans had to start somewhere. During the months October and November Galbraith and Stoltenberg traveled to Croatia and held talks with the Serbs and Croats, but very little was achievable before the two major power holders of the region came together and made a deal. President Tuđman and Milošević met in Dayton before the start of the Bosnian talks and made a statement calling for the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Eastern Slavonia. In the joint statement they agreed to “work towards full normalization of relations between their countries” and asked Ambassador Galbraith and Stoltenberg to “return to the region tomorrow and continue, on an intensified basis, their mediation”. This, coupled with Milošević’s orders to local Serb leaders to make a deal, allowed the US ambassador Galbraith to mediate a deal that was acceptable to the Croats and vague enough for the Serbs.

The US, here representing the International Community, used the classic carrot and stick method to pressure Croatia and Yugoslavia into doing its bidding. Serbs in Yugoslavia were already suffering the consequences of Western economic sanctions and after NATO attacks against Bosnian Serbs, they were aware the US would not shy away from military punishment. To keep his hold on power Milošević needed the US carrot in the form of lifted sanctions, and if the price for that was Eastern Slavonia, he was ready to pay. In his witness statement in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) Mr. Milanović said that during the negotiations over the Erdut Agreement he tried to talk to President Milošević but failed to achieve the goal. He got a message from someone close to Milošević saying “I tried everything with the President, we lost Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium. May God help us”. Croatia, on the other hand, was in a different yet similar situation. Its recent military victories in 1995 proved that behind Croatian politics stood a Croatian Army more than capable of solving issues on its own.

Nevertheless, the refugee crisis that followed Croatian military victories upset the international community and interfered with its goal of preventing major movements of populations. Croatia was warned by foreign ambassadors not to engage in military solutions because, if it did so, it too would face economic sanctions. The US Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright made it clear that the backing Croatia received in the UN from the US would change if Croatia pursued a military solution. Unlike Serbia, which was won over with the promise of a carrot, Croatia was put in place with the threat of the stick.

Looking at Yugoslavia at the time, it is obvious that years of conquest and sanctions had brought a price to pay. Gas shortages and hyperinflation² made it more and more necessary for Milošević to play the role of peace-maker and have the sanctions lifted. Indeed, later on during the process of establishing UNTAES, the transitional administrator Klein asked Milošević during one of their meetings, what his goal was. To this Milošević responded that “he did not want a mass exodus of Serbs from Eastern Slavonia”.³ The war in Croatia had been lost, and after crushing military defeats there Milošević had very little to gain by defending the last occupied territories in Croatia, even ones directly on the border between Serbia and Croatia. He, however, had a lot to lose in Bosnia. There Serbs held around 50% of the territory and were on equal footing with allied Croats and Muslims. If he were to be constructive in Bosnia, he could still get off with some territorial victories (by having a Serb state within Bosnia) and have the sanctions lifted. All these possibilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina were prioritized over having to fight the Croatian Army for only 4% of Croatian territory. Such a situation forced Milošević to order local Serbs to cooperate and sign

² Since Milošević was the main instigator of conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia, especially in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the international community put sanctions on Yugoslavia (at that time Serbian and Montenegro) and suffocated its economy.

³ Christine Coleiro, *Bringing Peace to the Land of Scorpions and Jumping Snakes: Legacy of the United Nations in Eastern Slavonia and Transitional Missions* (Clemensport: The Canadian Peacekeeping Press, 2002), 81.

an agreement that would lead toward reintegration into Croatia. Yugoslavian diplomacy would try to influence the particularities of the future Erdut Agreement so that it would be more aligned with a Serbian nationalistic impulse, but such attempts were futile and probably symbolic.

Croatia, the new military power in the region, was experiencing what is often referred to today as “the days of pride and glory” and was in a very different place than Yugoslavia. Considering the Homeland War had its most brutal days in Vukovar and Eastern Slavonia in 1991, Croatian resolve to liberate these territories was significant. Military plans were already drawn up and tens of thousands of Croatian soldiers started mobilizing near the lines of separation in Eastern Slavonia. A Croatian journalist called Višnja Mišin testified to that in her book. She recalled the arrival of the “Tigers” in the city of Vinkovci writing “I was overtaken by a mix of disbelief, happiness, and awe. The biggest and most powerful column of tanks, artillery, howitzers and soldiers I have ever seen was just arriving in the city of Vinkovci.” One hundred thousand Croatian refugees waited to return home since 1991. They waited in hotel rooms and dorms across the country for the day of return, and then in 1995 it finally seemed that the state could resolve their issue. The refugees, and the wider public, waited for the third military action to defeat the rebel Serbs and complete the task of regaining full sovereignty over land within its internationally-recognized borders. President Tuđman was aware of the pressure coming from the larger public and the refugees, but was also aware of the US position on the matter. He also knew that attacking Serbs, who were very well armed and dug into their positions, would require the sacrifice of many Croatian soldiers and would cause even more destruction to an already devastated area. Moreover, Sector East was directly on the border with Serbia/Yugoslavia, and an attack there could spark a direct reaction by the Yugoslav Army which would then escalate the conflict further. Knowing this President Tuđman decided to play along with the wishes of the international community and

use the leverage of military strength to make one thing clear: Croats were for a peaceful resolution, but if it could not be reached they were more than willing to settle things in their own way. Approaching the issue from that perspective won the Croats two options – either a peaceful reintegration or an excuse for a military reintegration.

Local Serbs, had to go along with the decision of President Milošević, and had only a proforma role in negotiating the Erdut Agreement. The moment that President Milošević agreed to give up Eastern Slavonia they were at the mercy of the Croats and the international community. Nevertheless, because the Erdut Agreement never explicitly mentioned reintegration into Croatia it gave nationalist Serb leaders a chance to sign the agreement and not lose face in the eyes of those they were supposedly representing. Radical Serbs would also use this vague nature of the Erdut Agreement in the future to slow down the process by demanding large degrees of political autonomy.

President Tuđman, Milošević and Clinton wanted the Erdut Agreement. Signing and implementating it would have worked towards their main goals, and so there was powerful political will behind it. For the US, it meant more prestige, and for President Clinton a possible reelection. For President Milošević it opened the road towards lifting sanctions and rehabilitating the Yugoslav position, while for the Croatian President Tuđman it secured the liberation of Vukovar and Eastern Slavonia without fighting. Forces that stood in the way of the Erdut Agreement (for example, nationalistic impulses on the Croatian and Serbian side) proved to be insignificant against such a powerful alignment of interests.

Analysis of the intertwined nature of the Erdut Agreement and U.N. Security Council Resolution 1037

When explaining the peace process that was followed by the UNTAES administration, one cannot look only at the Erdut Agreement. To understand the Peaceful reintegration, one must look at two documents – the Erdut Agreement and the Security Council Resolution 1037. This is crucial because they functioned as mutually supporting documents that dealt with two different requirements for achieving peace.

The Erdut Agreement brought together two warring sides and outlined areas of agreement upon which one could work to avoid a violent resolution. It did not have the power to implement potential solutions on the ground because of its vagueness. Basically, the Erdut Agreement outlined what the two warring sides agreed on – a transitional period, demilitarization, return of refugees, respect of human rights, restoration or compensation for lost property and elections. Finally, it delegated the power to implement these points of agreement to the international community. The Resolution 1037 of the Security Council implemented these points of agreement. Crucially, the Resolution 1037 resolved one of the major problems associated with the Erdut Agreement – its vagueness. From the beginning, the Erdut Agreement did not mention the end point of the transitional period, but Resolution 1037 did so right at the start by reaffirming that the territories under Serb occupation in Easter Slavonia belonged to the Republic of Croatia. This clarification was of great importance because it prevented any serious contention of the final outcome of the Peaceful reintegration.

The start of the transitional period – UNTAES first steps

The U.N. Security Council Resolution 1037 was a confirmation of the Erdut Agreement in that it followed closely the articles of the agreement without distorting the unspoken goal of reintegrating Sector East into Croatia. In fact, Resolution 1037 spelled out that the final aim of the Transitional period was reintegration and that the U.N. was acting with complete respect of Croatian territorial sovereignty inside its internationally recognized borders.¹

On January 17th, 1996, the U.N. Secretary-General appointed the American general Jacques Paul Klein to be the transitional administrator. Klein had already been to Croatia and Serbia in December 1995 and held meetings with President Tuđman and Milošević and was deemed prepared for the task ahead.²

On the 8th of February, 1996 the Secretary General Boutros Ghali reported to the Security Council that cooperation from all sides and a mutual recognition of Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were indispensable for the success of UNTAES, especially considering that the Security Council allocated only up to 5,000 troops to the area instead of the recommended 9,000.³ The Secretary General also stressed that “the forming and training of local police forces, under the authority of the U.N. and the transitional administrator, had to be completed before the beginning of the process of demilitarization to create a sense of trust and security in the region.”⁴

¹ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1037, January 15, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1037\(1996\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1037(1996)).

²Christine Coleiro, *Bringing Peace to the Land of Scorpions and Jumping Snakes: Legacy of the United Nations in Eastern Slavonia and Transitional Missions* (Clementsport: The Canadian Peacekeeping Press, 2002), 81.

³Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 39-40.

⁴Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 41.

On other topics, the Secretary General mentioned that UNTAES would start working on conducting meetings with both Serbs and Croats about technical matters such as restoring roads and telephone lines between the former Sector East and the rest of Croatia.⁵ Also, the Secretary General mentioned that a demining program would be part of UNTAES as well as a strong media campaign designed to inform the local Serb population about the goals and priorities of the transitional administration.⁶

In February, the military component of UNTAES was slowly being deployed to the area, and general Klein arrived in Croatia to assume the role of the transitional administrator. On February 13th General Klein, accompanied by his deputy Mr. Derek Boothby, the UNTAES head of Civilian Affairs Mr. Gerad Fischer, the Civilian Police (CIVPOL) commissioner Hakan Jofors, and the commander of the UNTAES military forces general R. Abad, met with President Tuđman. The group discussed the hope that the success of UNTAES could have positive impact on the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that it was necessary to restore roads and telephone lines between the region (occupied parts of Eastern Slavonia) and Croatia, as quickly as possible. They all agreed that there was a problem with the process of Serbian refugees' continuing movement in the region and the occupation of the houses of absent Croatian refugees'. In the meeting President Tuđman expressed his full support of the Transitional administration and general Klein.⁷

On the same day, general Klein met with President Milošević and Yugoslav foreign minister Milan Milutinovic in Belgrade. General Klein said to the press after the meeting that UNTAES was working on reopening of the Croatian-Yugoslav-Hungarian border and the river

⁵ Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 41.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

Danube for commercial traffic to revitalize the economic life of the region. He stated that the talks in Belgrade were constructive and that he was once again assured that President Milošević supports the UNTAES project.⁸

Additionally, important information about the UNTAES guiding principles was hinted of in a discussion held between the Croatian representatives and general Klein at the UN early in January 1996. The records of the meeting stated that the biggest danger to the Peaceful reintegration would be a failed demilitarization, that the economic recovery was going to be a vital part of the process, and that general Klein's administration would work hard to keep Serbs from leaving the region.

The difficulty of that task is revealed in the records of town meetings that ambassador Galbraith held in the cities of Vukovar and Beli Manastir, the former on January 30th and latter on February 14th. He went there to inform local Serbs about what was going on, and "to demonstrate that the interest of the United States did not end with the signing of the agreement in Erdut agreement in Zagreb...but rather that we [the United States] have a continuing interest...an interest that is based on the respect for the rights of all the people of this region."⁹ His remarks summarized the articles of the Erdut agreement and stressed that the goal of the agreement was to "enable the Croatians and others to return and to make sure that the Serbian people have the possibility of staying."¹⁰ Some of the statements and questions that the local Serbs directed to the ambassador were quite revealing of their attitudes towards the prospect of being reintegrated into the Croatian state. For example, one person stated: "I was never a citizen of Croatia. I was a citizen of the

⁸Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 45.

⁹The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997 (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 368.

¹⁰Ibid., 369.

Republic of Yugoslavia. I do not want to be a citizen of Croatia, because this is mine.”¹¹ Another said: “The Serbs should have been entitled to this right – to decide in which country they want to live. We should not be forced to live together again, once we have had this terrible war among us. You probably know our history from 1941 until now. You should know this is impossible.”¹² They also expressed opinions about the future of UNTAES. Someone asked: “Are you fully aware of the fact that if Serbs are not given a high level of autonomy in order to protect their rights there will be no Serbs in this territory. What you are going to see is a collective leaving of the area by the Serbs.”¹³ Most questions were prefixed with statements of disagreement with a possible reintegration, and history lessons about how Croatian chauvinism was to blame for their troubles. Aside from these, however, there were a lot of technical questions. People were asking who was to guarantee human rights for Serbs in Croatia, who was going to pay for their lost or damaged property, what currency was going to be used in the transitional period, what rights of autonomy were Serbs going to have (political, educational etc.). Some also questioned whether there was going to be an amnesty bill for Serbs that did not commit war crimes, and whether Serbian college diplomas were going to be recognized by the Croatian authorities.¹⁴ One question to ambassador Galbraith discussed if he was in Vukovar because he considered that region a part of Croatia, and one question asked which article of the Erdut agreement said that the region was an integral part of Croatia. These were very indicative of the current climate because they both reflected the misinformation that was given to local Serbs by those who initially informed them about the goals of the Erdut agreement. Ambassador Galbraith recognized that, and responded to the latter question by saying “One needs to be clear. The agreement is an agreement to set up a transitional

¹¹Ibid., 370.

¹² Ibid., 372.

¹³ Ibid., 375-6.

¹⁴ Ibid., 370-7.

period to full Croatian control. If anybody tells you differently, they are doing you a big disservice. I know most of you do not like that fact, but that is the fact.”¹⁵ Another source confirming the confusion of local Serbs regarding the true intent of the Erdut Agreement was the statement of the Secretary General Boutros-Ghali on June 26th regarding the progress of UNTAES: “Before the deployment of UNTAES, the population of the region had *been kept in ignorance or had been misinformed about the Basic Agreement* and the relevant Security Council resolutions, and had been subjected to propaganda from both sides¹⁶. As a result, Serbs were ill-informed and apprehensive about their future”.¹⁷ The meeting in Beli Manastir went along the same lines, with Serbs giving long speeches about how terrible the fascist Croats were. “We perhaps could live with the Croats, but the Croats cannot live with us”, “I claim that this land is more Serbian than Alaska is American”, “Mr. Galbraith, you are pushing us into being a part of Croatia, which we don’t want. We cannot accept this, because their democracy is nothing to us.”¹⁸ All these statements speak volumes to the amount of work that had to be done during the transitional period to restore trust between Serbs and Croats.

Simultaneous with general Klein’s and ambassador Galbraith’s initial efforts on the ground, the UNTAES military component started to take shape. On the 6th of February Belgian

¹⁵ The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997 (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 372 and 377.

¹⁶ It is unclear what the general means by propaganda from both sides when there was no reason to lie from the Croatian perspective.

¹⁷ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, June 26, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1996/472.

¹⁸The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997 (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 379, 383 and 384.

general Joseph Schoups was appointed to be the new commander of the military forces of UNTAES. He arrived in Zagreb on the 23rd of February and assumed command on March 1st.¹⁹

The Belgian ministry of foreign affairs reported on the 19th of February that he would have under his command 4963 soldiers. The Russian (977), Belgian (622) and Slovakian (250) soldiers were already present in the region and were waiting for the rest of the forces which were to be deployed by the end of March/beginning of April. However, because of logistics it was still possible that the deployment would have continued into May. The rest of the troops came from Jordan (850), Pakistan (979), Ukraine (410), Slovakia (350), Norway (54), Argentina (43) and the medical staff from Czechia²⁰ (40) and Indonesia (32). An additional 154 members of the military administration and 138 military policemen came mostly from Belgium.²¹

On the 29th of December 1995, the Croatian government formed the Office of temporary administration for the establishment of Croatian authority in the territories of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem. The head of the Office was Ivica Vrkić and his deputy was Mirko Tankosić. The Office was based in Osijek and was tasked with working together with the U.N. and local Serbs, through the implementation committees, to settle disputes, make further agreements, and reintegrate piece by piece the region into Croatia. Also, the government appointed dr. Ivica Kostović (who was also the vice-president of the government) to be the official representative of the government at the transitional administration.

¹⁹I've seen multiple contradictory accounts for the date the general assumed command – some say March 1st other March 14th.

²⁰New name for the Czech Republic.

²¹Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 45.

During the first stages of the process, the Office appointed experts from all relevant ministries and tasked them with establishing committees to develop a plan to reintegrate the region into Croatia. For example, in February 1996 the Office created implementation committees on agriculture, health, human rights, police, military, culture and education, refugee matters, civilian administration, and public companies. The latter included Croatian railway, Croatian post and telecommunications, Croatian electric company, Croatian forests, Croatian highways, Croatian water systems, as well as utility companies, oil resources, renovation, economy, religious questions and the Croatian national TV/information. The Office also dealt with the Red Cross, organizing meetings between split families at UNTAES checkpoints and visits of Croatian refugees to their homes in the region and likewise of Serbian refugees to their homes elsewhere in Croatia. Visits of this kind began in March 1996, when a group of Croatian women visited their homes in Darda while Serbian women visited Osijek. As doctor Holjevac-Tuković said, such events were part of an effort to create an atmosphere of trust between the Croatian and Serbian communities.²²

The Government of Croatia held a meeting on March 6th during which it was announced that a delegation from the Government of Yugoslavia would be arriving soon and they would discuss the opening the highways, railways and air routes between the two countries as well as opening consular offices in Belgrade and Zagreb. The Croatian government called for the urgent return of the Croatian and Hungarian refugees to the region. They also invited local Serbs who lived in the area before 1991 to stay. To reach this ambition, the government presented a pilot program outlining the return of Croatian refugees to the region. According to Ivica Kostović, the

²²Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Ininitus, 2015), 91-92.

EU and UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) requested that such a program be followed with a similar one for Serbian refugees returning to other parts of Croatia.²³

On matters regarding police work during the transitional period, the Croatian ministry of the Interior compiled a list of police officers who would attend training in Budapest with the intention of adapting to work with Serbian colleagues in the future transitional police force. These Croat officers were from different parts of Croatia and not from Eastern Slavonia.²⁴

During a March 6th meeting of the Government of Croatia, Ivica Vrkić reported improved conditions on the ground in regard to the fact that meetings with Serbian representatives were no longer take place at checkpoints, but rather in cities. The negotiations about agriculture progressed the most, Serbs even expressed interest to, in coordination with Croatian authorities, process around 25 thousand acres and use it to cultivate sunflower, sugar beet and soy.²⁵ Furthermore, vice president Kostović reported that the Croatian National Bank agreed to exchange the currency used in the region with the Kuna (the official Croatian currency), but only for cash and if the exchange happened during one day with established limits on the amount per person.²⁶

The wider Croatian public was still skeptical about the peace project in Eastern Slavonia. The Croatian perspective was well articulated by Ivica Vrkić, the head of the government Office dealing with local Serbs and UNTAES, when he recorded in his memoir that the “Reintegration is a trip into the unknown, seemingly a move of political adventurism in perilous times. Who can achieve peace when people are still thirsty for revenge. They are not calm enough to accept peace

²³ Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 46.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

especially considering the personal tragedies that they've suffered. People want war. More than peace, because the marks of war go deeper than people's threshold for tolerance."²⁷ Indeed, some of the most important work done by the Office consisted of communicating with the Croatian refugee community and explaining the current state of negotiations. To facilitate such communication, Mato Šimić, the president of the Croatian community of refugees, became a member of the Office.²⁸

Croatian refugees were a major constituency and a group that held much sway in terms of orientating Croatian public opinion. Their support of the Erdut Agreement did not leave much room for other political actors to work against the peace action from a nationalist perspective. If the people who suffered most were ready to wait longer and sacrifice even more, it would have been politically unsavvy and disingenuous to insist on a military option. Nevertheless, Ivica Vrkić testified to the difficulties he faced in organizing the Office when he wrote: "At first nobody believed in the peaceful reintegration. Everybody thought that it was some kind of game aimed at the international community and the Serbs while for us [Croats] a good excuse until the military operation."²⁹

²⁷ Ivan Vrkić, *Istočno od zapada: Politički putopisi hrvatskim istokom*, ed. Josip Đerek (Zagreb: Interpublic, 1997), 9

²⁸ Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 38.

²⁹ Ivan Vrkić, *Istočno od zapada: politički putopisi hrvatskim istokom*, ed. Josip Đerek (Zagreb: Interpublic, 1997), 22.

Demilitarization and other important events between March and June 1996

Despite supporting the peace process, Croatian refugees were not satisfied with the slow deployment of the UNTAES military component and demanded in mid-March 1996 that all military personal should be in the region by the 15th of April. This was necessary so that the demilitarization of the region, which they saw as a crucial first step, could begin.¹ UNTAES and its military commander, general Schoups, revealed the plan for demilitarization and informed both Serbs and Croats about its details on the 15th of April. In the document, which was going to be signed by both Croats and Serbs, demilitarization was defined as the “dismantling and demobilization of all military and police forces, troops and individuals and their command and supervisory structures. This also meant that no weapons, ammunition, explosives or other military equipment would be in the possession of people who live in the region, unless approved by the transitional administrator.”² Some important terms were defined in the document. Dismantling – a complete dismissal of all units and command structures, official demobilization, and surrender of all military infrastructure. Demobilization – meant the return to civilian life and a cessation of carrying weapons. Military forces – were all regular, non-regular, paramilitary and volunteer unites in the region. Police forces – were all regular, special, border, and other police affiliated forces present in the region. Following Resolution 1037, the period of demilitarization was decided to be 30 days long with the beginning date on the day that the Secretary-General reported to the Security Council that the UNTAES military component was fully deployed and ready to conduct its mission. Importantly, it was also decided that UNTAES would determine the number of police

¹ Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 52.

² Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 54.

officers who would not be demilitarized but instead used for the purposes of maintaining peace and order until the transitional police forces were fully established. UNTAES was also to decide the amount of equipment and weapons they needed to carry out their mission. All members of the police had to be disbanded and all weapons that would remain in the region had to be surrendered before the end of the demilitarization period. Moreover, the production and accumulation of weapons must be stopped. To help facilitate the demilitarization, Serb commanders were to inform the UNTAES military forces, no later than 15 days after the signing of this agreement, about all relevant details regarding the location of weapons and troops as well as equipment. Collection points for weapons and equipment would be established under the command of the UNTAES. Then UNTAES would disable the gathered equipment, keep it under strict surveillance and under no circumstances hand it to the other side.³ Usable cars, trucks and other equipment had to be handed over to the UNTAES. All military and police training was to be stopped and military and police infrastructure (buildings, barracks and checkpoints) were to be taken over by UNTAES.⁴

Information about mine fields and other dangerous zones also had to be given to the transitional administrator no later than 15 days after the signing of the agreement. The demilitarization process would have three distinct phases. Phase I would last from mid-April until successful UNTAES military deployment and would result in Serbs handing over crucial information and then collaborating with the transitional administration to determine when and where troops would be demilitarized, and the infrastructure taken over. Phase II would consist of the actual demilitarization period during which all agreed upon measures from Phase I would be executed. Finally, during Phase III (also 30 days) nobody except UNTAES forces (and those

³ It's unclear which side is meant.

⁴Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 56.

allowed by UNTAES) would carry or transport weapons. Demilitarized soldiers would have the right to wear their uniforms, but without markings or ranks displayed. UNTAES military forces, in coordination with local and U.N. police, would continue searching for weapons or military equipment to destroy.⁵

During the month of April and the first half of May a number of important events took place before the actual demilitarization started. On April 23rd, 1996 local Serbs in Eastern Slavonia organized a constitutive session of the assembly of the Srijemsko-baranjska oblast,⁶ which was how, at the time, they referred to the territories controlled by UNTAES. During this session, major changes were enacted that would prove significant for the future of UNTAES. During the session the name of the territories was changed to be “Srpska oblast Istočna Slavonija, Baranja i zapadni Srem” (Serbian county of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem) and, more importantly, Goran Hadžić was selected to be the president while Vojislav Stanimirović was selected to be the president of the Executive council.⁷ These two appointments meant that Milan Milanović, the Serbian leader who signed the Erdut Agreement, as well as people close to him, were ousted. Milan Milanović’s testimony at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia during the trial of Slobodan Milošević revealed that President Milošević was the key figure on the Serbian side and that he had total control over the political destiny of local Serbian leaders in the region. The following is an excerpt from the transcript of the testimony Mr. Milanovic gave at the ITCY:

⁵ Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 56-58.

⁶ Translates to Sirmium-baranjska county.

⁷ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Ininitus, 2015), 140.

Question: Were you asked to see Mr. Milošević in April 1996, an occasion that ended your career in the region?

Answer: Yes, that's right. Around about that time I did go to see Mr. Milošević, and I felt that something was wrong, because for the first time after a long time I did not make up the delegation which would go to see the president. But nonetheless, I did take all the people that I considered were important, and they did attend the meeting.

Question: And what was requested of you on that meeting?

Answer: I was requested, as Mr. Milošević put it - and Goran Hadžić said this too - that I should know -- that I was no longer necessary and that he had quite a few comments and criticisms, nor was I desirable, and that I had to be replaced. And I said, "All right, go ahead and replace me." But they couldn't replace me, and that is why they proposed a meeting, for this to be done in Belgrade. I did not agree to that; however, at Mr. Milošević's proposal we withdrew the next day in the morning at 10.00 from our posts; Kojić Ilija, Slavko Dokmanović, and myself, we withdrew.

Question: You said that they could not replace you. Why could they not replace you?

Answer: Well, I can't actually say why. Had they been able to do so, they would have done that. Well, probably they didn't have the necessary power and authority. They needed support from Mr. Milošević, and they got that support.”⁸

Nevertheless, the appointment of Goran Hadžić as the “president of region” was problematic to Croats since he was known to be a radical Serbian nationalist with allegations of war crimes to his name. Ivica Vrkić reacted to this news in an interview he gave to *Novosti* (News) on Monday 22nd

⁸ International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Cases – Slobodan Milošević, court transcripts October 13, 2003, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan_milosevic/trans/en/031014IT.htm.

of April in which he stated: “From the Croatian point of view I don’t consider it important who will represent the Serbs, is that going to be Hadžić or someone else. The important thing is that the process of the Peaceful reintegration has started and that in one year’s time Croatian authorities will be established and the refugees allowed to return. If I could influence who would be the Serbian representative, I would want him to be someone who did not take part in the rebellion and occupation, but if Serbs consider Hadžić to be their true representative the Croatian side will talk to him”.⁹ Hadžić’s role in the Peaceful reintegration, however, was sidelined by that of Vojislav Stanimirović who became the president of the Executive council. He represented a more cooperative and coolheaded side of Serbian politics. In fact, the fight over influence between these two figures proved crucial for the success of the peaceful reintegration.

On May 24th, the Serbian assembly came up with a proposal asking for “special status” of the region within Croatia. This special status resembled arrangements outlined in initial drafts for the Erdut agreement. The proposal gave the region its own parliament, government, flag, coat of arms and anthem. The document also proposed creating a regional citizenship, currency, regional bank, passport, police and control over municipalities (inside the region). According to the plan the region would also control health care, social security, education, culture, sport, industry, agriculture, forestry and human rights protection. The region would also have its own budget collected through taxing its citizens. The Croatian President would have veto rights on laws passed by the Regional assembly but only if the assembly exceeded its mandate. Essentially, it would have been a state within a state with even a right to negotiate and sign international agreements.¹⁰

⁹ Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 62.

¹⁰ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Ininitus, 2015), 142-3.

I believe these efforts to rewrite the U.N. Resolution 1037 and the Erdut Agreement even after the start of the Peaceful reintegration yet again showed the stubborn willingness of local Serbian leaders to live in complete denial of realities on the ground. The Belgrade *Telegraph* reported a statement from Mr. Hadić who said that the proposal encompasses “only the most minimal requests and conditions which would satisfy our people and enable them to remain in these lands”. He also added a warning that if such conditions are not met, the Serbs would have to leave the region.¹¹ The actual attitudes of regular Serbs in the region cannot be accurately assessed, but a hint was given to us through a petition supporting political autonomy which was signed by 50,000 citizens of the region (approx. half of the population of the region during UNTAES).¹²

Predictably, the Government of Croatia and UNTAES officials shut down both requests. As dr. Holjevac-Tukovic stated “Croatia didn’t give any room for a renewal of talks about political autonomy...especially because the Erdut Agreement didn’t bind Croatia to do so and because such requests were nonrealistic considering the ethnic composition of the region prior to the Serbian aggression in 1991.”¹³ Furthermore, Derek Boothby, the UNTAES deputy transitional administrator strongly condemned such ambitions for political autonomy which he characterized as “against the goal and purpose of the transitional administration in eastern Slavonia”.¹⁴

In May, it became clear that UNTAES was there to reintegrate rather than maintain the status quo and thus the question of the Đeletovci oil fields came up. This profitable natural resource was, at the time, occupied by a paramilitary group called the “Scorpions”. Its leader was a notorious war criminal and one of the most powerful member of the Serbian underground, Željko

¹¹ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 144.

¹² *Ibid.*, 145.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

Ražnatović – Arkan.¹⁵ The symbolic and financial importance of the Đeletovci oil fields could not have been underestimated. Ever since the beginning of the occupation in 1991 the income from these oil fields was crucial for the financial balance of the region.¹⁶ The local Serbian leaders and their criminal affiliates like Arkan exploited the oil resources for their own benefit. The money acquired by selling the extracted oil financed the local administration (politicians) and filled the pockets of local war lords. As the anticipated demilitarization of the region was approaching in May 1996, general Klein and UNTAES had to prove themselves capable of implementing the Erdut Agreement and the SC Resolution 1037. To do so they had to take control over the Đeletovci oil fields, because demilitarization would not have been complete if an unaccountable paramilitary group still occupied the site of the most important natural resource in the region. The fact that oil production on site had already stopped in April 1996 gave general Klein a hint that the Scorpions were aware that they might have to leave the premises soon. After consultations with President Milošević who explained that the Scorpions were a paramilitary unit not under his command, general Klein decided to take action on the 14th of May 1996 to drive them out.¹⁷ The UNTAES military (in this case the Jordanian battalion) approached the oil fields. The Scorpions responded by demanding 1,000,000 German marks and firing 5 shells towards the city of Otok.¹⁸ However, after Ukrainian MI-24 helicopters flew over the fields in a show of force, the Scorpions decided to evacuate Đeletovci.¹⁹ Around 300 of them did so in an escorted convoy that left Đeletovci for Serbia.²⁰ In his June 26th report on UNTAES the Secretary General of the U.N. stated the

¹⁵ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 126.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Christine Coleiro, *Bringing Peace to the Land of Scorpions and Jumping Snakes: Legacy of the United Nations in Eastern Slavonia and Transitional Missions* (Clementsport: The Canadian Peacekeeping Press, 2002), 87.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

following, “On 14 May 1996, UNTAES military units also assumed control of the strategic Đeletovci oilfield, and secured the departure of the Scorpion paramilitary unit from the area. The single most important economic resource of the region is the oilfield around Đeletovci. With a total of 74 wells, the oilfield was producing around 10,000 tons of crude oil a month, most of which was being refined at the Pančevo refinery in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.”²¹

The story of the Đeletovci oil fields did not end there. The local Serbs demanded that the proceeds from selling the oil should go towards the local Serbian administration and that the fields themselves should be controlled by the local Serbian oil company “NIK,” or Naftna industrija Krajine (Krajina’s oil industry).²² The Croatian government, however, demanded that the oil fields be made into an example of reintegration since many other public companies had to be reintegrated into the Croatian economy.²³ Ivica Vrkić, the head of the Office of the Croatian Government tasked with day to day dealings with UNTAES and local Serbs, stated in his memoir the following: “INA and Đeletovci had to be the example of how to enter in to all other public companies in the region.”²⁴ For this reason INA, the Croatian state oil company, offered to take in the “NIK” employees and absorb them into the company.

The talks between UNTAES, local Serbs and Croat officials about the fate of Đeletovci were tough and unproductive. During a meeting on May 23,rd Gerard Fischer – the head of the UNTAES civilian component – proposed that the oil fields be leased to a foreign company for

²¹ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, June 26, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1996/472.

²² Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 127-8.

²³ INA – Industrija Nafte – Oil Industry.

²⁴ Ivan Vrkić, *Istočno od zapada: Politički putopisi hrvatskim istokom*, ed. Josip Đerek (Zagreb: Interpublic, 1997), 99.

exploitation which the Croatian side outright rejected as a “crazy idea”.²⁵ The importance of Đeletovci to the Croats was great – Ivica Vrkić wrote in his memoir that taking over Đeletovci had a strong symbolic meaning almost equal to the arrival of Croatian police and customs officers on the border with Serbia.²⁶ For UNTAES it was all about money. General Klein knew that the oil fields and their revenues were crucial for keeping the region stable. During talks between the Government of Croatia and UNTAES, Derek Boothby²⁷ stressed “the very difficult economic situation in the region” and the fear that without sufficient funding and jobs, the numerous demilitarized young men could represent a destabilizing factor during the end of the demilitarization. Because of that Mr. Boothby requested help from the Government of Croatia in the form of a “financial injection into the region”.²⁸ After several more difficult meetings, a deal was struck, and INA took full control over Đeletovci and the local petrol stations in June/July 1996. 550 local Serbs who worked there were offered the chance to continue doing so under INA.²⁹ Another important development was the transfer of UNTAES military headquarters from Erdut to Vukovar on April 1st, and general Klein’s headquarters from Zagreb to Vukovar on April 22nd.³⁰ Both headquarters were in the same place – the former Serbian barracks in Vukovar.³¹

On May 6th, 1996 in Zagreb, general Klein participated in a cabinet meeting of the Government of Croatia. During the meeting the Croatian minister of Justice, Miroslav Šeparović,

²⁵Ivan Vrkić, *Istočno od zapada: Politički putopisi hrvatskim istokom*, ed. Josip Đerek (Zagreb: Interpublic, 1997), 100.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

²⁷ Vice transitional administrator.

²⁸ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 128.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

³⁰ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia*, June 26, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1996/472.

³¹Christine Coleiro, *Bringing Peace to the Land of Scorpions and Jumping Snakes: Legacy of the United Nations in Eastern Slavonia and Transitional Missions* (Clementsport: The Canadian Peacekeeping Press, 2002), 84.

announced the first amnesty proposal that would cover people who lived in the region during the census of 1991. Also, a document was created that outlined some major deadlines and predicated that the Peaceful reintegration would last till January 1997. Vice president Kostović presented the work done by the government during March and April 1996 and assessed that the Peaceful reintegration was indeed moving forward, albeit at a slower pace than the one the public wanted. He mentioned a deal between Croatia and Yugoslavia regarding the opening of the Vinkovci-Sid railway and the opening of the Zagreb-Beograd highway, which was supposed to happen the following Tuesday. General Klein stated that the cooperation between UNTAES and Croatia benefited both sides and stressed that there was no doubt about the outcome of the Peaceful reintegration. He called for establishing conditions favorable for life and work in the region and added that efforts needed to be made to facilitate the return home of both Croatian and Serbian refugees.³²

On the 22nd of May 1996, the President of the Security Council acknowledged the May 20th letter by the Transitional administrator that assessed that the military component of UNTAES was in place and ready to commence the demilitarization of the region. He announced that “the mission of demilitarization began on the 21st of May 1996” and demanded that both sides “comply strictly with their obligations under the Basic Agreement and to cooperate fully with UNTAES”. He called for the respect of the “highest level of internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms” and requested that the Government of the Republic of Croatia make the proposed amnesty for Serbs comprehensive by granting it to those who “either voluntarily or by coercion, served in the civil administration, military or police forces of the local Serb authorities

³² Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 63-4.

in the former United Nations Protected Areas with the exception of those who committed war crimes as defined in international law”. The President pointed out that this would “maintain public confidence and stability during the demilitarization and demobilization process.”³³ The basis for such demands was the fact that the first amnesty law proposed by the Government of Croatia was full of flaws, vague and did “not provide amnesty to all Croatian citizens but only those in the region; further, it included the possibility of prosecuting, in Croatian courts, persons accused of "most serious crimes" - a categorization that lead to confusion and uncertainty as to whom it might have applied”.³⁴

The process of demilitarization, which started on the 21st of May, ended on the 21st of June without any incidents. Fifteen thousand Serbian soldiers, four thousand of which were connected to the Yugoslav Army, demobilized while 118 tanks, 19 armored vehicles, more than 150 artillery pieces and 40-50 anti-air systems were withdrawn from the region.³⁵ UNTAES took control over the military bases in Beli Manastir, Vukovar, Darda, Klisa and Đeletovci.³⁶ All sides acknowledged that the demilitarization process was successful, and the Security Council commended the progress by stating that “In particular it notes with appreciation that the

³³ United Nations Security Council, Statement by the President of the Security Council, May 22, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PRST/1996/26.

³⁴ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, June 26, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1996/472.

³⁵ There are contradictory statements about the exact numbers, the SG report of June 26th states that UNTAES monitored the removal of 93 tanks, 11 armored personnel carriers, 35 anti-tank systems, 107 artillery pieces, 123 mortars and 42 anti-aircraft guns. Sources in Olujni mir and PMRHC cite general Schoups saying that it was the 118 tanks etc.

³⁶ Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 68.

demilitarization proceeded smoothly and was completed on 20 June 1996 [midnight]” and that “it expresses its satisfaction at the cooperation that both parties have shown in this respect.”³⁷

The first and most important step towards the Peaceful reintegration was always the successful demilitarization of the region. With such a momentous task completed, the peaceful reintegration was well under way.

The financing of UNTAES and the local Serbs, the extension of the UNTAES mandate and the mutual recognition of Yugoslavia and Croatia

The Erdut Agreement and the whole process of the Peaceful reintegration was based mostly on improvisations. There was no blueprint or already-established protocol to help the U.N. in designating what would be their responsibility and what Croatia’. This was especially true when it came to the funding of the operation. The Erdut Agreement mentioned that a transitional administration should be established and that people with damaged or destroyed property should be compensated, but it did not specify whose obligation it was to finance such an undertaking. The Security Council Resolution 1037 contained three paragraphs relevant to the financial obligations that were set out in the Erdut Agreement, but they were vague and open for interpretation. Paragraph 18 called upon the international community to “support and cooperate with efforts to promote the development and economic reconstruction of the region” while paragraph 19 underlined that all such activity was predicated on the cooperation of both sides in fulfilling the requirements of the Erdut Agreement. The second to last paragraph in Resolution 1037 requested

³⁷ United Nations Security Council, Statement by the President of the Security Council, July 3, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PRST/1996/30.

that “the Secretary General submit for consideration by the Council...a report on the possibilities for contributions from the host country in offsetting the costs of the operation”.¹ With such poor directives it was inevitable that at the moment when initial funding ran out, a problem would arise as to who should fund the peace action.

The summer of 1996 brought the dispute to the forefront because both UNTAES and the local Serbian administration were running out of money, the former because of expenditures and the latter because of the closing of the Đeletovci oil fields. The international community believed that it was the responsibility of the Government of Croatia to fund UNTAES and the local Serbian administration (which was working alongside UNTAES). Dr. Holjevac-Tuković pointed out how Gevin Hewitt the British ambassador to Croatia, gave the opinion that Croatia should fund the local Serbian administration and UNTAES. This was primarily because it was on Croatian territory, and because doing so would reaffirm Croatian sovereignty over the territories in question. He went on to request that Croatia fund UNTAES with the sum of 1.62 million USD per month so that UNTAES could continue doing its job. The US and the rest of the international community also took the same position.² President of the Security Council put pressure on Croatia in his statement on July 3rd in which he recognized that the closing of the Đeletovci oil fields was a blow to the region’s economic stability and urged “the Government of the Republic of Croatia to cooperate closely with UNTAES to identify and provide funding for the local administration and public services”.³

¹ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1037, January 15, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1037\(1996\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1037(1996)).

² Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Ininitus, 2015), 130-1.

³ United Nations Security Council, Statement by the President of the Security Council, July 3, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PRST/1996/30.

The issue looked very different from the Croatian perspective. It seemed an outrageous demand that Croatia should fund the administration of the people who occupied their country and ethnically cleansed Croats from Eastern Slavonia. The public, and especially the refugees, resisted any kind of concessions that were made to the local Serbs, thus one can imagine what their reaction was to the idea that their tax money should go towards paying the salaries of those who expelled them from their homes. It was a very risky political move to allow such a concession. Nevertheless, the pressure was mounting, and a deal had to be struck. On August 5th the Secretary General of the U.N. reported to the Security Council that “The local administration has been unable to pay the salaries of some 3,600 civil servants, including teachers, health workers and police, as well as general operational costs” and went on to warn that “This precarious financial base for administering the region, together with the presence of significant numbers of demobilized and unemployed ex-combatants, is undercutting the public confidence in UNTAES that had been created in the early months of the Mission”. Towards the end of his report the Secretary General observed that “It is indeed regrettable that the Government of Croatia has not yet been prepared to provide such funding, despite its clear obligation to cooperate fully with UNTAES and repeated demands by the Security Council that the host country help offset the costs of the operation. The mandated objective of UNTAES was to move towards the Peaceful reintegration of this portion of Croatia’s territory. The Government of Croatia therefore had an evident responsibility to support its administration financially during this transitional period” and concluded that “Unless the present negotiations with the Government of Croatia soon reach a satisfactory conclusion, I shall have to consider whether the situation has reached the point where I must report to the Council

that one of the parties has significantly failed to comply with its obligations under the Basic Agreement.”⁴

Despite being polite the threat caught the attention of the Croatian government and efforts were immediately made to reach a compromise. A deal was signed on August 8th in which the Government of Croatia agreed to provide each month, until January 15th, 1997, 4.500,000 Kuna to the UNTAES mission. The sum was less than the previously requested 1.62 million USD but nevertheless sufficient to end the crisis. Article IV of the deal also stated that UNTAES would provide the Government of Croatia with financial report, but solely for information purposes which meant that Croatia had no say in how the money was spent. Furthermore, article V tasked UNTAES with introducing the Kuna⁵ to the region no later than October 1st, 1996.⁶

The danger behind this agreement is revealed by the writings of Ivica Vrkić, the signatory along with general Klein. In his memoir he stated the following: “I was just told that today I am going to sign an agreement on the co-financing of public services under the temporary control of UNTAES. I’ve been to Zagreb many times so far, but I’ve never signed anything in Zagreb and especially not given public statements with general Klein. That was reserved for other people. It was clear to me that I was given a hot potato that I had to throw to the public before getting too scarred from this unpleasant situation. Everybody is angry and is asking why we are paying the

⁴ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, August 5, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1996/622.

⁵ The Croatian currency.

⁶ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Note by the Secretary-General, August 12, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1996/648.

Serbs, giving them money, to their local administration. Today's signature will be a real blasphemy. I was sad, but I had no other choice."⁷

The successful completion of the Peaceful reintegration always depended on an agreement on mutual recognition and a normalization of relationships between FR Yugoslavia and Croatia. On August 23rd, 1996, the agreement on mutual recognition was signed in Belgrade by the Croatian minister of foreign affairs Mate Granić and his Yugoslav counterpart Milan Milutinović. The Agreement came after a meeting, initiated by the Greek prime minister Konstantinos Simitis, between President Tuđman and President Milošević in Athens on August 6th.⁸ Article 1 and 2 established a mutual recognition of the independence and sovereignty between Croatia and Yugoslavia, in their internationally-recognized borders. Article 7 established that both countries would provide proper conditions for the return of refugees and enable them access to their property or compensate them for it, if destroyed. Furthermore, it stated that “the contracted parties would proclaim a general amnesty for all acts committed in connection with armed conflicts” apart from those who committed war crimes. Crucially, article 7 also contained a paragraph stating that both countries would support the “consistent and full” implementation of the Erdut Agreement.⁹ By signing this agreement, Milosević officially renounced any pretensions to Croatian territory and gave a powerful message to those in Eastern Slavonia who still hoped for a failed reintegration into Croatia. They had to start looking towards Zagreb as their capital instead of Belgrade.¹⁰

⁷ Ivan Vrkić, *Istočno od zapada: Politički putopisi hrvatskim istokom*, ed. Josip Đerek (Zagreb: Interpublic, 1997), 153.

⁸ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Ininitus, 2015), 163.

⁹ Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 93-5.

¹⁰ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Ininitus, 2015), 166.

In his August 5th report on UNTAES, the Secretary General Boutros-Ghali mentioned two other issues discussed at the time – the extension of the UNTAES mandate and the amnesty law proposed by the Croatian Government. During the summer of 1996 both the Secretary General and the President of the Security Council made statements that outlined their disappointment with the Amnesty Law passed by the Croatian parliament the previous May. The Secretary General wrote that the “Fear [of local Serbs] has also been exacerbated by the continued absence of an adequate amnesty law” and added that “on June 28th the Croatian media published a list of 811 persons whom the Government of Croatia had identified as being excluded from the provisions of the Amnesty Law adopted by the Parliament on 17 May 1996.” According to the Secretary General, aside from the fact that the people on that list received threatening phone calls, the list also proved itself to be erroneous since “it included an individual who had already been granted amnesty, a number of on-combatants, several elderly persons and at least one person who died some years ago”. Overall, it was the judgment of the Secretary General that the “promulgation of the Amnesty Law and the publication of the aforementioned list has created confusion about who has been granted amnesty and who is exempted from it, undermining the positive impact these steps might otherwise have had”.¹¹

In light of such harsh condemnation, the Government of Croatia had no other choice but to offer an updated version of the Amnesty Law. After the meeting between Serbian representatives and a delegation of the Croatian Parliament on September 10th, 1996 in Vukovar, general Klein

¹¹ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, August 5, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1996/622.

announced that there was a new proposal for the Amnesty Law. He hoped that it would be much more inclusive and that it would ease the local Serb's fear of prosecution.¹²

Following the September 10th meeting, on September 20th the Croatian Parliament voted into law the General Amnesty Act. This time the law was more comprehensive and, as Dr. Holjevac-Tuković pointed out, allowed for many high-ranking politicians of the former so-called “Republic of Srpska Krajina”¹³ to continue on their political work in the Republic of Croatia.¹⁴ The law did not come without resistance. Understandably, the Croatian refugees, none of whom had yet returned home, protested any kind of amnesty and requested that the UNTAES mandate end in January 1997. The Government of Croatia responded to such requests on September 27th when the Croatian Parliament unanimously voted for the Resolution to end of the UNTAES mandate.

Such a resolution was aimed more at alleviating internal political pressures than anything else since it was clear that the mission would not end in January 1997. Local Serbs already asked for an extension of the UNTAES mandate in July, and the Secretary General pointed out in his August 5th report that “This question...threatens to become the major local political issue, adding to political ferment in the region”.¹⁵ Additionally, in his August 28th report the Secretary General

¹² Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 99.

¹³ The name given by the Serbs to the Croatian territories they occupied in 1991.

¹⁴ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 116-7.

¹⁵ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia*, August 5, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1996/622.

announced that he would ask the Security Council to consider an extension of the UNTAES mandate “at the earliest appropriate time”.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the peaceful reintegration was making progress on many other fronts. The weapons buy-back program started in October 1996 and lasted until August 1997.¹⁷ The program was very controversial in Croatia because it seemed as though the Croatian state was rewarding Serbs for rebelling against it. The buy-back program ended up costing Croatia 1.6 million USD but was nevertheless proclaimed a success.¹⁸ During the negotiation about the details of how the buy-back program would work, it was essentially agreed that anybody could come to selected areas where UNTAES would be located and sell their weapon in complete anonymity.¹⁹ This type of open approach was a double edged sword, because while it aimed to remove the maximum number of weapons from the region, it also invited fraud. Dr. Holjevac-Tuković points out that according to reports by UNTAES, weapons were brought to the region from BiH and Yugoslavia in order to be sold there. The Jordanian and Russian UNTAES battalions stationed in areas in neighboring Yugoslavia took control over many more weapons. For example, during the first two weeks of the buy-back program the Jordanian and Russian battalions accepted 2163 pieces of light anti-tank weapons while the Belgium and Pakistani battalions received, during the same period, 171 weapons of the same type. Additionally, two men came to one of the buy-back locations and sold

¹⁶ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, August 28, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1996/705.

¹⁷ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 99.

¹⁸ Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, 103.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

70 pieces of anti-tank rocket launchers and received 10,850²⁰DM.²¹ Despite these issues, the program was very successful and managed to remove 30,042 weapons from the region.

Another important development was the deployment of the Transitional police force. Mentioned explicitly in the Erdut Agreement, the TPF was of crucial importance for the whole peace action. The uniforms and police symbols were made to be neutral and the TPF started working on July 1st, 1996. Initially local Serbs held a majority within the TPF, but with time more and more Croats were included.

Another small but significant event took place on November 9th, when the Croatian President Franjo Tuđman met with Serbian representatives in Zagreb. This was the first time that local Serb leaders came to Zagreb to talk to *their* President. The fact that they addressed him as such was a huge step forward and, in the end, both sides characterized the talks as productive and fruitful.²²

Despite such positive steps forward, the issue of the duration of the UNTAES mandate was still present. In his 26th of October report, the Secretary General stressed that “Throughout October there have been increasingly hostile and aggressive statements against UNTAES in the [Croatian] media, and by the Government, including statements by the Croatian Minister of Defense threatening military action if the region is not returned by April 1997” and added that “A most urgent requirement for the successful completion of the UNTAES mission is to terminate the uncertainty about the duration of its mandate. It is clear that the completion of the tasks of

²⁰ Deutsche Mark – Germany’s currency at the time.

²¹ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Ininitus, 2015), 102.

²² Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 112.

UNTAES within the present mandate period is impossible. UNTAES is already having to plan and prepare for events, such as elections, that extend well beyond 15 January 1997. Moreover, a decision by the Council to extend the mandate will discourage those who hold the false belief that political pressure will cause the mission to compromise on the performance of its tasks and full realization of its mandate”. Finally, the SG recommended that “the Council extend the current mandate of UNTAES by six months, to end on 15 July 1997, in the expectation that the Government of Croatia will extend its cooperation as necessary for the completion of the different tasks for UNTAES.”²³

On November 15th, following the recommendations of the Secretary General Boutros-Ghali, the Security Council adopted the Resolution 1079 and extended the UNTAES mandate until the 15th of July 1997.²⁴

²³Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, October 26, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1996/883.

²⁴United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1079, November 15, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1079\(1996\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1079(1996)).

Local elections and the letter of intent of the Croatian government

Towards the last months of 1996 and the beginning of 1997, the main issue became the holding of local elections which, according to the Erdut Agreement, had to happen no later than 30 days before the end of the UNTAES mandate. The local elections became an issue, because Croats and Serbs had different opinions on, among other things, how the administrative boundaries should be drawn after UNTAES left. In January 1997 the Government of Croatia sent a letter of intent to the Security Council outlining the steps that the Croatian state would take to support the peaceful reintegration.¹ In the letter, the Government of Croatia mentioned the upcoming elections and stated that all Serbs who, according to the census of 1991 lived in the region, would be allowed to vote for the local administrations of the region. Those Serbs who, after the war began, left another part of Croatia and moved into the region would be able to choose either to vote for the local administration of the place they resided during the 1991 census or for the one to which they had moved. Voting rights were restricted to those who applied for and got Croatian citizenship and a state ID card.² Article 4 of the letter promised the Serbian ethnic group all the rights that other minorities enjoyed, such as a proportional representation in local and state institutions. For example, because Serbs constitute a significant minority in Eastern Slavonia³ they were guaranteed two vice-župan⁴ positions and jobs in the healthcare services as well as the judiciary and the police. Another promise was to appoint two vice-presidents of the Croatian Parliament from the Serbs elected to parliament. Positions in the Ministry of reconstruction and development, the Office for refugees and displaced persons, the Ministry of Interior and others promised to Serbs in the region

¹Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 132.

²Important to note here that the government took the responsibility to issue these documents in time.

³Specifically, the two counties – Osiječko-baranjska županija and Vukovarsko-srijemska županija.

⁴The župan is the title for the governor of Croatian counties, the Serbs would have two vice-zupan positions in the two counties into which the Region currently under UNTAES control would be split.

with a guarantee that the Serbian minority (and all other minorities) would have full rights regarding their educational and cultural autonomy. Essentially Croatia allowed for separate curriculums and cultural institutions that would “preserve and cherish the individual cultural identity”⁵ of the group. A “Council of the Serbian ethnic community” would be established and could address the President and the government with their solutions for issues concerning the Serb minority. Furthermore, after the elections they would establish a “Joint Council of Municipalities” that would have replaced the local Serbian “Executive Council”. The Ministry of Defense decided to exempt Serbs from serving in the Croatian army for two years after the UNTAES mandate and the government stressed that all victims of war⁶ in the region would not be denied their social and healthcare rights for which they were eligible⁷, according to Croatian law.⁸

The Serbs, on the other hand, demanded that the “Serbian ethnic community living in the region under the present United Nations Transitional Administration [be allowed] to set up and administer a unique “županija” within the sovereign Croatian State as a form of local self-government or administration or as any other form of organization of that level and meaning in future.”⁹ The local Serbs also wanted a full demilitarization of the region even after the end UNTAES mandate and a fifteen year exemption from service in the Croatian army for all Serbs.¹⁰

⁵Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 137.

⁶ Especially so the disabled, widows, children without parents.

⁷ Except for specific rights pertaining to Croat war veterans.

⁸ Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu, ed. Mirko Mađor. (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 133-8.

⁹Letter dated 22 January 1997 from the charge d’affaires A.I. of the permanent mission of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, January 22, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1997/64.

¹⁰Ibid.

On January 22nd, the Secretary General responded to these issues in his letter to the President of the Security Council. In the letter the SG mentions that “The Transitional Administrator considers that the rights and guarantees outlined in the [Croatian government] letter, if fully and genuinely implemented, constitute a solid basis for the holding of elections simultaneously with nationwide elections in Croatia and offer substantial progress towards the completion of the process of peaceful reintegration of the region.” General Klein also warned that the timing of the local elections would have a lot to do with the speedy issuance of citizenship documents to local Serbs. In response to the Serb the Secretary General stated that he believed “that the political package, taken in conjunction with the Basic Agreement and resolution 1037 (1996) and the guarantees contained in the Affidavit of Employment¹¹ signed by the Government of Croatia on 16 December 1996 (see annex), constitutes a comprehensive framework of guarantees for Serbs who choose to stay in Croatia as equal citizens enjoying full rights under the Croatian Constitution in accordance with international law and under international monitoring.”¹²

In a response statement to the SG’s letter, the President of the Security Council stated that the Council agreed with the Transitional Administrator, “that the rights and guarantees outlined in the letter from the Government of Croatia, if fully implemented, constitute a solid basis for the holding of elections simultaneously with nationwide elections in Croatia, and offer substantial progress towards the completion of the process of peaceful reintegration of the region.” The President of the Security Council also stressed the need for full cooperation from local Serbs.¹³

¹¹This agreement was about protecting the rights of employees of the public enterprises and institutions presently existing in Eastern Slavonia.

¹²Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Letter dated 21 January 1997 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, January 22, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1997/62.

¹³United Nations Security Council, Statement by the President of the Security Council, March 6, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PRST/1997/4.

The problem of the radical Serbs in the region had already been pointed out by the Secretary General in August 1996 when he warned about increasing polarization between Serbs willing to cooperate and those who were not. According to him “hardline elements in the Regional Assembly and the Regional Executive Council [were] opposing the reintegration process and challenging the positions of those who have exhibited a willingness to cooperate with UNTAES.”¹⁴

This problem started to take a more prominent role with the January 1997 letter of intent by the Government of Croatia. The split seemed to be happening between Goran Hadžić and Vojislav Stanimirović. The former held sway in the Regional assembly while the latter was the president of the “Executive Council”. The fact that these two leaders represented opposing forces in the Serbian community is attested by Ivica Vrkić’s memoir when he wrote, already in December 1996, that he supported general Klein’s intention to demand Hadžić’s removal during his meeting with President Milosević. Ivica Vrkić writes that “if Hadžić leaves, there will be room for Stanimirović to gain strength and finish the [peace] mission.”¹⁵ Furthermore, Stanimirović’s signature on the document, outlining the above mentioned Serbian demands, suggested he still had to take radical positions in order not to lose his battle over influence with Goran Hadžić. In my interview with Dr. Stanimirović I asked him if he believed that criminals, profiting from the status quo, were part of the Serbian opposition to the peaceful reintegration. He stated “One part of them [those who opposed the peaceful reintegration] was certainly in the structures of the oil industry in Đeletovci. Among them was Hadžić who had a certain role, a certain circle of people, who were

¹⁴Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, August 28, 1996, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1996/705.

¹⁵ Ivan Vrkić, *Istočno od zapada: Politički putopisi hrvatskim istokom*, ed. Josip Đerek (Zagreb: Interpublic, 1997), 239.

dealing with all kinds of smuggling. They were there; criminals or not, they were doing illegal things.”¹⁶

The negotiation processes regarding the holding of elections during the first few months of 1997 were a thorough process during which the region saw an increase in tensions. In his February 24th report to the Security Council, the Secretary General stated that there have been peaceful protests by local Serbs, in Vukovar and other cities, accusing UNTAES for siding with the Croats. The Secretary General warned that there was a “growing rift” between moderate and radical Serbs and that despite the decision of the “Regional Assembly” to “urge Serbs to stay” there was a “substantial increase in [Serb] families leaving the region”. The Secretary General blamed the situation on both radical Serbs who were “intimidating the majority” and the Government of Croatia for slowing down the process of document issuance.¹⁷ It is worth mentioning, however, that the offices in which Croatian officials worked with local Serbs to get them their documents, were at the constant risk of attack and some, like those in Bobota, Bršadin and Negoslavci, had to be closed.¹⁸ “Overall, despite issues, the SG’s report was optimistic and set April 13th 1997 as a realistic goal for the date of the local elections.”¹⁹

With the date of the elections approaching, Serb demands changed. Local Serb leaders gave up on the idea of uniting the territories under UNTAES control into one Croatian county. Nevertheless, they requested that they be allowed to possess dual citizenship (Yugoslav/Serbian

¹⁶Dr. Vojislav Stanimirović, interview by the author, Vukovar, January 15, 2018.

¹⁷Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, February 24, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1997/148.

¹⁸Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 168.

¹⁹Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, February 24, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1997/148.

and Croatian), that the border with Yugoslavia be organized as a “soft border”, that the region be demilitarized permanently, and that Croatia guarantee their safety after the departure of UNTAES.²⁰ The demands regarding the demilitarization and dual citizenship depended on Yugoslavia and there was little Croatian officials could do about it; however, the other demands were accepted. Simultaneously with these developments the local Serbs in the region decided to reorganize themselves in order to prepare for the upcoming elections. On the 5th of March the “Regional Assembly” founded the Samostalna Demokratska Srpska Stranka (*Independent Democratic Serbian party*) and declared that it would fight for the rights of all Serbs in Croatia. The party was registered in Zagreb and both pretenders for the position of president of the party (Vojislav Stanimirović and Goran Hadžić) gave positive statements in regard to working within the Croatian political system to fight for Serbian rights.²¹ Soon after, the party would be joined with the SSS or Samostalna Srpska Stranka (*Independent Serbian Party*). Dr. Stanimirović was chosen to be the president of this new party by securing 19 out of the 33 votes in the main committee of the party.²² Goran Hadžić was defeated and apparently immediately left the room after the secret ballot showed he had lost the race.²³ Hadžić also lacked Croatian documents and was thus replaced, together with all other members of the main committee who did not possess Croatian citizenship.²⁴ In a last ditch effort to destabilize the upcoming elections, the group associated with Hadžić insisted on organizing a referendum on autonomy but the effort proved useless as the SDSS with Dr. Stanimirović decisively opted for a “personal autonomy” of local

²⁰ The Government of the Republic of Croatia, 004-01-96-02-05, Notes from the permanent Croatian mission in the OESS, October 21, 1996 quoted in Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 167.

²¹ Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, 170.

²² *Ibid.*, 174.

²³ Ivan Vrkić, *Istočno od zapada: Politički putopisi hrvatskim istokom*, ed. Josip Đerek (Zagreb: Interpublic, 1997), 325.

²⁴ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 174.

Serbs that would manifest itself in the independence of the Serbian Orthodox Church and other cultural institutions. Milorad Pupavac the former president of the SSS (now joined with the SDSS) outlined the following strategy for the survival of Serbs in Croatia – the conservation of the Serbian cultural and religious identity, integration into the Croatian civil society and the return of the Serbs who left Croatia in the summer of 1995.²⁵

On the ground in Eastern Slavonia more and more Serbs were receiving (upon request) Croatian documents. With the date of the election approaching, however, the Serbs requested a final concession – the redrawing of municipalities boundaries. This requests was already mentioned in the February 24th report by the Secretary General in which he stated that moderate Serbs would be willing to take part in the elections if UNTAES redraws “a number of local municipal electoral boundaries which had been redrawn in 1991-1992 to leave Serbs in minority positions in several municipalities”.²⁶ General Klein decided to make Negoslavci, Šodolovci, Markušica and Jagodnjak their own individual municipalities while Tenje (the suburb of Osijek) and Mirkovci (the suburb of Vinkovci) were allowed to be their own municipalities for only one year.²⁷

On the 8th of April, five days before the elections, the Serbs held their referendum for the “whole county” reiterating their previously abandoned request that the territories under UNTAES be made into one distinct county instead of being split into two. Out of 77,614 people who voted

²⁵ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 177.

²⁶Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia*, February 24, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1997/148.

²⁷ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 183.

in the referendum apparently only 154 voted against it.²⁸ These results, however, were considered primarily as a propaganda statement rather than actual results of a referendum because it had no basis in the Erdut Agreement or Resolution 1037.

On the other hand, on April 13th local elections were held in all of Croatia. The process passed without major incidents, but because of some technical problems²⁹ during the first day, general Klein extended the period for voting in the region to April 14th. All together more than 71,000 citizens inside the region decided to vote. The Secretary General stated, in his letter to the President of the SC, that the Transitional Administrator had informed him “that no intimidation, violence or electoral improprieties were observed or reported before, during or after the elections.”³⁰ Nevertheless, some irregularities were observed. Vojislav Stanimirović sent a letter to the Transitional administrator lamenting that polling stations were not opened on time and were not located in the usual places. Moreover, the American ambassador to Croatia, Peter Galbraith, also noted that voter lists that should have been in Dalj ended up in Erdut.³¹ Overall many people on both sides were dissatisfied with the elections – the Serbs because of the previously mentioned objections and Croats because, undeniably, a number of people voted with documents of the Republic of Srpska (one of the entities of BiH³²) or voted more than once.³³ Still, despite these shortcomings, general Klein confirmed the elections to be valid on April 22nd in Vukovar.

²⁸ Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 204.

²⁹ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Letter dated 29 April 1997 from the Secretary General addressed to the President of the Security Council, April 29, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1997/343.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *The United States and Croatia: A Documentary History 1992-1997* (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1998), 432.

³² Bosnia and Herzegovina – the neighboring country.

³³ The Government of the Republic of Croatia, 6.10.2.3., Cabinet Zlatko Matešša meeting, Croatian Danube region, The Ministry of Interior, Results of local elections, 15.4.1994 quoted in Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Infinitus, 2015), 187.

As far as the results go, the Serbs won in the city of Beli Manastir (15-12³⁴) and in the municipalities of Erdut (11-5), Šodolovci (16³⁵), Jagodnjak (16-0), Darda (10-5), Tenje (12-3), Negoslavci (16), Trpinja (16), Borovo (16), Markušica (16) and Mirkovci (14-2). The Croats won in the city of Ilok (20-6) and Vukovar (14-12) and in the municipalities of Antunovac (16), Draž (14-2), Kneževi Vinogradi (12-4), Bilje (13-3), Petlovac (13-3), Čeminac (12-4), Ernestinovo (14-2), Popovac (9-7), Bogdanovci (10-6), Tordinci (18-3), Nijemci (13-3), Tovarnik (11-5), Lovas (11-5), Stari Jankovci (10-6) and Tompojevci (11-5).³⁶

Vojislav Stanimirović was not satisfied with the election results, although he did acknowledge that some fault for the losses falls on radical Serbs who made it difficult for all those who wanted to vote to get Croatian citizenship. They harassed Serbs getting Croatian documents as well as the Croat officials issuing them. Another similar problem, although more humorous, was that some Serbs, while voting for SDSS, could not resist crossing out the HDZ option. Unfortunately for them, this made their ballots void.³⁷

Finally, on the 8th of May the President of the Security Council acknowledged the successful completion of the local elections and urged an “early formation of the newly elected bodies of local government and prompt and full implementation of the undertakings contained in the Basic Agreement and the letter from the Government of Croatia of 13 January 1997, including

³⁴ SDSS – the Serbian party won 15 seats in the city assembly while HDZ – the Croatian party won 12 seats, in other examples I will unite Croatian parties because HDZ was not the only Croat party

³⁵ There was probably no opposition to vote for.

³⁶ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Letter dated 29 April 1997 from the Secretary General addressed to the President of the Security Council, April 29, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1997/343.

³⁷ Ana Holjevac Tuković, *Proces mirne reintegracije Hrvatskog Podunavlja*, ed. Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot Informatika, 2015), 188-9.

the establishment of the Joint Council of Municipalities and the appointment of local Serbs to the guaranteed positions in the parliamentary and administrative structures of Croatia.”³⁸

The end of the Peaceful reintegration

As the summer of 1997 was approaching many issues still remained unresolved. The constitution of the elected bodies in the cities and municipalities was still underway and problems, such as which symbols should be represented in the town halls, still haunted the peaceful reintegration. The return of refugees and displaced persons was a source of major concern since the main issue of Serbs living in Croat houses and vice versa was not addressed during the past year and a half. The integration of the public companies from the region into Croatian public companies was mostly a technical problem, but the integration of institutions like the judiciary and the police represented a major task since local Serbs still resented anything that reminded them of the Croatian state.

The county organizations of the SDSS and HDZ made a deal in May 1997 that the winning party in a municipality should get the position of mayor and president of the assembly while the other party should get the positions of vice-major and vice-president of the assembly. The city of Vukovar, however, was a bigger problem, because the tie between SDSS and HDZ was broken by a radical Croat party – the list of Tomislav Merčep. During the first try the city assembly elected a Croat mayor and Croat president of the assembly but without the Serbs who did not show up. After general Klein decided to personally preside over the assembly, the Serbs returned, and the

³⁸ United Nations Security Council, Statement by the President of the Security Council, May 8, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PRST/1997/26.

assembly voted again. Because of pressure from general Klein, HDZ accepted to vote in a Serb as the president of the assembly. During these procedures the Croatian flag and state symbols were present in the room alongside the flag of the Serbian and Hungarian minority^{1,2}

Moreover, issues arose around the promises that were made in the letter of intent of the Croatian government. The Serbs were promised that President Tuđman would appoint two members of the Serbian minority into the upper house of the Croatian Parliament. The President did so, but the problem was that aside from Vojislav Stanimirović he chose Jovan Bamburača, a Serb from Zagreb. Vojislav Stanimirović protested saying that both Serbs were supposed to be from Eastern Slavonia but a compromise was made, between the government and the local Serbs, to appoint more Serbs into the executive branch.³

The return of Croatian refugees to Eastern Slavonia was also a problem. The Government of Croatia and UNTAES had to organize a system in which Serbs from other parts of Croatia, occupying Croat houses in Eastern Slavonia, had to be allowed to return to their original house. The problem was that some of these houses were either destroyed or occupied by Bosnian Croat refugees and thus in order for Croats to return to Eastern Slavonia these houses had to be reconstructed or the people living inside had to be moved. This was a complicated process but in the 23rd of June report by the Secretary General we see that “the Government of Croatia, on 24 April, adopted operational procedures for return to be applied equally to all Croatian citizens”.⁴

¹ In those municipalities in which the SDSS won the majority it was agreed that no flag should be flown until legal municipality symbols were chosen.

² Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 231-234.

³ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Croatia, June 23, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1997/487.

⁴ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Croatia, June 23, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1997/487.

The procedures were, however, not working properly, and by the time of the report “only twenty six individuals had returned from the region.” This coupled with incidents of ethnic hatred, like the one in Hrvatska Kostajnica where Bosnian Croat refugees “reacted violently to the appearance of a handful of Serb returnees”, made the Secretary General write a negative assessment of Croat efforts to be impartial towards all its citizens when it came to their safety. The Secretary General mentioned repeated harassments of Serbs returnees in Croatia and especially noted the story of a 12-year-old boy “attending school in Podlapaca, near Gospić” who had to “leave school as a result of constant beatings and harassment by other children because of his Serb ethnicity.”⁵ Overall, “the ability of Serbs to return to their former homes throughout Croatia remain uncertain” and thus a lot had to be done to strengthen security and the return procedures.

On the other hand, the integration of public companies and institutions was progressing “rapidly under the principles of the affidavit on employment, which guarantees Serbs employment in the equivalent Croatian structures.” The Government of Croatia accepted to reregister “approximately 19,000 potential pensioners” and include them in the Croatian pension system. In June the Serbian oil company NIK passed on all of its property to the Croatian oil company, INA, and the NIK employees continued to be employed in INA. As far as the law goes, it was agreed that Croatian law would be followed, however, “The Croatian Bar Association has refused to waive or reduce the admission fee of DM 10,000, which local Serb lawyers are unable to afford, with the consequence that no local lawyers will be able to defend cases in court.” There were still unknowns about the Amnesty Law and the Government of Croatia was requested to clarify any potential lists of exemptions. Progress was made in the effort to integrate the health care system by guaranteeing employment to the current employees, but a critical lack of medical equipment

⁵ Ibid.

had to be alleviated by the Government of Croatia as soon as possible. The education system was to be reintegrated in a similar fashion, by guaranteeing continued employment to the current teachers.

In May, the Croatian Kuna has been introduced into the region as the only legal currency while the TPF was slowly going to be preparing to be reintegrated in the Croatian police system. At the time there were 836 Croats and 1153 Serbs in the TPF and efforts were going to be made to reduce the Serb numbers to around 700-800.

Towards the end of his report, the Secretary General mentioned an “exit strategy” that would allow UNTAES to gradually withdraw over the next six months. According to the SG in “the first phase, the Transitional Administrator would devolve to Croatia executive responsibility for the major part of civil administration of the region while maintaining his authority and ability to intervene and overrule decisions should the situation deteriorate and the achievements of UNTAES be threatened” while in the second phase, after a satisfactory conclusion of the first, the “remaining executive functions would be devolved, with Croatia assuming responsibility for the continued demilitarization of the region and the gradual integration of the Transitional Police Force into the Croatian police force.”⁶

On July 14th the Security Council decided to extend the UNTAES mandate until the 15th of January 1998 and endorsed the “restructuring [of] UNTAES” and especially the plan to “draw down of the UNTAES military component by 15 October 1997.”⁷

⁶ Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Croatia, June 23, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1997/487.

⁷ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1120, July 14, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1120\(1997\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1120(1997)).

After the Resolution 1120 and the extension of the mandate another change happened as Mr. William Walker replaced the Transitional Administrator general Klein.⁸ During this time the Government of Croatia made efforts to satisfy the requirements of the Secretary General and many concessions were made. For example, in my interview with Dr. Kostović he mentioned that towards the end of the Reintegration, the Transitional Administrator Walker called him and demanded that diplomas of Serbian doctors in Vukovar be validated based on some “papers from Banja Luka⁹”. Dr. Kostović was the former dean of the medical college in Zagreb and for him this was an absurd request. To allow doctors with unproven knowledge to work in hospitals was a major concession made only after dr. Kostović received a message from President Tuđman that he had to do it, that as the President said, he had to “swallow frogs”, if necessary.¹⁰ The Law on Convalidation was passed in September 1997. It recognized individual decision made by the judiciary of the former Serbian rebel “state” such as marriages, birth certificates and other similar decisions.¹¹

Based on these, and other similar developments, the Secretary General compiled a final report on the 4th of December in which he stated that, based on the recent efforts of the Government of Croatia to reassure its citizens, “I am of the view that UNTAES should complete its work as originally envisaged. I therefore recommend the termination of UNTAES on 15 January 1998.”¹²

⁸ United Nations Security Council, Letter dated 24 July 1997 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary General, July 24, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1997/579.

⁹ A Serbian city in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¹⁰ Dr. Ivica Kostović, interview by author, Zagreb, January 1, 2018.

¹¹ Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 287.

¹² Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, December 4, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1997/953.

This report was followed by the Resolution 1145 in which the SC noted the end of the UNTAES mandate and decided to “establish, with effect from 16 January 1998, a support group of 180 civilian police monitors, for a single period of up to nine months as recommended by the Secretary-General, to continue to monitor the performance of the Croatian police in the Danube region.”¹³ This brought the final end of the United Nations Transitional Administration of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem.

¹³ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1037, December 19, 1997, accessed on April 21, 2018, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1145\(1997\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1145(1997)).

Analysis of the Peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem

The Peaceful reintegration that took place in Croatia in the second part of the 1990s was a political process of reestablishing sovereignty over occupied territories through compromises instead of violence. From that it is undeniable that the main goal of the whole process was completed successfully. Still, there are many more ways to look at what happened in Eastern Slavonia at the turn of the millennium. Aside from preventing war, the peace action had other goals too. How successful was it in fulfilling them? Indeed, what goals did each side set for itself? And finally, who or what can be credited with the outcome? These are some of the questions that I will consider to gain a deeper insight into the Peaceful reintegration and the impact it had on Croatia and the world. In the following analysis I will explore the goals and tactics used by each side as well as study the outcome that these tactics and goals have produced. In the end I will give credit those institutions and people who I think were responsible for it and finish with an observation of the larger historical context of the time.

The Erdut Agreement and the Resolution 1037 outline the goals of the peace action. These founding documents (with the report of the Secretary General pursuant to Resolution 1025) outlined several practical goals that UNTAES had to complete. These goals included reestablishing public services in the region, demilitarizing the region, establishing the transitional police force, holding local elections, the mutual recognition of Croatia and Yugoslavia, the economic recovery of the region and the successful return of refugees. Simultaneously, UNTAES had to govern in the interest of the inhabitants of the region (both displaced Croats and Serbs), there had to be total respect of human rights, and the property of people in the region had to be restored, returned or compensated for.

These were some of the official goals that all sides agreed on but what I have learned by studying the Peaceful reintegration is that most of these goals were serving a higher ideal outcome. UNTAES and the international community wanted to return the region to Croatia and prevent a massive Serbian exodus from the region. Unlike other goals this one was not written down in the UNTAES founding documents. However, Secretary General Boutros-Ghali talked about this goal in his report pursuant to Resolution 1025, and throughout the peace process the representatives of the international community repeated again and again that the Peaceful reintegration mattered most because it would prevent a massive Serbian exodus from the region.

For the Croats, the main goal was the liberation of the region in order to confirm the final defeat of the imperialist designs of the Yugoslav President Milosević and in order to allow the return of the expelled Croats to Eastern Slavonia.

On the Serbian side, things were more complicated because of the fragmented nature of their political structure. We have to differentiate between President Milosević and the local Serbs in the region, and even further between the Serbian criminal/political mafia and the everyday Serbs living in the region. For President Milosević the important things were stability¹ and the image of him as the peacemaker². The local Serbian mafia in Eastern Slavonia was interested in extracting the maximum amount of profit from the region, before Croatian authorities could stop them. While, for dr. Vojislav Stanimirović and other moderates, the primary interest was the achievement of rights and privileges for the Serbian minority, since they thought they would be needed in order to protect Serbs from potential discrimination in the future.

¹ Stability for the embattled Yugoslavian economy, remember – influx of refugees from Croatia - not good

² Removal of sanctions imposed on Yugoslavia.

Knowing all these interests can help us understand certain tactics used by the different factions during the peace process. For example, we can understand why certain individuals in the Serbian minority repeatedly put forward unrealistic demands and then when they would not be met, organized protests and orchestrated incidents. The unchecked use of the Đeletovci oil fields, the cutting of wood and importing it into Serbia, the robbery of furniture and building materials from abandoned Croat houses and other exploitations of Croatian resources were rampant before the arrival of UNTAES and continued on, in diminished amounts, even during it. Dr. Vojislav Stanimirović in my interview with him stated: “the U.N. often let people go, Serbs, those who wanted to leave, to extract machines from this area.... they allowed it tacitly, they were not interested in that. They were only interested in preventing casualties and that the whole thing ends peacefully. They tacitly allowed that, they even opened their gates during the night so that people could drive and leave.” Goran Hadžić, the leading Serb extremists left Croatia soon after the local elections in which he “planned” to participate even though he had not asked for Croatian documents. Many other, less public figures like him left the region the moment when further enrichment through criminal means became impossible. These individuals were very well represented in the “government” of the local Serbs and were a continuous impediment to progress. They went from lying to their own people at the start of the process to later requesting political autonomy. In both cases they acted to protect their own interest instead that of the people they were “representing”. With the first lie they protected their reputation as patriots (remember they were the same people that signed the Erdut Agreement) and with the second they wanted to extend the peace action as much as possible. Furthermore, this helps us understand certain more radical attitudes of Dr. Stanimirović since he had to fight over influence with these self-serving criminals. In order to secure as many rights as possible for the Serb minority he had to stay in power and to

do so he could have not appeared weak in negotiations with Croats. He had to make sure that he stayed in power so that he could make those hard compromises that had to be made but were unthinkable to the radical Serbs. President Milošević's situation was much simpler. He approved of the peace deal because it was benefiting his position in Bosnia and at home, and hence did everything asked of him to conclude the deal.³

The situation in the Croatian camp should have been simple too but some interesting developments caused complications to arise. Throughout the process it seemed that, despite President Tuđman's orders to approach the reintegration constructively, certain high to mid ranked bureaucrats had a will of their own and repeatedly obstructed the smooth implementation of deals already agreed upon. This is confirmed by Ivica Vrkić many times. For example, he mentions in his memoir, that in December 1996 a Serb, Milorad Lemić was arrested on charges of being a war criminal even though he was never officially indicted. Ivica wrote "Instead of thinking how to deal with the Serbs, more and more I have to think about what some Croats are preparing for me." Furthermore, in another reflection he wrote "The state is too young, and the partisan (as in Tito's communist soldiers during WWII) mentality is still present in our people who think that they work best for Croatia if they do as they see fit, instead of following the national interest and strategy." This unorganized group of bureaucrats may have obstructed the mission in the hope that they would incentivize more Serbs to leave or because they thought coordinating a peace action with people who were the occupiers was unfair and too much to ask. Furthermore, Croatian officials had to deal with a demanding public, especially those citizens who were still displaced from Eastern Slavonia and whose return there was the major goal of the Republic of Croatia. Knowing

³ Milošević forced the Serbs to sign the agreement, he ordered the signing of the agreement on mutual recognition between Croatia and Yugoslavia etc.

this can help us understand why the Government of Croatia repeatedly put forwards unrealistic end dates for the UNTAES mandate. They knew that they had to keep promising Croat refugees a quick return. I asked the ex-vice President of the Government of Croatia Ivica Kostović where he thought that general Klein and UNTAES could have done a better job and this was his response: “It seems to me that we could have done a better job with the pilot programs although, the elections, Ovčara⁴ and the humanitarian aspect in general, was done well... The worst part for me was when Klein would say after every conference “You cannot say that they [Croat refugees] will return!” but if I didn’t say that they would return and when, people would go crazy. It was a very delicate job...”⁵ Ivica Vrkić also felt the strong pressure from Croatian refugees and mentioned them in his memoir almost every time Croatia made some kind of concession to local Serbs.

These types of problems had a lot to do with the types of tactics that the international community and UNTAES had to resort to. Covert obstruction by uncooperative individuals and an extreme caution on the side of those willing to work help the Peaceful reintegration often united and forced the Secretary General to act. Remember how Croatia had to fix the Amnesty Law, and other such agreements, many times and how it seemed that without President Tuđman’s direct involvement many compromises would not have been made. One of the consequences of this behavior was that Croatia’s sovereignty was overtly violated a number of times and the usual pressuring often became threatening. Dr. Kostović mentioned, in my interview with him, that “foreign ambassadors” repeatedly warned Croatia not to exercise its legal right to liberate occupied territories and that a threat was made that Croatia would be punished with a delay in its accession

⁴ A site where Serbian forces killed and buried around 200 Croatian prisoners from the hospital in Vukovar, after the fall of the city in Fall 1991.

⁵Dr. Ivica Kostović, interview by the author, Zagreb, January 18, 2018.

to the EU, if it decided to act militarily.⁶ Moreover, Croatia was pressured to allow everybody to vote in the local elections and consequently even people with foreign IDs were allowed to do so. Dr. Kostović: “I was told that if only one Serb proves that he could not vote, even though he had the right to, they would not recognize the elections as valid. Meaning – nobody with the right to vote was denied doing so. Not one. That is the American system - Everyone must have the right to vote. Not a single case.”⁷ Pressures like that were present during the negotiations on the financing of UNTAES in the first year of the peace process (see page 50), as well as at the end of it when foreign college diplomas had to be recognized (see page 69).

The UNTAES approach to the Serbs was much softer and even though they were told by the Transitional Administrator and other international representatives like ambassador Peter Galbraith that reintegration into Croatia was an inevitability, their words were easily ignored. Arguably at the start of the process, it was precisely this delusion of future political autonomy or international administration that kept most Serbs in the region. It was obvious that local Serbs had the least amount of control over what happened, so they got, more often than not, the carrot instead of the stick.

So, what was the outcome of these goals and tactics? We can recognize that most of the practical goals like demilitarization, local elections and the Amnesty Law were successfully completed. However, did the former Sector East remain a multiethnic region? Well according to the Croatian census of 2011 there were 15,881 Croats (57.3%) and 9,654 Serbs (34.8%) in Vukovar.⁸ In comparison, during the 1991 census there were 22,166 Croats (47.4%) and 15,143 (32.4%)

⁶Dr. Ivica Kostović, interview by the author, Zagreb, January 18, 2018.

⁷ Dr. Ivica Kostović, interview by the author, Zagreb, January 18, 2018.

⁸ Croatian bureau of Statistics (DZS), Croatian population census 2011, Population according to citizenship, ethnicity, religion and mother tongue, accessed on April 21, 2018, https://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/publication/2012/SI-1469.pdf.

Serbs in Vukovar.⁹ In Beli Manastir, there were 5,750 Croats (57.1%) and 2,572 Serbs (25.5%) during the 2011 census while in 1991 there were 4,945 Croats (37.7%) and 4,217 Serbs (32.1%). Moreover, if we compare the 1997 local elections to the 2017 local elections we see that the SDSS lost control over only two municipalities (in Trpinja the SDSS lost to an independent list of candidates and in Darda they lost to HDZ). In other municipalities like Erdut, Šodolovci, Jagodnjak, Negoslavci, Borovo and Markušica they won overwhelmingly, securing a 100% win in two cases.¹⁰ The results of the 2017 local elections also reveal to us a break with the practice of voting along ethnic lines especially in bigger cities like Beli Manastir in which the HDZ and SDP¹¹ won over 70% of the vote while SDSS won 9.5%. In Vukovar there's a similar story with Croatian parties winning over 70% of the vote and the Serbian parties winning just under 18%.¹²

With these developments in mind one can state that Serbs still represent a significant minority in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem and that their political representation was not severely undercut, except in the bigger cities in which that was a consequence of people ceasing to vote exclusively along ethnic lines. Speaking generally, the international community did complete its main goal because the Peaceful reintegration put in place a good framework of laws and rights that kept most of the Serbs in the region. The cooperative part of the local Serbs was successful too, it survived politically and gained rights to cultural and educational autonomy. Nevertheless, this is not to say that everything is perfect for the local Serbs in Eastern Slavonia.

⁹ Ivo Turk, Marijan Jukić, "Promjene broja i udjela Hrvata i Srba u Hrvatskom Podunavlju kao posljedica Domovinskog rata I Mirne reintegracije (1991-2001)," in Dražen Živić, Sandra Cvikić, eds., *Mirna Reintegracija Hrvatskog Podunavlja: Znanstveni, Empirijski i Iskustveni Uvidi* (Zagreb: Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2010), 203.

¹⁰ The State election committee (Državno izborno povjerenstvo - DIP), *Archive Local elections 2017*, accessed April 21, 2018, <http://www.izbori.hr/arhiva-izbora/index.html#/app/lokalni-2017>.

¹¹ Socijal Demokratska Partija – The Social Democratic Party – the main left of center opposition party

¹² The State election committee (Državno izborno povjerenstvo - DIP), *Archive Local elections 2017*, accessed April 21, 2018, <http://www.izbori.hr/arhiva-izbora/index.html#/app/lokalni-2017>.

Dr. Stanimirović told me that “the return of property did not, and still is not going well” and that “even after 20 years, the Serbian community still cannot register schools on the minority language (Serbian) even though Hungarians, Slovaks and Italians can. We do not have that right.”¹³ Furthermore, there were some incidents in Vukovar, in the recent years, relating to the implementation of the right of the significant minority to have its language (Serbian) used alongside Croatian on city/road signs. This sparked protests from Croat veteran’s organization who claimed that Cyrillic (Serbian language uses the Cyrillic alphabet) letters were inappropriate in a place of such tragedy as Vukovar.

As far as the Croats are concerned the Peaceful reintegration did complete the goal of reestablishing sovereignty, and with its conclusion it also allowed for Croatian refugees to return. Still, the peace process promised to facilitate the return of refugees during the two-year UNTAES mandate. Tens of thousands of people were living in hotels and temporary shelters across Croatia waiting for years and years for their homes to be liberated and their lives restored to normal. Throughout the study one could notice a lack of references to the situation regarding the displaced Croats. This was intentional. I wanted to reflect the lack of progress on facilitating the return of displaced Croats into Eastern Slavonia during the years of the Peaceful reintegration. It is indisputable that the Erdut Agreement and the Resolution 1037 set the return of displaced persons as a high priority during the years of the UNTAES mandate. However, very little was achieved on this front. In my opinion, this was an oversight on the side of the people who prepared and conceived the mission. The practical and political obstacles to the return of refugees to Eastern Slavonia were too great at the start of the mission. Primarily, I think the Secretary General Boutros-Ghali and his team underestimated the huge needs for reconstruction in Eastern Slavonia. The

¹³ Dr. Vojislav Stanimirović, interview by author, Vukovar, January 15, 2018.

refugees' return was approached by the international community with the idealistic perspective of allowing everyone to return safely even when no infrastructure facilitated such potentially massive returns. Also, the political atmosphere was not ripe for the return of Croats into Eastern Slavonia nor for the return of Serbs into other parts of Croatia. Because of this we saw little progress, except for some pilot programs in which Croats returned into parts of Eastern Slavonia where there were no Serbs and some Serbs returned to Croatia. Eventually the Peaceful reintegration led to the return of displaced persons but only when it was successfully completed.

Another important goal that transcended the ethnic divisions in Eastern Slavonia, was the economic recovery of Eastern Slavonia. It was promised many times both by successive Croatian governments and the international community. Nevertheless, the abandonment of Eastern Slavonia after the Peaceful reintegration, was staggering. The region is still one of the least developed parts of Croatia, despite being the opposite before the war. Of course, the imperialist war policies of President Milosević are the principal culprits but that cannot absolve the Croatian governments or the international community from deserting the citizens of the region. Like many, the Croatian Prime minister Mate Granić, promised that Eastern Slavonia would be “the most important strategic area of our country.”¹⁴ In contrast to that we see that the GDP per person in the Vukovar-Sirmium county, in 2015, was 6,235 euros and in Osijek-Baranja county 8,413 euros, while the Croatian average was 10,586 euros.¹⁵ In 2016 the registered unemployment rate in Vukovar-

¹⁴ Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, Ivica Vrkić, *Olujni Mir: Kronologija hrvatske misije mira na Dunavu*, ed. Mirko Mađor (Zagreb: Narodne Novine, 1998), 111.

¹⁵ Croatian bureau of Statistics, *Croatian Gross Domestic Product – Review by county*, accessed April 21, 2018, https://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/Pokazatelji/Bruto%20domaci%20proizvod.xls.

Sirmium county was 29.7% and in Osijek-Baranja county 28.8%. The national average for 2016 was 16.9%.¹⁶

Furthermore, in a study on foreign investments in the Vukovar-Sirmium county professor Katarina Marošević and professor Josip Romić, from the Osijek University, stated that “Direct foreign investments into the Vukovar-Sirmium county are at a very low level and thus an indicator of one of the reasons for the poor economic development. Namely, the overall direct foreign investments into Croatia, per capita, in the period of 2005 to 2009 were around 3.207.000 euros, out of which the Vukovar-Sirmium county took up 173.000 euros, which is 20 times less than the Croatian average.”¹⁷ These statistics could lead us to say that the Croatian governments and the international community did not care about the faith of Eastern Slavonia after the end of the UNTAES mandate. To some extent this is true but if we look at the goal of keeping the region multiethnic, which was also a long-term goal, we see that it had not failed. My opinion is that the reason why the region remained multiethnic is connected to the strong framework of law and rights that made the Serbs feel safe. This framework was established during the Peaceful reintegration and is still in place. On the other hand, no binding framework was put in place to facilitate the economic recovery of the region. When it comes to the economy the citizens of Eastern Slavonia were left with nothing more than promises.

¹⁶ Croatian bureau of Statistics, Employment and wages – Review by county, accessed April 21, 2018, https://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/Pokazatelji/Zaposlenost%20i%20place.xlsx.

¹⁷ Katarina Marošević, Josip Romić, “Strana izravna ulaganja u funkciji razvitka Vukovarsko – srijemske županije,” *Ekonomski vjesnik: Review of Contemporary Entrepreneurship, Business, and Economic Issues*, Vol. XXIV, no.1 (July 2011): 163, accessed April 21, 2018, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/70564>.

Nevertheless, the primary success story of UNTAES was the fact that it prevented war and that it constructed a compromise between the Government of Croatia and the local Serbs. To whom or to what can we credit that? Well, I would suggest that a number of decisions on the part of the U.N. and some key people on the ground facilitated this success. Starting from the beginning, and the Erdut Agreement, we recognize a good blueprint for a peace mission. The key decisions (demilitarization and elections) gave the U.N. strong benchmarks to judge whether the mission was successful. If the demilitarization was not completed successfully at least 30 days after the arrival of the UNTAES military component, then the U.N. would have retreated. Also, empowering the UNTAES with a capable military component working under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, meant that in case of problems the Transitional administrator could use necessary force to challenge the status quo. We see such an example with the Đeletovci oil fields. In the specific case of the UNTAES mandate, Chapter VII could only have been invoked in order to achieve “security and freedom of movement” for the U.N. staff.¹⁸ General Klein used this to argue that the paramilitary’s control over the Đeletovci oil fields represented a reason for invoking Chapter VII since U.N. staff could not go there. In this case, their freedom of movement was disrupted. By using this excuse, general Klein was able to retake the oil fields and radically change the status quo. Furthermore, the UNTAES military component was a credible military force with 5,000 soldiers¹⁹ and thus the local Serbs were more likely to give up their weapons knowing that they would be protected by the U.N. Furthermore, the alliance between the U.N. forces in Eastern Slavonia and the NATO forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina was crucial, because NATO was ready to provide air support in case something went wrong.

¹⁸ Christine Coleiro, *Bringing Peace to the Land of Scorpions and Jumping Snakes: Legacy of the United Nations in Eastern Slavonia and Transitional Missions* (Clemensport: The Canadian Peacekeeping Press, 2002), 79.

¹⁹ The area under UNTAES control was small.

Another key point, in my opinion, was that the Erdut Agreement did not mention reintegration into Croatia. This omission allowed the local Serb leaders to sign the document without being perceived as traitors. However, both Croats and the international negotiators, the only ones with real power, knew the agreement's end game. This was confirmed in the Resolution 1037 when the Security Council reaffirmed its commitment to Croatia's sovereignty over Eastern Slavonia. At the start of the process it was crucial to leave some vagueness in the air in order not to agitate the local Serb population too much. Serb leaders, in fact, deceived local Serbs on the true meaning of the Erdut Agreement. This tactic served well both those in the local Serb leadership who wanted to stay in power and keep earning profit with illicit activities, and those in the international community who did not want Serbs to panic and leave the area. The international community, however, never openly deceived local Serbs but tolerated leaving those people who did (Hadžić and other radicals) in positions of power in the region. Peter Galbraith did state openly, during his Vukovar and Beli Manastir town hall meetings, that the region would be reintegrated into Croatia, but his words were easily ignored by the local Serbs.

When it comes to the people involved in the Peaceful reintegration there were individuals whose contribution was of crucial importance. President Franjo Tuđman made two key decisions that facilitated the UNTAES success story. First of all, it was his key decision to link the negotiations in Dayton about Bosnia and Herzegovina, to the ones about Eastern Slavonia. By doing so he made sure that Eastern Slavonia was not sidelined and ignored (since it was a small problem in comparison to BiH). President Tuđman hijacked the American momentum to solve the problem in BiH and diverted part of that momentum towards Eastern Slavonia. He understood well that permitting the status quo in Eastern Slavonia would haunt Croatia for many more years. A military solution to the problem was problematic for many reasons. It would have alienated the

international community from Croatia even further and potential international sanctions, or worse, was not in Croatia's interest. Also, Eastern Slavonia was on the border with Yugoslavia which meant that a high number of casualties was probable as well as a potential escalation of the conflict. Ivica Kostović told me the following: "They [some Croats] were carried away [by previous military victories] and said "We will never reintegrate Eastern Slavonia! The only solution is a military action!" to which Tuđman simply said what the number of casualties would be, even if the action went on perfectly, and said "Do you see? I do not want these casualties."²⁰ It was crucial that President Tuđman stood firmly behind the Peaceful reintegration, because he was probably the only person with enough political power in Croatia to be able to survive (politically) a proposition to work with Serbs.

Another key decision by President Franjo Tuđman was to involve the United States in the process as much as possible. Initially he wanted NATO to spearhead the mission but when that proved impossible he demanded that the Transitional Administrator be an American general. This might seem arbitrary, but because of previous bad experience with U.N. staff, President Tuđman rightly demanded someone outside the U.N. structure – someone who was not used to failure.

General Jacques Paul Klein was the perfect fit for the position of the Transitional Administrator. He made numerous great decisions during the UNTAES mandate that facilitated its success. From his decisive takeover of the Đeletovci oil fields to his smaller decisions such as attending the local church masses and being in constant communication with the local Serb population (and the Croat representatives), he represented an unquestioned authority in the region. The part of his involvement in the mission that stands out, in my opinion, was the way he carefully

²⁰ Dr. Ivica Kostović, interview by author, Zagreb, January 18, 2018.

balanced his image in order not to appear as one sided. The careful balancing between Croat and Serb interests was the most precarious part of his job. Still, general Klein acted decisively against perceived Serb and Croat interests when needed. For example, the financing of the UNTAES and the local Serb administration was a huge obstacle since almost no Croat official saw that as a Croatian interest. However, the insistence of general Klein and his willingness to pressure Croatia through the Security Council and the Secretary General made the agreement achievable. On the other hand, he also knew how to stand up to the Serbs and rid them of their unachievable ambitions. Towards the end of the first year of the UNTAES mandate, in December 1996, general Klein brought President Tuđman to a meeting in Vukovar with local Serbs. Ivica Vrkić wrote in his memoir “He showed the Serbs who was the boss...Of course he did not do it to scare the Serbs, but to make them aware of realities.”²¹ This came at the time when the Serbs still demanded political autonomy and was orchestrated to dissuade them from going in that direction.

Ivica Vrkić, the head of the Croatian Office, assumed dealing with everyday negotiations with UNTAES and the Serbs. A native of Eastern Slavonia he already had experience in Serbo-Croatian relationships. In my interview with Mr. Vrkić I recognized a couple of key factors that allowed him to have such a positive influence on the Peaceful reintegration. First of all, even before the start of the process he saw the importance of “opening the space of Eastern Slavonia” through practical means. For example, as a member of the Croatian Parliament he raised question about including Vukovar and other occupied cities in the weather channel report and proposed giving local Serbs seeds so that agriculture did not die out in the region. These seemingly banal requests do not matter in themselves as much as the thinking process behind them. The whole of the

²¹ Ivan Vrkić, *Istočno od zapada: Politički putopisi hrvatskim istokom*, ed. Josip Đerek (Zagreb: Interpublic, 1997), 222.

Peaceful reintegration basically worked in that manner. Give local Serbs help and through them accepting it they would also accept an increasing Croatian presence in the region. Such methods also reestablished the Croatian currency and Croatian public companies in the region. Furthermore, he did not blame Serbs in general for what happened in 1991 but directed his condemnation towards the Serbian political leaders, an attitude indispensable for the Peaceful reintegration. Another positive attitude was his willingness to improvise. For example, during the beginning of the process, Mr. Vrkić's Office stated to the press that they've established a telephone line with the local Serbs in the region and that they were receiving information about what was going on there. The initial information they let out was partially collected by the Croatian intelligence agencies and partially made up. However, after local Serbs saw that and thought someone was actually communicating with the Croats, they actually started calling the office.²² That was one of the first interactions between Croatia and occupied parts of Eastern Slavonia.

Another key figure, as it would turn out, was Dr. Vojislav Stanimirović – the president of the Serbian “executive council” and later member of the Croatian Parliament. His contribution was significant since he was a rare Serb leader with whom it was possible to make a compromise. Ivica Vrkić gave an interesting example of the cooperation between general Klein, Dr. Stanimirović and himself. “Klein, Stanimirović and I worked in the same direction and in the same way. For example, when a criminal wanted to steal all the equipment from the winery in Erdut and send it to Serbia, I was told about that by Stanimirović. Immediately, I published that on TV and said that in this moment there is a robbery that is taking place and that those who are doing it are stealing from the Serbs who plan to stay in the region and who won't have anything on which to live.”²³

²² Ivan Vrkić, *Istočno od zapada: Politički putopisi hrvatskim istokom*, ed. Josip Đerek (Zagreb: Interpublic, 1997), 37-9.

²³ Ivica Vrkić, interview by author, Osijek, January 5, 2018.

Apparently after that the robber left the vinery without the equipment. Overall, Dr. Stanimirović may have represented attitudes foreign to a Croatian perspective, but from what I have learned, his approach was constructive and carefully arranged in order for him not to lose the battle of influence with the more extreme Serbs.

Other contributors to the Peaceful reintegration such as Dr. Ivica Kostović and Vesna Škare Ožbolt, top political operatives working in the Government of Croatia, did a lot of work behind the scene. Moreover, the many unknown members of the Croatian bureaucracy who processed the tens of thousands of citizenship requests should also be recognized as positive figures whose work was indispensable.

The Peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem was an overall successful peace mission. Many factors propelled it to success, these included a strong Croatian military, the geopolitical situation in the world and the Balkans favorable to it, and operatives on the ground honestly pursuing its completion. When we look at the process of making the Erdut Agreement, we recognize that the local Serbs in the region had no other choice but to sign the agreement. They lost support from President Milošević and were cornered by the Croatian military. There was very little space for maneuvering, and the choice was clear: either accept the peace deal or give the Croats an excuse to liberate the region militarily. At this point it is clear that the fact that Serbs were so close to complete defeat helped the prospects of peace. Another important development was that the United States, the sole superpower in the world at that time, took great interest in brokering a fair deal so that not only would the region return to Croatia peacefully but also that Serbs would remain in the region. From that I can judge that not having two superpowers backing each side was of great help for the Peaceful reintegration. The other important element was that there was a convergence of interests between Yugoslavia and Croatia. This was of huge

help since the whole conflict started because of the divergent interests of Yugoslavia and Croatia. The Croatian Homeland War was a war started by the Yugoslav Army. This meant that without support from Yugoslavia, local Serbs had little to choose from. When it came time to implement the peace deal, it was crucial that the right people were chosen for the job. Fortunately, both the U.N. and Croatia chose the right people with the right attitudes. In time the Serbs also recognized the need for a constructive leader, and all three sides converged to focus their efforts towards ending the status quo.

Conclusion

The world today is much different than in 1995. Geopolitics changed and today we live in a multipolar world where global institutions like the U.N. lost (completely) their power and effectiveness. The Peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia taught me that, for a successful peace deal, there needs to be an entity capable of exerting pressure on all side in the conflict. The role that the US played in the drafting and implementing of the Erdut Agreement was significant. American economic, military and diplomatic power stood behind ambassador Galbraith at the start and behind the Transitional Administrator during the peace process itself. The U.N. was simply a tool used out of pragmatic reasons (remember the US not wanting to send troops to Croatia as well as Bosnia).

Crucially, however, even American insistence would not have been enough on its own. Croatian and Yugoslav interest converged to open a path to peace. Incredibly, even that would not have been enough if the peace mission was not conceived to be capable of decisive measures on the ground and if the right people were not chosen for the job.

When we look at other similar situations today, like the ones in Syria and Ukraine, we recognize how conflicting superpowers can make a bad situation much worse. The Peaceful reintegration taught us that for a peace mission to be successful, it needs to be supported by those involved, and that even then people must overcome great obstacles. Unfortunately, wherever I look in the world today, I do not see the same conditions that were present in 1995. Even though I would like to write that the Peaceful reintegration gave us a clear blueprint of how to handle a peace process, I do not have good basis for such a statement. More than anything, the Peaceful reintegration taught me that even with perfect conditions, when all important interests converge, making peace is a strenuous and complicated process that requires a bold and generous involvement from all sides.

Glossary:

Balkan peninsula – a geographical area covering south eastern Europe

The region – I refer to the territories occupied by Serbs in Eastern Slavonia as “the region” for simplicity sake and because some U.N. documents use that term too. Additionally, “Sector East” is also another name given by the U.N. to these territories.

Vukovar – the city in Eastern Slavonia at the center of fighting during 1991

Beli Manastri – the second largest city in Eastern Slavonia

Serbia/Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – these are synonyms at the time of the events that I am describing. After the breakup of the communist Yugoslavia in 1991 Milošević changed the name of the country from Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. However, at that time FRY was made up only of Serbia and Montenegro. Later on, in the early 2000s after Milošević was ousted, the country changed its name once again into Serbia and Montenegro. In 2003 when Montenegro voted for independence Serbia and Montenegro was dissolved and today we know Serbia and Montenegro as two separate independent countries.

Bosnia and Herzegovina – another ex-Yugoslav republic inhabited by Serbs, Croats and Muslims. In 1992 a war broke out and Serbs, again aided by the Yugoslav National Army, occupied much of the country until Muslims and Croats united and reversed the situation. At that point in 1995 a peace deal was brokered in Dayton, Ohio by the administration of President Clinton.

Belgrade – Serbian/Yugoslav capital

Zagreb – Croatian capital

Županija – A Croatian county

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