

# **“THEY” WANTED THEM, AND “HE” DID NOT: ABOUT THE CONTEXT, ORGANIZATION AND FORM OF THE FORCIBLE CONSCRIPTION OF REFUGEES IN SERBIA IN 1995**

*Borislav Radović*

*The training camp of the Serbian Volunteer Guard is situated in Erdut. Big barracks with spacious grounds were renovated and transformed into a contemporary facility comparable with the best international centers of this kind...It is busy like in a bee-hive every morning since 6 o' clock, when a new working day begins. There are morning calisthenics, breakfast and inspection. The trumpeter plays the Serbian anthem and a new day starts. A strenuous training awaits them...Sunday is a day off. They attend the mess in the church, play sports on various playgrounds, go out...but everything as deserved, because disrespect of the rules of this stoic school of humanity can bring the old Serbian measure: 25 strokes on the buttocks, in front of the entire ranks.<sup>1</sup>*

This is not a promotional flyer for some slightly bizarre fitness-center, but a falsely idyllic description of the decor of one of the darkest episodes of the contemporary Serbian history. In this “stoic school of humanity” occurred acts and treatments so inhuman that even today they represent a genuine nightmare for those who experienced them.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Kako je nastala Srpska dobrovoljačka garda: Ponovo u stroju”, Srpsko jedinstvo, broj 10, jun, 1995, p. 13.

## THE CONTEXT

*The main reason of poverty in Serbia is too much money the citizens have.<sup>2</sup>*

The events we will speak about took place in the summer of 1995. It was the fourth year of the war (or, more precisely, wars) in which Serbia, officially, “did not participate”. In the course of those years, the country had engaged in three war adventures (of which two still lasted in the summer of 1995), and fabulously impoverished because of the arrest of all normal economic activities,<sup>3</sup> probably huge war expenses,<sup>4</sup> war-related loss of the biggest part of the former Yugoslav market, and loss of the complete international market because of the exceptionally comprehensive and efficient trade, financial, transport, diplomatic, educational, cultural, technical and sport sanctions, introduced by the UN Security Council on May 30, 1992,<sup>5</sup> and reinforced on April 17, 1993.<sup>6</sup> Demographically, until

---

2 From the speech of Dr Borisav Jović (vice president of the Socialist Party of Serbia), delivered in Topola, on September 3, 1993, quoted in: “Svaštalice”, Republika, [www.republika.co.yu](http://www.republika.co.yu)

3 The GNP of Serbia and Montenegro fell from 49 811 billion dinars in 1989 to 22 017 billion in 1994, which represents a 55.79% decrease. In the same period, the national income fell from 38 644 billion to 17 944 billion, which represents a 53.56% decrease. The statistical yearbook of Yugoslavia 1999, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd, 1999, p. 124.

4 A student who would like to find a precise estimate of those costs will inevitably face a considerable frustration. Thus, Mlađan Dinkić writes that “according to the estimates of some military experts, arms imports of all the countries of the former-Yugoslavia, in the period 1992-94, amounted to ‘only’ 1.5 billion USD. If this amount is divided by the number of parties interested in this kind of import, it turns out that the FRY (Serbia and Montenegro) in this respect did not have too large expenses” (Ekonomija destrukcije, Stubovi kulture, Beograd, 2000, p. 141). Regrettably, the author did not produce any precise estimate of the FRY expenses. On the other hand, if we know that the former Yugoslav National Army in the beginning of 1991 bought 30 000 tons of weapons in Eastern Germany, Poland and Russia (“Illegalna trgovina oružjem: Podmazivanje rata, Vreme, 8. decembar 2005, p. 45-6), and if Ozren Žunec claims that “in 1993 Serbia spent 1,27 billion USD to help the Krajinas”, (“Rat u Hrvatskoj 1991-1995”, [www.ffzg.hr](http://www.ffzg.hr)), then we can ask ourselves about the real amount of Serbian war expenditures. If no official data in this respect have been produced so far (which is not surprising, given the fact that Bosnia has sued Serbia for aggression, before the International courts of justice in the Hague), it is surprising that no such analysis was performed by independent experts or NGOs. Thus, the citizens of Serbia (in difference with those of Croatia) still do not know how much their country spent for the wars in Croatia and Bosnia.

5 UN Security Council, Resolution 757 (1992), [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

December 31, 1994, the country had seen the arrival of 219 182 registered refugees from the war-affected regions of the former Yugoslavia<sup>7</sup> and departure of at least a half of the 200 000 most dynamic (generally younger and better-educated) individuals who left Serbia for good during the 1990s.<sup>8</sup> Internally, however, the regime of Slobodan Milošević had successfully crushed three large rebellions of the urban population<sup>9</sup> and established its control over all important instruments of power (finances, the influential media, large business corporations, the army, police, customs service and diplomacy), gerrymandering and regularly beating the financially-weak, vilified, semi-amateur, disunited and partially corruptible opposition that, furthermore, turned out to be tragically disunited in the questions of war and peace and manners of resolution of the Serbian national question.

In the summer of 1995, the regime seemed omnipotent and invulnerable, but Serbia was tired of wars.

First of all, it entered these conflicts halfheartedly. There was no national consensus about the justifiability of the *armed* resolution of the Serbian national question (the political status of the Serbs outside of Serbia), and it was especially true for the *way* this armed approach materialized in the field. The best proof of this are the rates of desertion and refusal of mobilization calls that never before, in numerous wars that Serbia had waged after its political emancipation from the Ottoman empire, had reached levels so high. Thus, Backović et al. rightly speak about the “conscription crisis” from the autumn 1991, when “the official data on the response to the partial conscription of reservists reached 50% in Serbia and 15% in Belgrade (the unofficial data, collected from local information sources, are

---

6 UN Security Council, Resolution 820 (1993), [www.un.org](http://www.un.org). The strengthening consisted in freezing of the funds that Yugoslav governments and Yugoslav companies had in foreign countries, impounding of all vessels, freight vehicles, rolling stock and aircraft in which a majority of controlling interest was held by a person or undertaking in or operating from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) and their forfeiting to the seizing State upon determination that they were in violation of the resolutions on sanction against the FRY.

7 “Izbeglice prema prethodnom prebivalištu i vremenu dolaska”, Popis izbeglica i drugih ratom ugroženih lica u Saveznoj republici Jugoslaviji, UNHCR, Komesarijat za izbeglice Republike Srbije i Komitet za raseljena lica Republike Crne Gore, Beograd, 1996, p. 34.

8 According to the 1991 census, the number of inhabitants of Central Serbia and Vojvodina living in foreign countries was 196 649 (“Stanovništvo u zemlji i u inostranstvu prema starosti i polu”, Popis 1991, CD, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd, 1997), while according to the 2002 census (“Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova 2002 – Prvi rezultati popisa po opštinama i naseljima Republike Srbije”, p. 99, [www.webrzs.statserb.sr.gov.yu](http://www.webrzs.statserb.sr.gov.yu)), that number was 395 943, which represents a difference of exactly 200 000 souls.

9 March 9, 1991, the Vidovdan movement in the summer of 1992, and June 1, 1993 demonstrations.

even more depressing)”.<sup>10</sup> Aside from the disunion of opinions about the necessity of war, during the years of “conquest of pride”<sup>11</sup> and “combustion of people”,<sup>12</sup> the life of an ordinary citizen – who had to face ever more frequent shortages with shrinking and irregularly paid salaries – had gradually turned into a physically exhausting struggle for the mere survival. The most fascinating episode of that race against the clock was the regime-generated hyperinflation which had reached its peak in the autumn and winter of 1993: “The rise of prices in January reached the fantastic 313,563,558%. On average, the prices grew 62% per day, 2% per hour, 0.029% per minute”.<sup>13</sup> In December 1993, the average Serbian inhabitant – who, out of necessity, had become a petty smuggler, double or triple moonlighter, farmer or pirate – earned 13 775 000 000 dinars, or 25,90 DEM,<sup>14</sup> which covered only 11% of the “consumer basket” (the group of 65 foodstuffs needed for a normal nutrition of a four-member family).<sup>15</sup> One egg sold for 205 650 000 dinars, and one kilo of potatoes for 613 020 000,<sup>16</sup> which means that the average salary, in that desperate moment, could have been spent for the “last supper” consisting of 66.98 eggs or 22.47 kilos of potatoes!

In general, bad life (chronic four-year-long stress; poorer health care;<sup>17</sup> shortages of medication and medical equipments caused by war and poverty; poorer nutrition<sup>18</sup>) began to take its toll: general mortality (in the conditions of zero

---

10 Ofelija Backović, Miloš Vasić i Aleksandar Vasović, “Ko to rado ide u vojnike: Mobilizacijska kriza-pregled medijskog izveštavanja”, Republika, br. 198, [www.republika.co.yu](http://www.republika.co.yu)

11 Milan Mladenović, “Zajedno”, Neko nas posmatra (1993)

12 Rambo Amadeus, “Turbo folk”, Oprema dobro (2005)

13 Mlađan Dinkić, Ekonomija destrukcije, Stubovi kulture, Beograd, 2000, p. 42.

14 Mr Ljubomir Kedžić, Hiperinflacija i statistika, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd, 1997, p.50.

15 Nikola Dragaš i Miodrag Nikolić, Potrošačka korpa 1987-2000, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd, 2001, p. 23.

16 G17, Bela knjiga Miloševićeve vladavine, p. 51, [www.g17plus.org.yu](http://www.g17plus.org.yu)

17 Statistics demonstrate that during the first half of the 1990s health care expenditures amounted to the approximately same portion of the national income year after year (7,4% in 1990; 6,9% in 1991; 6,7% in 1992; 9,9% in 1994; 10,4 in 1995, in: “Učešće tekućih rashoda vanprivrednih delatnosti u narodnom dohotku”, Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije 1998, Savez zavod za statistiku, Beograd, p. 157). However, we must not forget that the national income in the first half of the 1990s fell for more than a half, which means that health care expenditures decreased in the same proportion.

18 If we take a look at data on the average Yugoslav per capita consumption of various foodstuffs in 1990 and in 1993, we will see that the consumption of citrus fruits fell from 7,1 to 3,3 kg, consumption of fresh vegetables from 102,5 to 88,5 kg, consumption of various kinds of meat from 64.4 to 46.5kg, consumption of fresh milk from 99.1 l to 89.6 l, consumption of all kinds of cheese from 12 to 8,7 kg, consumption of eggs from 166 to 136 pieces

or negative population growth<sup>19</sup>), in only three years (1990-1993) grew for more than 10%.<sup>20</sup> It has to be said that no other period after the Second World War saw such a quick and intense rise of mortality.<sup>21</sup> The most tragic aspect of that “unbearable heaviness of being” in Serbia and Montenegro in the early 1990s was the rise of the number of suicides which, when compared with the 1986-90 period, grew for more than 11%.<sup>22</sup>

A survey carried out from March to June 1994 on 1 400 households from Belgrade and 12 cities in the province yielded the following results:<sup>23</sup>

---

and consumption of sugar from 42,6 to 34,2 kg. (“Potrošnja prehrambenih proizvoda po stanovniku”, Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije 1997, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd, 1997, p. 140).

19 “From 1981 to 1991, population growth rate in Serbia was, with some oscillations, sharply falling, which continued a long trend of decrease of population growth. In 1991, population growth reached its lowest point since 1950, amounting to only 4.6 per 1000 inhabitants. So low a rate in Serbia was the result of a very low rate in Central Serbia (0.8), a negative rate in Vojvodina (-1.8) and a high rate in Kosovo (22.2)”, Marina Blagojević, “Demografska slika Srbije 90-tih: dihotomija i stagnacija”, in: Silvano Bolčić (ed.), Društvene promene i svakodnevni život: Srbija početkom devedestih, Institut za sociološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu, Beograd, 2002, p. 33.

20 In 1990, the total number of deceased in Central Serbia was 60 287, and in 1993 the number was 67 131, which represents a 10.19% increase (Mr. Ljubica Gačeša i Mr Jasna Milanković, Nivo i tendencije mortaliteta prema starosti i polu u SR Jugoslaviji 1950-1998, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd, 2000, p. 112).

21 Aside from that, mortality remained high even after the end of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia (1995) and remained like that until the end of the 1990s (in all probability, as a lasting payment of debt to the war, impoverishment and disintegration of structures of normal living). We have to remark that in earlier times the number of deceased in Central Serbia needed forty years to grow for 11.48% (from 53 361 in 1950 to 60 287 in 1990, with occasional periods of decrease of mortality), but only 8 years in the 1990s to grow for the exceptional 14.03% (i.e. from the already mentioned number for 1990 to 70 125 in 1998 – with a slighter drop of mortality in 1994, which was the year of the end of hyperinflation and a period of a breathing spell). Finally, the tendency of increase of mortality in the 1990s appears even more dramatic if we know that the tendency of birth rate in the 1990s considerably differed from the one in the pre-war period (which neither was excellent).

22 The average yearly number of suicides in the 1986-90 period was 1 446, and 1 637 in the 1991-95 period (Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije 1993, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd, p. 64; Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije 2001, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd, p. 75). In fact, both the rise of general mortality and the rise of suicides affected big cities much more intensely than the rest of the country, but we cannot discuss this point here.

23 “Social disintegration and families under stress: Serbia 1991-1995”, Sociologija, vol XXXVII, No.4, Beograd, oktobar-decembar 1995, p. 464.

Table 1. *Direct influence of the nearby war on the family*

	Belgrade	The province
Settled or resettled due to the war	1.5%	2.7%
Received refugees	15.9%	7.2%
Helping family or refugees in the war areas	21.8%	14.5%
Was directly exposed to armed conflicts	24.5%	19.4%
Has someone who was wounded	5.0%	4.0%
Acquired arms	15.4%	22.1%

The body and soul of Serbia were tired of war, but in the summer of 1995, it was far from being over.

In fact, 1995 was the worst year for the Serbs since the beginning of the conflicts. At the beginning of the war in Croatia (autumn 1991) and the war in Bosnia (spring 1992), the Serbs had enjoyed enormous advantages, first of all because the bulk of the equipment of the former Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) had remained in Serbian hands,<sup>24</sup> and, furthermore, because the adversaries had not had already-established armies but had to form them as they went along. That is why the Serbs, at the very beginning of these conflicts, had realized enormous advances in the field: by the end of the first year of the war in Bosnia, the Army of Republika Srpska had established its control over 72% of the territory of that republic,<sup>25</sup> while in Croatia, the Serbs had mainly realized their strategic goal by taking control of the majority of the areas with the highest concentration of ethnic Serbs, which, for Croatia, by the beginning of January 1992, meant the loss of 17 000 km<sup>2</sup>, or 30% of the territory.<sup>26</sup>

But, time was not on the Serbian side. This is how the military balance in Bosnia and Croatia looked like in the period under study:

---

24 "Our army is one of the rare ones in history to have started a liberation war with a very solid material base especially as concerns combat hardware, ammunition, and food reserves", Ratko Mladić in a report from December, 1992, quoted in the transcript of Milošević's trial ([www.milosevic-trial.org/trial/2003-04-11.htm](http://www.milosevic-trial.org/trial/2003-04-11.htm), p. 19 053).

25 "We have military control over 72% and our people are cadastral owners of 56% of the territory" - Ratko Mladić, quoted in: "Pregolema je srpska tuga u očima", interview with general Momčilo Perišić, *Profil*, br. 32, [www.profil.co.yu](http://www.profil.co.yu)

26 Ozren Žunec, "Rat u Hrvatskoj 1991-1995", [www.ffzg.hr](http://www.ffzg.hr)

Table 2: *Military balance in Bosnia and Croatia (1992-1995)*<sup>27</sup>

Year	War area	Warring parties	Men under arms	Tanks	Armored carriers	Artillery	Mortars	Multiple rocket launchers	Heli-copters	Aircraft	
1992	BH	1. Moslems	30 000 - 50 000								
		2. Croats	50 000								
		3. Serbs	67 000	around 300	around 180	around 480					
		1 + 2	80 000 - 100 000								
	CRO	Croats	105 000 <sup>28</sup>	around 200	around 200	around 150 <sup>29</sup>					
		Serbs	NO DATA								
1993	BH	1. Moslems	60 000	around 20	around 30	“some” <sup>30</sup>					
		2. Croats	around 50 000 <sup>31</sup>	around 50		around 500					
		3. Serbs	up to 80 000	around 330	400	800			37	38	
		1 + 2	around 110 000	around 70	around 30	over 500					
	CRO	Croats	103 300 <sup>32</sup>	200	? <sup>33</sup>	? <sup>34</sup>	? <sup>35</sup>	? <sup>36</sup>	20 <sup>37</sup>		
		Serbs	40-50 000	around 200	around 100	around 500					
1994	BH	1. Moslems	around 110 000	around 40	around 30	“some” <sup>38</sup>	300	over 40			
		2. Croats	around 50 000	around 75		around 200			6		

<sup>27</sup> Table constructed on the basis of the yearly publication *The Military Balance*, Institute for Strategic Studies, London (editions for 1992/3, 1993/4, 1994/5 and 1995/6)

<sup>28</sup> Aside from that, 100 000 reservists, 40 000 policemen and 10 000 members of the HOS.

<sup>29</sup> Aside from that, aerial defense guns and surface-to-air infantry missiles.

<sup>30</sup> Including “some” 120 and 203mm and 20 and 30mm aerial defense guns.

<sup>31</sup> (HVO, HV and HOS)

<sup>32</sup> Aside from that, 180 000 reservists, 10 000 home guard and 40 000 policemen.

<sup>33</sup> Unspecified number

<sup>34</sup> Unspecified number (including arms of 85, 100, 105, 122, 130, 152 and 203mm)

<sup>35</sup> Unspecified number (including arms of 82 and 120mm)

<sup>36</sup> Unspecified number (including arms of 122 and 128mm)

<sup>37</sup> Aircraft and helicopters taken together.

<sup>38</sup> Including “some 130 and 203mm”, aerial defense guns of 20 and 30mm, and 100 anti-tank guided weapons.

Year	War area	Warring parties	Men under arms	Tanks	Armored carriers	Artillery	Mortars	Multiple rocket launchers	Helicopters	Aircraft
		3. Serbs	up to 80 000	around 330	400	800	120m m	76	30	40 <sup>39</sup>
		1 + 2	around 160 000	around 115	around 30	over 200	300	over 40	6	
	CRO	Croats	105 000 <sup>40</sup>	178	91 <sup>41</sup>	around 900	660	over 7	18	20
		Serbs	40-50 000	around 240	over 100	around 500	? <sup>42</sup>	14	6	12
1995	BH	1. Moslems	92 000	around 31	around 35	around 100	200	2	5	3
		2. Croats	around 50 000	around 100	around 80	around 200	around 300	around 30		
		3. Serbs	up to 75 000	around 370	295	700	around 900	76	12	20
		1 + 2	around 142 000	around 131	around 115	around 300	around 500	around 32	5	3
	CRO	Croats	105 000 <sup>43</sup>	181	over 273	949	761	over 22	25	28
		Serbs	40-50 000	around 250	over 100	around 200		14	16	17

The table clearly demonstrates two basic facts:

1. *The relative shortage of soldiers as a chronic weakness of the Serbian party.* In Croatia, throughout the war, the Serbs were twice numerically weaker than the regular corps of the Croatian army that, in any moment, could grow up to 200 000 men (4 Croatian to 1 Serbian soldiers), through inclusion of reserves and mobilization of 40 000 permanently armed policemen and 10 000 members of the home guard. In Bosnia, the relative favorable balance for the Serbs in 1992 (1 Serbian soldier to 1.19-1.49 Moslem and Croatian soldiers) had already by 1994 changed to 1 Serbian to 2 Moslem and Croatian soldiers.
2. *The material strengthening of the Moslem, and especially, Croatian party over time.* This strengthening was, first of all, made possible by enormous military spending of the warring parties (especially the Croatian one),<sup>44</sup> generous financial donations of emigrant communities (especially Croatian

39 All kinds.

40 The same as in footnote 32.

41 Unspecified number of the BTR-40/50 model.

42 Unspecified number.

43 The same as in footnote 32.

44 Ozren Žunec says that Croatian direct war expenditures amounted to 7 billion US \$ ("Rat u Hrvatskoj 1991-1995"), [www.ffzg.hr](http://www.ffzg.hr)

ones) or friendly countries,<sup>45</sup> as well as by the fact that, after the dissolution of the Warsaw pact, Eastern Europe was flooded with surplus quantities of the relatively cheap weapons that could have been found even in the immediate vicinity of the former Yugoslavia.<sup>46</sup>

It has to be said that the armament of Croatia and Bosnia was accomplished with a more or less discrete assistance of Western countries – especially the USA – that found ways of bypassing the arms embargo they themselves had initiated.<sup>47</sup> Most frequently, the assistance consisted of professional military training (either by retired army officers<sup>48</sup> or special forces members<sup>49</sup>), logistic support (opening and securing of arms delivery channels, such as, for instance, the opening of Dubrave airport near Tuzla,<sup>50</sup> or the mending of Visoko airport<sup>51</sup>), delivery of information about the strength, deployment and moral state of the Serbian forces,<sup>52</sup> and sometimes even in a subtler way, by turning the blind eye to embargo violations committed by some parties in conflict.<sup>53</sup>

We have to stress that the Moslem and Croatian party, in the period considered, had not only grown stronger militarily but had also established a political alliance, by signing the so-called Washington treaty, on March 18, 1994, which created the Bosniak-Croatian federation. Militarily, this accord had been materialized on May 16, 1994, through creation of the Joint General Staff of the

---

45 In the Bosnian case, a CIA report from 1993 established that money and arms deliveries to the Bosnian government from Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Brunei and Pakistan were being shipped via Turkey. As for Iran, the biggest donor, “CIA estimates that between May 1994 and December 1996 some 14 000 tons of arms, worth between 100 and 200 million US \$ were put in”, in: “Oružje iransko – šutnja američka”, Dani, 8. oktobar, 1999, [www.bhdani.com](http://www.bhdani.com)

46 Miloš Vasić, “Ilegalna trgovina oružjem: Evropsko bure baruta”, Vreme, 15 decembar 2005, p. 39-46.

47 “Such an embargo was voted for the countries of the former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1996, at first the EU and USA embargo (September 1991), and then the UN embargo (June 1992)”. “Ilegalna trgovina oružjem: podmazivanje rata”, Vreme, 8. decembar 2005, p. 40.

48 “September 1994. With the consent of the State Department, the American firm MPRI and Croatia signed in the Croatian Embassy in Washington a contract on training of the Croatian army”, “Oružje iransko – šutnja američka”, Dani, 8. oktobar, 1999, [www.bhdani.com](http://www.bhdani.com)

49 Vladimir Jovanović, “Vojne novine u Bosni: Američki obruč”, AIM, 29 april, 1995, [www.aimpress.ch](http://www.aimpress.ch)

50 Miloš Vasić, “Ilegalna trgovina oružjem: Zakon spojenih sudova”, Vreme, 29. decembar 2005, p. 51.

51 Tjeri Šarlije “Bosanski bluz i američki sevdah”, Duga, 13-19 maj 1995, p. 34.

52 Veljko B. Kadijević i mr Branislav Đorđević, “Kako odbraniti Krajinu”, Duga, 27. maj-9. jun 1995, p. 32; “Rat u Bosni i Hercegovini», Hrvati Bosne i Hercegovine, [www. http://www.hercegbosna.org](http://www.hercegbosna.org)

53 “Oružje iransko – šutnja američka”, Dani, 8. oktobar, 1999, [www.bhdani.com](http://www.bhdani.com)

Army of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (i.e. the Army of the Bosnia & Herzegovina and the Croatian Defense Council).<sup>54</sup>

In the field, the changes revealed themselves relatively modestly, in the summer of 1994, through Moslem conquest of Nikšić plains (near Sarajevo) and seizure of some positions on the mount Ozren and south of the town of Brčko,<sup>55</sup> as well as through offensives on the Majevisa and Vlašić mountains. Although relatively small, the battles for these two mountains were very important, because Majevisa hill Stolice hosted a tower that controlled the vital information flow between Belgrade, Pale and Knin, while Vlašić controlled the valley of Lašva, the city of Travnik and the communication line Zenica-Travnik-Jajce<sup>56</sup>. Although the Serbs regained the lost positions already by September 1994, these actions revealed a reinforced adversary, who had become capable of taking the initiative and choosing the time and place of attack.

The same summer of 1994 saw much bigger events happening in Western Bosnia, or more precisely, at the Bihać front. Namely, on August 21, the Fifth Corps of the Army of BH defeated the forces loyal to Fikret Abdić and crushed his Serb-supported Autonomous province of Western Bosnia. On the occasion, the capital city of Velika Kladuša was taken as well, which provoked exodus of the entire civilian population – 20 to 60 000, according to different sources – that found shelter in the Serb-controlled part of Croatia.<sup>57</sup> Encouraged by this success, the Fifth Corps continued the offensive (October 23-28) and took the biggest part of the Grabež plain (in the vicinity of Bihać). It thus arrived to the foot of Krupa in the north, and halfway between Petrovac and Bihać in the south.<sup>58</sup> This has provoked a joint response of the Serbian Army of Krajina and the Army of the Republika Srpska, the biggest coordinated action of these armies at all, but the two-month Serbian initiative did not lead to the recapture of the lost areas.<sup>59</sup> Even worse, the Croatian army and the Croatian Defense Council began their offensive in the Livno field and made important advances northwards (i.e. towards Grahovo), purporting to join the Fifth corps in Bihać and thus relieve the Serbian pressure

---

54 “Chronology 1985-1995”, Bosnian Institute, [www.bosnia.org.uk](http://www.bosnia.org.uk)

55 Dragan Janjić, “Vojna situacija u Bosni: Srbi ponovo imaju inicijativu”, AIM, 8. septembar, 1994, [www.aimpress.ch](http://www.aimpress.ch)

56 Milos Vasic, “Bosnian Thunder: War in the Midst of Truce”, Vreme News Digest Agency, March 27. 1995, [www.scc.rutgers.edu](http://www.scc.rutgers.edu)

57 “Yugoslav crisis and the world – 1994”, Balkan repository project, [www.balkan-archive.org.yu](http://www.balkan-archive.org.yu); “Chronology 1985-1995”, Bosnian Institute, [www.bosnia.org.uk](http://www.bosnia.org.uk)

58 Dragan Janjić, “Ofanziva u zapadnoj Bosni: Poljuljana vojna moć bosanskih Srba”, AIM, 4. novembar, 1994, Beograd, [www.aimpress.ch](http://www.aimpress.ch)

59 Stipe Sikavica, “The Battle Of Bihac”, Vreme News Digest Agency, January 16, 1995, [www.scc.rutgers.edu](http://www.scc.rutgers.edu)

around the city.<sup>60</sup> Then happened the first serious forerunner of the future Serbian military problems and the first turning point in the Bosnian war: the conquest of the city of Kupres by the Croatian and Bosnian armies, on November 3, 1994. It was the biggest Serbian defeat until then and the conquest of the first larger city theretofore. The conquest of the city has simultaneously opened a possibility of further Croatian and Bosnian advances towards the cities of Jajce, Glamoč and Bosansko Grahovo.

Problems continued well into 1995. Thus, on March 23, the BH Army began a large offensive around Tuzla<sup>61</sup> and on March 28, successfully terminated a weeklong battle for the famous, strategically important Vlačić.<sup>62</sup> At the Croatian front, the Croatian army had accomplished the conquest of the Dinara mountain in June, which put it into a strategically superior position towards the city of Knin.<sup>63</sup>

But, a month before these events there had occurred the most serious omen of the forthcoming breakdown of the Serbian army in Croatia: the operation “Flash”, offensive action of the Croatian army that had in only four days (May 1-4) brought about the loss of Western Slavonia (region with cities Jasenovac, Okučani, Lipik and Pakrac), and expulsion of some 15 000 persons.<sup>64</sup>

Although this did not represent a fatal loss of territory (the surface of Western Slavonia was 662 km<sup>2</sup>), the psychological effect of the Croatian victory was huge, primarily because of the savage (and militarily unnecessary) attacks on and killing of the retreating civilians,<sup>65</sup> and then because the Serbs did not believe that the Croatian army was capable of any substantial offensive but, rather, of continuation of the so-called strategy of “mouse bytes”, whereby the Croatian forces “nibbled off” relatively small portions of the territory under Serbian control (such as the Peruča dam and the region around Maslenica bridge,<sup>66</sup> the Miljevo plateau,<sup>67</sup> or the Medak pocket<sup>68</sup>). That is why Belgrade immediately after the “Flash” appointed a new commander-in-chief of the freshly shaken Serbian army of Krajina: Mile Mrkšić, general of the Army of Yugoslavia left Belgrade and went

---

60 Dragan Janjić, “Obnavljanje borbi u Bosni”, AIM, 21, mart, 1995, [www.aimpress.ch](http://www.aimpress.ch)

61 “Key events in Bosnia in 1994 and 1995, with annotations of CSCE/OSCE mission & Federation ombudsmen activity”, [www.curriculumunits.com](http://www.curriculumunits.com)

62 Chronology 1985-1995”, Bosnian Institute, [www.bosnia.org.uk](http://www.bosnia.org.uk)

63 Veljko B. Kadijević i mr Branislav Đorđević, “Kako odbraniti Krajinu”, Duga, 27. maj-9. jun 1995, p. 32

64 *ibid.*

65 “Mirna reintegracija područja, svedočenja preživelih: Đurdevdanska kolona smrti”, Duga, 13-19 maj, p. 12-15.

66 January 22 1993.

67 June 21 1992.

68 September 9 1993.

to Krajina to carry out the necessary reforms of the SAK, in order to raise its combat capability, halt the Croatian advance and recapture the lost territory.<sup>69</sup>

## THE CONSCRIPTION

*As a proud Serb, I would have preferred that they had all heroically died and remained remembered as heroes who had successfully defended the territories*<sup>70</sup>

In Serbia, the forced conscription of refugees from Krajina began in the night of Sunday, June 11, 1995 - more than a month after the "Flash" offensive. Two days later, the Belgrade daily *Naša Borba* reports that "since Sunday night, the military police of the Republic of Serbian Krajina carries out the conscription in Belgrade as well. As several persons originating from Serbian Republic of Krajina confirmed to our newspaper, boys with the emblems of the 'MP Krajina' knocked on their doors in the Sunday night ...it is also stated that this 'collecting' of soldiers is carried out in a somewhat bizarre way and without clear criteria. Thus, the Krajina policemen have, two nights ago, also sought men from Krajina with Yugoslav citizenship, then students, and even those with refugee status (the majority of our interlocutors are students without refugee status). The well-informed sources in Belgrade claim that the Belgrade conscription of men from Krajina was ordered by general Mile Mrkšić, commander-in-chief of the Serbian army of Krajina, as part of the new reorganization of the army he commands since last month".<sup>71</sup>

Soon it became known that the Serbian police (uniformed or in plain clothes) mobilize as well.<sup>72</sup> The persons mobilized are "men from Krajina with refugee status, those with registered domicile, and even Yugoslav citizens

---

69 "Završavanje rata", NIN, 20 januar 2000, [www.nin.co.yu](http://www.nin.co.yu)

70 Željko Ražnatović Arkan, commander-in-chief of the Serbian Voluntary Guard and the president of the Party of Serbian Unity, about the Serbs exiled from Western Slavonia, *Srpsko jedinstvo*, jun 1995, quoted in: "Svaštalice", *Republika*, [www.republika.co.yu](http://www.republika.co.yu)

71 D. Petrović, *Naša Borba*, 13. jun, 1995, p. 4. On June 23, the same daily confirmed that it was a mobilization ordered by Mile Mrkšić, and that it was being carried out "according to a list that came to the Ministry of internal affairs of Serbia two weeks ago. As our sources claim, the list contains the names of men from Krajina settled in Serbia who 'have to be urgently transferred to the Republic of Serbian Krajina and assigned to units'. However, say the informers of 'Naša Borba', the list was extended with 6 000 men, so that the total number is around 18 000 souls. This list, it is claimed, was made by personnel managers from military departments in the Republic of Serbian Krajina, so that it also included men who have nothing to with Krajina, except that they worked there some time or took part in the war as volunteers." ("Iz RSK stigao spisak sa 12.000 imena za mobilizaciju: U modu ušlo i potkazivanje", *Naša Borba*, 23. jun, 1995, p. 2).

72 "Mobilizacija Krajišnika a u Srbiji: Strah od noćnih posetilaca", *Naša Borba*, 15. jun, 1995, p. 2.

originating from Krajina”,<sup>73</sup> “people born in Belgrade or Šumadija, who once worked in Bosnia or Croatia”<sup>74</sup> and “refugees who have recently become of age and received regular calls to the Yugoslav army, as well as men whose military papers indicate exemption for medical reasons”.<sup>75</sup> Sometimes, it was not at all important if a person had anything to do with Croatia. Thus, in the city of Pirot, the mobilization engulfed also some persons who had been born in the city, worked there and had real estate in it<sup>76</sup>. The police even arrested members of some national minorities, Slovakian, for instance.<sup>77</sup> As the Belgrade weekly *Vreme* stated, “these ‘accidental’ arrests of people born in Serbia and their transfer over the Drina create additional hatred between ‘newcomers’ and ‘natives’. A refugee’s testimony given to the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia made it clear that citizens of Sremska Mitrovica, revolted by the fact that policemen from Krajina had taken and transferred over the Drina 24 of their neighbors, denounced men born in Krajina”.<sup>78</sup>

In fact, the public became so upset that the police – whose head persistently denied that any mobilization was going on – issued a statement saying that it “does not carry out the mobilization of draft-eligible persons for the needs of the Republic Serbian Krajina”, but only performs “an organized control of persons who are not citizens of our country and do not have residence permit, acknowledged abode or refugee status. Relatedly, it has been established that a certain number of persons from the Republic of Serbian Krajina and Republika Srpska remain illegally in the Republic of Serbia and are engaged in crimes, misdemeanors, harassment of citizens, fights and other delicts. Therefore, they were exposed to lawful measures and denied the possibility of enjoying illegally the hospitality of the Republic of Serbia”.<sup>79</sup>

Indeed, labeled as criminals, the people were hunted down like criminals: taken from “trams, buses, cafés and discotheques, in the street, at toll gates, during

---

73 *ibid.*

74 “Mobilizacija Krajišnika u Srbiji: Odvode i rođene Beograđane i Šumadince”, *Naša Borba*, 22. jun, 1995, p. 1; “U Šumadiji otvorena ‘sezona lova’: Mobilišu i rođene Šumadince”, *Naša Borba*, 22. jun, 1995, p. 14; “U Novoj Varoši prinudno mobilisano petnaest lica: Odveden i Zoran Bogdanović, rođeni Beograđanin”, *Naša Borba*, 22. jun, 1995, p. 14; “Čitaoci ‘Naše Borbe’ javljaju: Kupe i Srbijance”, *Naša Borba*, 24-25. jun, p. 3.

75 “Mobilizacija - strogo selektivna: Ko je zaštićen?”, *Naša Borba*, 24-25. jun, 1995, p. 3.

76 “Noći dugih pendreka u Pirotu: Milicija odvodi mladiće sa lisicama na rukama», *Naša Borba*, 22. jun, 1995, p. 14.

77 The memoirs of the former Slovak ambassador Miroslav Mojžita, *Beograd-Beleške 1995-2001*, *Danas*, [www.danas.co.yu](http://www.danas.co.yu)

78 “Prinudna mobilizacija - pozadina: Danajski poklon”, *Vreme*, 3. jul, 1995, p. 17.

79 “Saopštenje MUP-a Srbije: Kontrola, a ne nasilna mobilizacija», *Naša Borba*, 26. jun, 1995, p. 2.

road checks”,<sup>80</sup> from work places and even from graduation balls.<sup>81</sup> Identity checks in public places were greatly facilitated by the fact that identity cards of “all persons who lived some time in Croatia were ‘labeled’ by the Serbian authorities with the letter ‘T’”,<sup>82</sup> or with letters “G” and “SR”.<sup>83</sup> As for captures in student dormitories, refugee camps and similar places, the police were sometimes greatly aided by impeccably law-abiding local officials.<sup>84</sup> As for the capture of people in their own homes “it usually occurred well after midnight, around 3 or 4 o’ clock. The caught napping were given about 15 minutes to take money and the most necessary clothing articles”,<sup>85</sup> which often was not sufficient for the confused, freshly awoken or otherwise temporarily disabled persons to take the elementary effects<sup>86</sup> or, if they happened to be alone, inform their families or friends about what was happening to them and where they were going to. People were often taken after the use of force, at gunpoint or handcuffed. In fact, the whole operation looked more like a criminal mass kidnapping than any normal mobilization. Firearms were used as well, and one of the most serious examples was that of Mirko Drljača, man who had come to Serbia from Pakrac (Krajina) in 1993, but was not a refugee anymore as he had obtained a Yugoslav identity card in the meantime. “Literally, in the middle of the day and in front of the Sremska Mitrovica Fire station, Drljača was shot in both upper legs by a policeman of the

---

80 “Mobilizacija u Srbiji između politike i bezakonja: Lov na topovsko meso”, Naša Borba, 24-25. jun, 1995, p. V; “Racija u beogradskom noćnom klubu ‘Havana’: Upad u ‘raj za ‘Bosance’”, Naša Borba, 27. jun, 1995, p. 2; “Lov na ljude na novosadski način: E, sad neću ni kako ‘oću’”, Naša Borba, 29. jun, 1995, p. 13.

81 “Mobilizacija u Kikindi: Milicija odvodila mladiće sa matuske večeri”, Naša Borba, 15. jun, 1995, p. 2; “Regionalni odbor DSS za Banat o mobilizaciji izbeglica: Sigurnosti sve manje”, Naša Borba, 30. jun, 1995, p. 12.

82 *ibid.* This “T” meant “transit” (“Život izbeglica: Čiji krst oni nose?” NIN, 28. februar, 1997, [www.nin.co.yu](http://www.nin.co.yu))

83 Pod lupom: kršenje ljudskih prava na teritorije bivše Jugoslavije 1991-1995, Fond za humanitarno pravo, Beograd, 1997, p. 242. The author of this article could not find out what these marks stood for.

84 Thus, for instance, it turned out that in the Novi Beograd student dormitory the policemen disposed of the lists of residents from Krajina that only the residence management could give them. Besides, the identity checks and taking away of the students was carried out in the presence of the dormitory keepers. (“Mobilizacija Krajišnika a u Srbiji se nastavlja: Milicija ‘češlja’ Studentski grad”, Naša Borba, 19. jun 1995, p. 34)

85 Filip Švarn, “Hajka na Krajišnike”, AIM, 18. jun, 1995, [www.aimpress.ch](http://www.aimpress.ch); “As we came to know through informal sources, about eighty men were also made volunteers and transferred by bus to Pale last week; some of them were in shorts, pyjamas and slippers and some were handcuffed”, in: “Nastavak lova na nepoželjne Srbe: Danak u krvi”, Vreme, 26. jun, 1995, p. 14.

86 “Kako je mobilisan novinar Milovan Maksić: Odvezli su ga u papučama”, Naša Borba, 23. jun, 1995, p. 2; “Racija u beogradskom noćnom klubu ‘Havana’: Upad u ‘raj za Bosance’”, Naša Borba, 27. jun, p. 2.

Republic of Serbian Krajina, a man from Krajina obviously expert in this kind of business. Drljača was shot while trying to escape transfer to the Krajina front”.<sup>87</sup>

Eleven days after the beginning of mobilization in Serbia, on June 22, Republika Srpska as well began showing interest for its exiled citizens, especially those with medical education. Namely, its Ministry of health, work and welfare stated that it had “pressed charges against the doctors and medical personnel, draft-eligible persons, who have fled to the FR Yugoslavia at the beginning of the war and later on ...No person who, in the meantime, has acquired FRY citizenship and identity card of one of its constituent republics will be exempted from lawful sanctions. The charges against doctors and medical personnel who contact the Ministry departments in the municipalities they fled or RS offices in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Užice or Podgorica until July 3, will be dropped”.<sup>88</sup> The lists with the persons wanted, as *Vreme* wrote, “Dr Karadžić has already sent to the Serbian authorities and now expects their deportation and criminal prosecution”.<sup>89</sup> The request of the Ministry of health, work and welfare was simultaneously accompanied by the request of the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska which “decided to give the last chance to all exiled militarily capable citizens to return to Republika Srpska until July 5 and make themselves available to the military authorities for the defense of homeland”, or, otherwise, face legal sanctions.<sup>90</sup>

In this way, the hunt on refugees in Serbia became formally generalized: the persons sought were not only the Serbs from Croatia but also the ones from Bosnia (or individuals who had something to do with Bosnia in some previous period of their lives); not only medical but all available personnel was wanted. And, according to the electronic version of *Vreme*, the same held true for men from Krajina who were employees of the Serbian police, as well as for their compatriots who were former or actual officers of the the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) or the Army of Yugoslavia (VJ).<sup>91</sup>

Although the action of mobilization in Serbia had grown so big and visible that *everyone who wanted could know about it*, the attitude of the official Serbia

---

87 “Pucnjava pred vatrogasnim domom u Sremskoj Mitrovici: Kako je nastradao Drljača?” Naša Borba, 23. jun, 1995, p. 2.

88 “Ministarstva zdravlja i odbrane RS: Upozorenje dezerterima”, Večernje novosti, 23. jun, 1995, p. 4.

89 “Nastavak lova na nepoželjne Srbe: Danak u krvi”, Vreme, 26. jun, 1995, p. 13

90 “Saopštenje Skupštine Republike Srpske: Apel na savest”, Večernje novosti, 22. jun, 1995, p. 4.

91 Former or active officers of these armies were ordered to report to the HQ of the Serbian Army of Krajina in Banja Luka by September 1, or, otherwise, lose their status and become eligible for mobilization as all other civilian refugees. The policemen originating from Krajina were given choice to spend two months in Krajina (June and July), with regular pay or, else, lose their job. (Filip Švarn, “The Mobilizing Goes On: Les Officers Sans Frontiers”, September 4, 1995, Vreme News Digest Agency, [www.scc.rutgers.edu](http://www.scc.rutgers.edu))

was complete denial. The most remarkable trailblazers were the official media: “For the official media in Serbia, and especially for the mainstay of the regime, *The radio and television of Serbia*, the mobilization was not a news, regardless of the information from Knin that several thousands of combatants had come by bus to Krajina to defend their hearths”.<sup>92</sup>

Those days, quite characteristically, the popular (and populist) *Politika Ekspres* wrote: “If something does not exist, it can be made up, and this is precisely the method used by the activists of the Belgrade-based “SOS phone” and the Helsinki committee in Serbia when launching the story about the mobilization of men from Krajina in the FR Yugoslavia and their alleged deportation to the homeland. Whether accidentally or set up precisely for June 15, almost simultaneously with the summit of G7 leaders in Halifax (Canada) who are expected to decide on the final peace in the former Yugoslavia, yet another of the already-seen media mines was activated in Belgrade”<sup>93</sup>

Especially bitter was the denial of mobilization by the Serbian Commissariat for refugees – institution charged with (and paid for) refugee care. The Head of the Commissariat, Bratislava “Buba” Morina, took every opportunity to deny the existence of the action that everybody could see.<sup>94</sup> However, the most disappointing was the behavior of the Red Cross of Serbia and Yugoslavia, institution that, “according to some witness reports, generously passed their addresses to the Serbian police”.<sup>95</sup>

---

92 “Lov na topovsko meso: Mobilizacija u Srbiji između politike i bezakonja”, *Naša Borba*, 24-25 jun, p. V

93 The same ideas also developed in: “U ovom trenutku: Vreme janičara”, *Politika ekspres*, 20. jun, 1995, p. 2.

94 “In the Commissariat for Refugees of the Republic of Serbia they affirm having no idea about that matter. The commissioner, Bratislava Buba Morina, admits she has heard that a ‘boy, ice-cream street vendor, was taken’ and continues: ‘Nobody asked us for data on refugees nor could anybody give them without my permission. It is obvious that there are people in this city who know the whereabouts of other people’, in: Filip Švarn, “Hajka na Krajišnike”, *AIM*, 18. jun 1995, [www.aimpress.ch](http://www.aimpress.ch); “There was no mobilization of refugees with regulated status – affirms Mrs. Morina – and, as for other people who remained in the FR Yugoslavia illegally and without documents, I am not competent either to worry or to speak about them”, in: “Bratislava Morina o mukama izbeglica i mukama sa izbeglicama: U potrazi za izgubljenim domom”, *Duga*, 5-18. avgust 1995, p. 85; “Among the mobilized there are no refugees whom the Commissariat has recognized status, and if there is a mobilization at all, it probably affects persons who roam in Belgrade without papers and status”, in: “Prema informacijama SOS telefona: Mobilizaciju sprovodi MUP Srbije”, *Naša Borba*, 17-18, jun, p. 3.

95 Milka Ljubičić, “Sudbina ‘polaznika’ Arkanovog kampa u Erdutu: Operacija kažnjavanja ‘izdajnika’”, *AIM*, 4. jul, 1996, [www.aimpress.ch](http://www.aimpress.ch). Aside from that, the Red Cross, organization traditionally dealing with war prisoners’ rights, had to know that “the mobilized who had already been imprisoned by Croat or Moslem soldiers and then released by or exchanged through the Red Cross are no longer covered by this international organization

On the other hand, an example of the opposite behavior was given by Montenegro which refused to take any part in the mobilization.

Numerous domestic political parties and civil associations, in their way, shared the Montenegrin attitude. Public protest was expressed by the Center for anti-war action,<sup>96</sup> the Helsinki committee for human rights in Serbia,<sup>97</sup> the Fund for development of democracy,<sup>98</sup> the Humanitarian law fund,<sup>99</sup> the Serbian renewal movement,<sup>100</sup> the League of socio-democrats of Vojvodina,<sup>101</sup> the youth section of the Democratic party<sup>102</sup> and the Democratic party of Serbia.<sup>103</sup> Among international bodies, protest was expressed by French Embassy (as representative of the country that then presided over the European Union,<sup>104</sup> International Helsinki federation for human rights,<sup>105</sup> Amnesty International<sup>106</sup> and UNHCR,<sup>107</sup> while the American Department of State assured the American media that it was “bringing its concerns directly to the attention of the Serb leadership”.<sup>108</sup>

---

in case of repeated imprisonment”, in: “Mobilizacija - strogo selektivna: Ko je zaštićen?», Naša Borba, 24-25. jun, 1995, p. 3.

96 “Centar za antiratnu akciju (SOS telefon) uputio pismo predsjednicima Liliću i Miloševiću i premijeru Kontiću i Marjanoviću: Ne može se izbeći odgovornost Srbije i Jugoslavije”, Naša Borba, 15. jun, 1995, p. 2.

97 “Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji: Nezakonit akt”, Naša Borba 15. jun, 1995, p. 2; “Saopštenje Helsinškog odbora za ljudska prava u Srbiji: Ministar policije zloupotrebio ovlašćenja”, Naša Borba, 28. jun, 1995, p. 2.

98 “Milenko Radić, predsednik Fonda za razvoj demokratije: Sve je potpuno nezakonito”, Naša Borba, 15. jun, 1995, p. 2.

99 “Fond za humanitarno pravo poziva mobilisane ili njihovu najbližu rodbinu: Pokretanje krivičnog postupka zbog otmice i proterivanja”, Naša Borba, 28. jun, 1995, p. 2.

100 “Srpski pokret obnove: 'Divljački lov na ljude’”, Naša Borba, 23. jun, 1995, p. 2; «Srpski pokret obnove: Lov na ljude se nastavlja», Naša Borba, 28. jun, 1995, p. 2.

101 “Liga socijaldemokrata Vojvodine: Masovno kidnapovanje”, Naša Borba, 26. juna, p. 16.

102 “Pismo Demokratske omladine Mirku Marjanoviću: ‘Prijavite se dobrovoljno u Vojsku RSK’”, Naša Borba, 27. jun, 1995, p. 2.

103 “Konferencija za štampu Demokratske stranke Srbije: Građani su igračka u rukama režima”, Naša Borba, 29. jun, 1995, p. 4.

104 “Protest EU zbog mobilizacije izbeglica”, Naša Borba, 24-25 jun, 1995, p. 3.

105 “Međunarodna helsinška federacija: Mobilizacija dovodi u pitanje kredibilitet režima u Srbiji”, Naša Borba, 24-25 jun, 1995, p. 3.

106 “Amnesti Internešenel uputio apel Liliću: Hitno obezbediti povratak prisilno mobilisanih u SRJ”, Naša Borba, 27 jun, p. 2.

107 “Ron Redmond, portparol UNHCR, za ‘Našu Borbu’ o mobilizaciji izbeglica u SRJ: Otvoreno kršenje Konvencije čiji je i SRJ potpisnik”, Naša Borba, 21. jun, 1995, p. 3.

108 U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, Daily press briefing, 95/06/29, www.hri.org

It was the voice of the other Serbia, as well as the voice of an insufficiently exigent “international community”. In the meantime, the majority of Serbian citizens (exhausted? scared? resigned? delighted?) watched silently their fellow-citizens, neighbors and newly-arrived unfortunate wretches being taken away. True, at the end of July, two cousins of some forcibly conscripted men went on hunger strike under the window of Milošević’s office and “were given refreshment drinks and vitamins by the activists of the ‘Belgrade circle’, ‘Committee for the support to the forcibly conscripted’, ‘Women in black’, other anti-war organizations and individuals, but, nevertheless, the majority of passersby were mainly indifferent”.<sup>109</sup> The official Serbia counted on this lack of solidarity, but the mobilization was so scandalously carried out that some protests had become hard to ignore. Namely, the political coalition in power began splitting as some of the political allies of the Socialist Party of Serbia who, in fact, supported the mobilization, began protesting against the way of its execution.<sup>110</sup> Silence was finally broken on June 24 by a truly historical magazine article of Mirjana Marković, where she not only clearly stated that there was a mobilization going on but also that it was quite justified. The justification of that action (which expressed the true, never before expressed, “politically incorrect” and, therefore, inexpressible attitude of the Serbian regime towards refugees), the emotional tone of the author and the literary quality of the text deserve to be reproduced here entirely:

*June 17 – Some partisans of the Serbian cause in Bosnia and Serbian Krajina live in Belgrade, have not spent a single day in the war and do not intend to do so. They have mainly arrived from the war zone, and timely, before or at the immediate beginning of the war.*

*They came to Belgrade and other cities in Serbia with their children, their money and their ambition: to take over the economic, political, and in general, social positions that would make them extraordinary, first-class citizens.*

*As for the Serbian people in Bosnia and Serbian Krajina, only the poor have remained to fight there. Their*

---

109 “Pod predsednikovim prozorom: Štrajk gladu”, Vreme, 31. jul 1995, p.19.

110 “The Serbian Radical Party has to express its indignation about the illegal manner of execution of the otherwise legal decisions, as well as about the inhuman attitude of the Serbian authorities towards those sent to the Republika Srpska and Republic of Serbian Krajina”, in: “Radikali podržavaju mobilizaciju: Ogorčenje zbog nelegalnog načina”, Naša Borba, 28. jun, 1995, p. 2; “Draft-eligible men should have been returned to Bosnia and Krajina to defend what is theirs, but in a more appropriate manner ...the way people are now being hunted in Serbia is below any standard”, in:

“Goran Latinović, SK-Pokret za Jugoslaviju: Zakasneli potez vlasti”, Naša Borba, 28. jun, 1995, p. 2.

*results irritate these patriots from Bosnia and Serbian Krajina domiciled in Belgrade – they are not satisfied at all and vent their dissatisfaction aggressively. They are angry at the poor devils in the hills of Bosnia and Krajina, but also at adult males (perhaps adult females as well) in Serbia for not being mobilized to fight the war in Bosnia and Krajina. It is out of question for them to take part in the war they advocate so passionately. And if they are so embittered about Serbian hearths, why did not they stay to defend them? Why did they come here at all? Perhaps they expected somebody else to defend them, for instance, their poor and honest neighbors who could not or did not want to go. Or, perhaps, the youth from cities and villages in Serbia, who should give proof of their patriotism by getting killed for the hearths of those who had left them and went to Belgrade to open restaurants and firms.<sup>111</sup>*

After this article, state officials began openly talking about the mobilization;<sup>112</sup> the Serbian police issued its famous statement (in the night of June 24, therefore, on the same day after the text in *Duga* had appeared), while the official media suddenly discovered refugee themes, but their interest boiled down to unimaginative repetition of the statements expressed in the text of Dr. Marković. Thus, for instance, *Večernje Novosti* found itself fine with a mere reproduction of that text.<sup>113</sup> Until the end of the summer, it was the only feature article this daily made about refugees, and the same held true for *Politika* and *Politika Ekspres*, other two official, and also most influential dailies in the country. And let us keep the dessert for the end: the text of Mirjana Marković made its way to newsstands only a couple of hours after mobilization had stopped, as it was “discontinued in the night of June 23”.<sup>114</sup> What a coincidence! In other words, the official Serbia acknowledged the June mobilization only when it had ended. It was just a special

---

111 “Ko ustvari ratuje na području nekadašnje Jugoslavije: Patrioti iz Bosne i Srpske Krajine sa stanom u Beogradu”, *Duga*, 24 jun 1995, p. 5.

112 Thus, for example, the shift boss in the Valjevo police department, Boško Jovančić, declared: “We are doing the military authorities of the Republika Srpska and Republic of Serbian Krajina a favor. We round up men on the basis of their request”, in: “Rodbina traga za odvedenim 'dobrovoljcima' iz Valjeva: 'Srpska policija nikad nije radila prljaviji posao’”, *Naša Borba*, 28. jun, p. 2.

113 “Iz dnevnika dr Mire Marković u ‘Dugi’: Prekopavanje prošlosti”, *Večernje novosti*, 23. jun, 1995, p. 2.

114 “Mobilizacija izbeglica”, *Pod lupom: kršenje ljudskih prava na teritoriji bivše Jugoslavije 1991-95*, Fond za humanitarno pravo, Beograd, 1997, p. 246.

case of the general poetics of the former regime that, as so many times until then, revealed itself in denial of the existent and postulation of the inexistent.

In July, therefore, a close season was proclaimed in the mobilization forest, so that the remaining game could cautiously peep out from their hideouts, smell the air and relax a bit, but not for long, for, war was thundering in Bosnia, one city after another kept falling, and there was a new storm forthcoming on the horizon: “Storm”, offensive of the Croatian army, which in only four days (August 4-7, 1995) terminated the entire western (also the biggest) part of the Republic of Serbian Krajina,<sup>115</sup> crushed the Serbian Army of Krajina and produced exodus of the entire civilian population that - in an endless column of all possible vehicles loaded with what could have been picked up in hurry, and under the curses and stones of Croatian civilians<sup>116</sup> and occasional shelling and rocketing of the Croatian Army<sup>117</sup> - retreated mostly to Serbia and partly to the parts of Bosnia under Serbian control and Eastern Slavonia (the only remaining part of the Serbian Republic of Krajina).

But already on

*August 11 the commander-in-chief of the Army of Republika Srpska issued an order to the General Staff of the Serbian Army of Krajina demanding that the retreated units from Krajina be transformed into a maximal number of new units that would be placed under command of the General Staff of the Army of Republika Srpska and partially under command of the Serbian Army of Krajina, in order to defend the actual territory of the Republika Srpska (RS) and Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK) and liberate the occupied territories of the RSK and RS...The order also stated that “all draft-eligible men aged 18- 60 from RSK, who have retreated chaotically, must be mobilized and organized in units of the Serbian army”... It was stressed that the mobilized conscripts had to be collected in Petrovac, Prijedor, Banjaluka and Derventa... and specified that the formation of the units and their combat preparation had to be accomplished by August 14. This order, however, was written too late and could not have been accomplished, because the majority of men had already dispersed and arrived to Serbia, i.e. the FRY. However, the General Staff of the Army of Yugoslavia endorsed the order, as it is*

---

115 See the excellent serial “10 godina od ‘Oluje’ nad Krajinom”, B92 radio station, [www.b92.net](http://www.b92.net)

116 The episode at Sisak, see: Ozren Žunec, “Rat u Hrvatskoj 1991-1995”, [www.ffzg.hr](http://www.ffzg.hr)

117 For example, the aircraft rocketing of the refugee column at Petrovac road, on August 7, see: “Banja Luka je prva dočekala prognanike iz Krajine: NN ulazi u novi život”, Duga, 19. avgust-1.septembar, 1995, p. 6.

*confirmed by its information from August 14, sent to Ratko Mladić and Mile Mrkšić, stating that “the collection of conscripts from the RS and RSK who are in the FRY is being carried out by the Ministry of interior affairs”. A gathering center was formed in Loznica, with a liaison officer who coordinated tasks with the Ministry of interior affairs. General Mladić and Mrkšić were asked to let know how much of the conscripts they could take...On August 15, Ratko Mladić issued an order regulating reception of the mobilized conscripts from the territory of the FRY. It was ordered that reception points be organized in Bijeljina (the military barracks “Stepa Stepanović”) and Bileća (the barracks “Bilećki borci”). The order specified that “the conscripts born in the RSK and RS west of the river Bosna have to be immediately transferred under police escort to the educational-commando center ‘Manjača’ [where “organization and unit formation, clothing, arming and a short training are being organized, after which the men are ascribed to tasks according to the decisions of the General Staff of the Army of Republika Srpska and Serbian Army of Krajina”], while the conscripts from the Republika Srpska born east of the river Bosna are to be assigned to the Romania, Herzegovina and Eastern Bosnia corpuses”.<sup>118</sup>*

This inevitably long and highly informative excerpt demonstrates two things which were not clearly visible in June and July and which were a subject of much speculation in the public and non-governmental media: 1. the coordination between the political and military authorities of the three Serbian states, and 2. the triage scheme of mobilized persons.

In August, therefore, the forcible conscription in Serbia entered a new phase and acquired some new operational instruments such as the training camp of the Serbian Voluntary Guard in Erdut (of which there will be more talk later on). An especially painfully aspect of the August phase of the campaign was the fact that it also meant capture of men who had just survived the ordeal of military defeat and the Golgotha of forcible abandonment of the homeland. Some of these people had spent four years in war only to be forcibly brought back to it. Especially touching was the case of those August refugees who had roamed for days in Serbia looking for any kind of accommodation and whose first contact with the authorities

---

118 “Knin je pao u Beogradu”, Osma strana, [www.krajinaforce.tripod.com](http://www.krajinaforce.tripod.com)

was used to bring them back forcibly.<sup>119</sup> They, simply, did not know that by avoiding the Croatian “Storm” they entered the Serbian one.<sup>120</sup>

The Serbian police just did its job. The captured individuals were, immediately after arrest, escorted to temporary gathering centers – nearest precincts or fire stations or any other premises suitable for large human gatherings, such as the Sremska Mitrovica prison,<sup>121</sup> or the yard of the Public transport company of the city of Novi Sad.<sup>122</sup>

The gathering centers served also for triage: the mobilized men intended for the Bosnian front were transferred under armed escort of the Serbian police to Loznica, Bijeljina or Zvornik,<sup>123</sup> where they were taken over by the military authorities of the Republika Srpska (in accordance with the above-quoted Mladić’s order), while individuals intended for the Eastern Slavonian front were transferred to the “former JNA basis in the village Željjava” (Krajina)<sup>124</sup> or, *most frequently*, to the training camp of the Serbian Voluntary Guard in Erdut.<sup>125</sup>

*Erdut at dawn. There are men with helmets and guns standing in the moonlight. The railway bridge and the Danube shimmer in the dark. The silence is broken with cries: “Get out! Out! You Serbian traitors, motherfuckers! We will kill you; we will cut your throats! Run! Run! Into the line!”*

*Clubs fall onto heads from all directions. Eardrums and heads crack under blows. Thousands are still arriving by bus to Erdut.*

*Under the open sky, there are four chairs and four barbers standing by. Head shaving takes about 30 seconds. At 7 o’clock, there is salute to the flag. Arkan speaks: “May God help you, Serbian volunteers! You are Serbian volunteers now. I’ll fuck you for having betrayed Krajina!”*

---

119 “M. S, a refugee temporarily settled in Kruševac, was taken to Erdut on August 22 last year, only a day after he had reported to the local Red Cross office”, Milka Ljubičić, “Sudbina ‘polaznika’ Arkanovog kampa u Erdutu: Operacija kažnjavanja ‘izdajnika’”, AIM, 4. jul, 1996, [www.aimpress.ch](http://www.aimpress.ch).

120 As NIN discovered at the beginning of July 1995, the “Storm” was the official code-name of the operation of mobilization of refugees (“Gde god krenem- rat” , NIN, 25 oktobar, 2001, [www.nin.co.yu](http://www.nin.co.yu)). It is indeed amazing how the bureaucratic imagination of the Serbian and Croatian authorities produced the same result.

121 Milošević’s trial, witness B-129, the transcript, p. 19 506-7, [www.un.org/icty/](http://www.un.org/icty/)

122 “Krivična prijava zbog mobilizacije: Penzioner tužio policiju”, Naša Borba, 26. jun, 1995, p. 2

123 “Knin je pao u Beogradu”, Osma strana, [www.krajinaforce.tripod.com](http://www.krajinaforce.tripod.com)

123 *ibid.*

124 Filip Švarm, “Hajka na Krajišnike”, AIM, 18. jun 1995, [www.aimpress.ch](http://www.aimpress.ch)

125 Transfers to Erdut were taking place only in the August period of mobilization.

*There are thousands in the line. You can't quit it for a moment. Punishments are terrible. As salute to the flag goes on, a man is picked out, tied to the flag post and given 25 blows. All have to watch the man twisting like a worm under the clubs. Punishments are various. For instance, a man is tied to the poplar trees by the Danube. The nights on the Danube are cold and full of mosquitoes. The man is showered with cold water.*<sup>126</sup>

This kind of “welcome” overshadowed all other humiliations or psychopathically disproportional “punishments” for every trifle “infraction”, in which the Erdut camp abounded in the period of the “operation of punishment of traitors”: confiscation of all documents upon arrival,<sup>127</sup> confiscation of all gold and other valuables (that, of course, were never given back to the owners),<sup>128</sup> prohibition of contact with anybody outside of the camp (lasting up to 45 days),<sup>129</sup> tying to kennels,<sup>130</sup> “forcing people to pluck each other’s beards”,<sup>131</sup> orders to “punish each other mutually (beating a tied man)”,<sup>132</sup> “tying to the flag post (up to 48 hours)”,<sup>133</sup> forcible “standing in the sun, all day long, without food and water”,<sup>134</sup> “24 hours spent in a barrel full of cold water”,<sup>135</sup> permanent humiliation and compulsion to

---

126 “Miodrag Milojević: Rame uz rame sa Legijom po srpskim frontovima”, [www.profil.co.yu](http://www.profil.co.yu). This fascinating interview is especially important since it comes from a man who had spent four months with Milorad Ulemek/Luković “Legija” at the Bihać front.

127 “Zastarevanje psihičke torture”, Radio slobodna Evropa, [www.danas.org](http://www.danas.org)

128 Marina Grihović, “Pravda za mobilisane izbeglice”, IWPR, [www.iwpr.net](http://www.iwpr.net)

129 *ibid.*

130 “One of the punishments was to be closed in a kennel, to be made a dog. The work unit had made seven kennels, smeared them with used machine oil and painted them black, so that a man who wore a chain around the neck, who had to be a dog, bark like a dog, would inevitably become all daubed. When Arkan’s soldiers passed by, the man in the kennel had to salute them with barking. If not, they trampled him under boot, bat him with clubs. The dog, man-dog, had to walk around on all fours, like a real dog, and bark. He would enter his kennel on all fours and put a chain around the neck. Every kennel had a chain five-six meters long”. (“Miodrag Milojević: Rame uz rame sa Legijom po srpskim frontovima”, [www.profil.co.yu](http://www.profil.co.yu))

131 “Appeal Against Compensation Awarded to Forcibly Conscripted Refugees”, Humanitarian Law Center, [www.hlc.org.yu](http://www.hlc.org.yu)

132 “Gde god krenem- rat”, NIN, 25. oktobar, 2001, [www.nin.co.yu](http://www.nin.co.yu)

133 *ibid.*

134 Milka Ljubičić, “Sudbina ‘polaznika’ Arkanovog kampa u Erdutu: Operacija kažnjavanja ‘izdajnika’”, AIM, 4. jul, 1996, [www.aimpress.ch](http://www.aimpress.ch).

135 *ibid.*

self-humiliation,<sup>136</sup> and, as a definite invention of the Erdut camp, exhaustion through carrying of a black-painted “24.1 kilos”<sup>137</sup> heavy stone, marked with the words “Mr. Discipline”.<sup>138</sup>

After such a “disciplining”, that sometimes lasted a month (but most often a week or a fortnight), the “mobilized”, often poorly armed and clad,<sup>139</sup> were transferred either to trench-digging units or directly to the first front line, under a watchful eye of Arkan’s guardsmen, who remained in the third line. Some of these unwilling soldiers never returned from Erdut, while the others still try, one way or another, to live with the experiences they undergone there. We do not know how many of them did not succeed in their attempts.

The manner, extent and frequency of infliction of pain in the Erdut camp become much clearer if we keep in mind that the Serbian Volunteer Guard was largely composed of individuals who had either been criminals before the war or who became such in the war.<sup>140</sup> Besides, because of the type of military actions this unit used to carry out (described in more detail in the indictments of the Hague tribunal), these individuals had become even more brutal, which means that cruelty and disrespect of human life became their usual way of thinking and acting. Moreover, we should not forget that the camp also served for confinement, questioning, torture and killing of the local inhabitants and war prisoners.<sup>141</sup> Finally, one should bear in mind that the camp, ever since its foundation, was also the operational center of a wide network of illicit businesses that covered the entire Eastern Slavonia. Over and from Erdut flew smuggled merchandise (first of all, petroleum derivatives and cigarettes), the property stolen either in the war plunder of Eastern Slavonia or elsewhere in Europe (automobiles, gold and valuables, art

---

136 *ibid.* “They called us traitors, cowards, grandmas, ass-kissers, exclusive culprits of the fall of Krajina, Serbian shits, monkeys...what’s worst, we ourselves had to repeat these insults: ‘I am the worst Serb; I am a traitor of Serbhood; I am...’”

137 “Miodrag Milojević: Rame uz rame sa Legijom po srpskim frontovima”, [www.profil.co.yu](http://www.profil.co.yu)

138 *ibid.* “One has to carry the stone 24 hours a day, incessantly, as a punishment. Next to a man who runs and carries the stone run also guardsmen with clubs. If the man falls, let the stone fall, he will be trampled under boot, maimed by clubs. The stone carrier also has to sing “I like this stone!”. While running around the man, Arkan’s soldiers tap the clubs in the hands and provoke: ‘Let the stone fall! I’ll kill you, I’ll cut your throat...let it fall!’”

139 “Gde god krenem – rat”, NIN, 25 oktobar, 2001, [www.nin.co.yu](http://www.nin.co.yu)

140 “We see Arkan visiting prisons at the beginning of 1991, taking out his old buddies from the prisons of Sremska Mitrovica and Zabela and proposing them a deal: a month at the front for three or six months of the reduction of sentence”, in: Miloš Vasić, “Atentat na Zorana: Kad država nije država”, intervju radiju B92, [www.b92.net](http://www.b92.net)

141 Chapter “SAO SBZS”, in: “Tužilac Međunarodnog suda protiv Jovice Stanišića i Franka Simatovića”, Međunarodni krivični sud za bivšu Jugoslaviju, predmet br. it-09-63, [www.un.org/icty/](http://www.un.org/icty/)

works, wine, electronic devices, domestic appliances...),<sup>142</sup> arms, heroin,<sup>143</sup> and lastly, mercilessly exploited local natural resources (at first the Slavonian oil fields, and then oak forests).<sup>144</sup> Arkan himself controlled the main lines of these “businesses” (taking for himself a lion’s share of the profits), with the knowledge, approval and logistical support of the Serbian authorities, mainly the State security service<sup>145</sup> and customs office.<sup>146</sup> This was seen as a reward for Arkan’s military and all other services. Arkan, a man with an impressive pre-war criminal record in several European countries,<sup>147</sup> had a gas-station and a free-shop in Erdut, as well as several legal businesses in Serbia (a chain of bakeries and money exchange offices, the Belgrade “Penguin” radio station, the “TV Palma plus” in Jagodina, the “Grand Casino” in the hotel “Jugoslavija” in Belgrade, the football club “Obilić”<sup>148</sup> – to mention some of the most visible ones), but, nevertheless, remained fond of classical criminal businesses, such as rackets, for instance.<sup>149</sup>

These were the men who, in the summer of 1995, were entrusted with the task of disciplining and developing of “humanity”, patriotism and military virtues.

As for the number of individuals mobilized in the summer of 1995 (and especially the number of those who passed the “training” in Erdut), it is impossible to give a *precise* answer now. The range of the numbers we found in the consulted sources was best summarized by Backović et al. who, quoting various estimates, stated that Serbia had handed over to the Republic of Serbian Krajina and

---

142 “Dosije Arkan”, Vreme, 22. januar 2000, p. 11-21.

143 Miloš Vasić, “Atentat na Zorana: Kad država nije država”, an interview given to the B92 radio station, [www.b92.net](http://www.b92.net)

144 For a handful of juicy details on the last phase of the plunder of Eastern Slavonia, see: “Tragovi Škorpiona”, Vreme, 9. jun, 2005, p. 12-15.

145 Chapter “Psi rata”, in: Florans Artman, Milošević – dijagonala lauffera, Den Graf, Beograd, 2001, p. 137-157; Miloš Vasić i Filip Švarn, “Srpske paravojne formacije: 1990-200 – Zadah zločina”, U trouglu državne sile, Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, Beograd, 2001, p. 57-73; “Sve tajne DB-a i Agencije”, Vreme, 8. maj 2003, p. 11-17.

146 According to Arkan’s ex-secretary, now witness B-129 in Milošević’s trial, “whenever he was informed that a truckload of whisky or cigarettes had problems entering from Bulgaria or Macedonia, Ražnatović would call the then director of the Federal Customs Office Mihalj Kertes, and the same day the truck would be allowed to enter Serbia and go to Erdut. The load was not taxed. A part of it would remain in the free-shop in Erdut, while the bulk would be sold in Serbia”, in: “Svedok: Di Stefano i braća Karić najveći sponzori SDG”, Politika, 16. april, 2003, [www.rtvpolitika.co.yu](http://www.rtvpolitika.co.yu)

147 “Dosije Arkan”, Vreme, 22 januar 2000, p. 11-21.

148 *ibid.*

149 Uroš Komlenović, “Arkan, jedna karijera: Poslastičar u državnoj službi”, AIM, 13. jun, 1997, , [www.aimpress.ch](http://www.aimpress.ch)

Republika Srpska between 6 000 and 25 000 men.<sup>150</sup> We see that the numbers vary up to 16 000, which means that it is, actually, impossible to give a precise answer without consulting and comparing the archives/databases of the Army of Yugoslavia, Serbian Ministry of interior affairs and (now defunct) armies of the Republika Srpska and Republic of Serbian Krajina. However, we do not think that the archives of the Serbian police (which, we believe, contain the secret of the number of Erdut martyrs) will be open to the public in the foreseeable future. Therefore, this issue remains a challenge for some future student, on condition, of course, that official documents - if these were carefully maintained, in the first place, and not already destroyed by now - ever be rendered accessible to the public.

## DISCUSSION

*Who knows where would we be now without Milošević's visionary politics.*<sup>151</sup>

By forcibly mobilizing refugees in the summer of 1995, the erstwhile Serbian authorities committed a twofold violation of human rights: a) the very act of forcible return of refugees to a territory where their life or freedom could be threatened represents a serious breach of human rights; b) *the way* officials of the Republic of Serbia (or persons under their control) treated the forcibly conscripted (and especially those sent to Erdut), represents a mass and heavy violation of human rights.

The military effects of the mobilization were negligible and, from the military point of view, it was an absurd and futile action.<sup>152</sup> From the humanistic point of view, the mobilization produced *unnecessary* loss of life and health, and *unnecessary* psychic suffering whose psychiatric (and therefore social) consequences will continue to be felt for long. Economically, it was a pure loss, either because of the costs of the operation itself or because of the costs of alleviation of its consequences (welfare and health care of the disabled; regular payments to the families of deceased; compensations to the injured parties or their families).

---

150 Ofelija Backović, Miloš Vasić i Aleksandar Vasović, "Ko to rado ide u vojnike: Mobilizacijska kriza-pregled medijskog izveštavanja", Republika, br. 198, [www.republika.co.yu](http://www.republika.co.yu)

151 Ivica Dačić, portparol SPS, Politika, 6. novembar 1999, citirano u: "Svaštalice", Republika, [www.republika.co.yu](http://www.republika.co.yu)

152 A typical example is the unsuccessful defense of Grahovo, in June 1995: "The Serbian defense of Grahovo was weak and put up by inexperienced soldiers, Serbs originating from Croatia and Bosnia who had previously found refuge in Serbia where they were mobilized and brought back to the front" ("Rat u Hrvatskoj 1991-1995", [www.ffzg.hr](http://www.ffzg.hr))

Ten years after, the whole action seems so tragically absurd and painful that we have to ask ourselves: why did it occur at all? Why the forceful mobilization of refugees in Serbia in the summer of 1995? In the historiographic part of this work we have tried to demonstrate the chronic lack of men in the Serbian armies in Croatia and Bosnia, at the moment when they were undergoing a series of defeats in the field. This approach suggests that the mobilization represented a simple answer to the requests and needs of these armies. Or, in other words, the mobilization was solving a numerical problem.

This explanation, however, cannot be *completely* satisfactory. Namely, the numerical problem did not exist, because there were three Serbian armies<sup>153</sup> in the summer of 1993: the Serbian Army of Krajina, the Army of Republika Srpska and the Army of Yugoslavia, and, besides them, as Kadijević and Đorđević<sup>154</sup> pointed out correctly, numerous possible volunteers from Serbia.

Of course, the Serbian Army of Krajina was in rout at that moment, a possible engagement of the Army of Yugoslavia in the territories of other, internationally recognized states collided with Milošević's intense efforts to get rid of the sanctions, and there could not have been a thought of a general mobilization after the disastrous experiences from 1991. But why not engaging the Army of Republika Srpska and volunteers from Serbia? Of course, the Army of Republika Srpska had its own problems in the field. But why did it not engage even in the occasions when it could suffer no losses at all?<sup>155</sup> And why not volunteers from Serbia (in some mixture of authentic volunteers and elements of regular police and army forces)? This question, I believe, has only one logical answer: because the commanders of the remaining Serbian effectives *decided* not “to play all aces”, not to carry out the complete mobilization of all available forces and not to initiate a final defense of the - never formally proclaimed - goals from the beginning of the wars in Bosnia and Croatia.<sup>156</sup> In other words, I think that there occurred a *grand relinquishment*. Let us see what Ozren Žunec has to say about that:

*The fact that Serbia never intervened when Croatia attacked the Republic of Serbian Krajina, and never even threatened to intervene, as well as the fact that the breakdown*

---

153 “Serbian” in the sense that the majority of officers and soldiers of these armies were ethnic Serbs.

154 Veljko B. Kadijević i mr Branislav Đorđević, “Kako odbraniti Krajinu”, Duga, 27. maj-9. jun 1995, p. 36.

155 Thus, by the time of the “Flash”, “on the right bank of the Sava no movement was observed that would demonstrate at least a symbolic willingness of the Army of Republika Srpska to help; its artillery, as well, remained inactive although it had within its range the main Croatian forces as they advanced on the road towards Okučani” (Ozren Žunec, “Rat u Hrvatskoj 1991-1995”, www.ffzg.hr)

156 “Defense of Serbia takes place in Knin”, “All Serbs in one state”, “The western border of Serbianhood: Virovitica- Karlovac-Karlobag”. “The Drina is not a border but the spine of Serbianhood”, etc.

*of the Republic of Serbian Krajina in the operation "Storm" was accepted without too much emotion (in spite of a dramatic exodus of the people), reveal that the Republic of Serbian Krajina was left down the drain once it had played out the role of a foreground for the partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had always been the main goal of Milošević's politics. A Serbian "state" in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as it was, became a heavy load, which became evident when Serbia closed its border to the Republika Srpska in the summer of 1994 and introduced sanctions. It seems that Milošević was quicker than Karadžić to realize that the Bosnian Serbs would not be allowed to hold permanently 70% of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina that they had taken in 1992 and did not want to give up, which became the main obstacle to a political solution that would include the partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina. When Karadžić too had realized that point, he probably had to decide what part of the territory to give up, and the southern part of Bosnian Krajina (Kupres-Bosansko Grahovo-Drvar-Bosanski Petrovac-Jajce-Donji Vakuf) seemed the most logical choice since it is economically uninteresting and sparsely populated, and its concession could save the far more important and valuable region of Northern Krajina with Banja Luka.<sup>157</sup>*

But, if Milošević gave up the salvaging of the state of the Croatian Serbs, "let down the drain" the entire Republic of Serbian Krajina and a good part of the Republika Srpska, why then refugees were forcibly sent back to these territories? A forcible return to a territory you want to abandon does not make sense at all. Did Milošević think that a military reinforcement would help recapture the lost territories or, at least, safeguard the remainder? Was the operation meant for internal political reasons, to assure the Serbian public (shocked by the loss of the territories) that he "did not let anything go down the drain" and that he was still fighting (especially because he had, perhaps, already began preparing the "peaceful reintegration" of Eastern Slavonia, i.e. abandonment of the entire Republika Srpska Krajina)? Or was he, simply, afraid of the fact that there were in Serbia thousands of armed, angry and desperate men from Krajina who felt betrayed and who had already lost everything? Was it none of this, some of this or all of this?

The question of motivation of Milošević's decision on forcible mobilization, in fact, cannot be answered in the absence of any Milošević's sincere statement in this respect, or in the absence of a credible statement from a

---

157 Ozren Žunec, "Rat u Hrvatskoj 1991-1995", [www.ffzg.hr](http://www.ffzg.hr)

trustworthy witness. Still, the most frequent answer we found in the consulted material was that by sending the forcibly conscripted back and by their hoped-for military successes the ruler of Serbia wanted to reinforce his positions in some future negotiations with big powers.<sup>158</sup> Aside from the imprecision of this explanation, it does not satisfy us **also** because it does not take into account some facts that have nothing to do with Milošević’s political calculations in the summer of 1995. Namely, as *Vreme* lucidly observed:

*There is a series of elements suggesting that this forcible mobilization has been long and carefully planned and that it is much bigger than it looked at its beginning. Firstly, it was preceded by some extensive administrative actions, such as the revision of refugee status that began in February 1994. The revision was supervised by the Commissariat for Refugees of the Republic of Serbia, and the commissioner Bratislava Buba Morina explained the operation in the following way: ‘First of all, to ascertain the number of refugees...and then to carry out coordination with the authorities of the Republika Srpska and the Republic of Serbian Krajina who had presented us a large list of the territories that refugees can return to’ (*Vreme*, May 1994). In fact, the revision achieved that 90 000 individuals have lost their refugee status. They joined the group of 70 000 individuals who, in Commissariat’s estimates, remain illegally in Serbia, or, as Madame Morina said, “roam in the streets”. This business has lasted long and was finished about a month before the beginning of the mobilization. Not long thereafter, the government of Serbia proudly announced a proposal of a new law on the citizenship of the Republic of Serbia. According to the proposal, persons originating from the Republika Srpska and the Republic of Serbian Krajina and who have legally or illegally settled in Serbia after 1990 will not be able to get the citizenship of the host country.<sup>159</sup>*

Therefore, the revision of refugee status began already in February 1994, i.e. fifteen months before the “Flash” and was finished in June 1995! This means that, before any essential loss of the Serb-controlled territories over the Drina and far before the big turn of the tide in the field, there had been a wish of the official Serbia to get rid of (at least a part) of refugees in Serbia. We can demonstrate that

---

158 “Prinudna mobilizacija - pozadina: Danajski poklon”, *Vreme*, 3. jul, 1995, p. 18.

159 “Nastavak lova na nepoželjne Srbe: Danak u krvi”, *Vreme*, 26. jun, 1995, p. 13.

Milošević saw refugees as a big economic burden,<sup>160</sup> or that he disliked them for purely political reasons,<sup>161</sup> but we can also start looking out for a completely different – perhaps incredibly personal – reason of Milošević’s wish: the reasons of a wish, although enlightening it, does not change its fact. Milošević’s wish had existed far before Serbian war troubles began.

Practically, this means that the Bosnian and Croatian Serb request for mobilization fell onto a more than favorable ground in the official Serbia that, we can suppose, was only searching a good pretext. In other words, the request offered Milošević a dreamed opportunity to get rid of the unwanted people. Thus, the forcible conscription in 1995 is understood as a concurrence, temporal coincidence of two wishes: Milošević’s chronic wish to “get rid” of refugees and the contingent wish of the Bosnian and Croatian Serb authorities to “get hold” of them. “They” wanted them, and “he” did not.

What this does not explain, however, is the *way* these people were treated. I think that it, quite simply, reflects “the specific difference” of Milošević’s system – indifference towards the value of human life and personal dignity, disdain for the law and legality and reliance on “doubtful executives”: amoral, brutal, criminal structures covered under a patriotic discourse. The mobilization in the Serbia *of that sort* could not look otherwise.

---

160 See Milošević’s statements about refugees, quoted in the article of Vladimir Jović included in this monograph.

161 There are several Milošević’s statements - made to some American officials - that the majority of refugees represent “a dangerous pro-Karadžić element”, in: Filip Švarn, “Izbeglice na tapetu: Prognanici kao ‘fašisti’”, AIM, 20. februar, 1997, [www.aimpress.ch](http://www.aimpress.ch)

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Artman, Florans: *Milošević – dijagonala lauffera*, Den Graf, Beograd, 2001.

Blagojević, Marina: “Demografska slika Serbsje 90-tih: dihotomija i stagnacija”, u: Silvano Bolčić (ed.), *Društvene promene i svakodnevni život: Serbsja početkom devedestih*, Institut za sociološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu, Beograd, 2002.

Gaćeša, Ljubica i Milanković, Jasna: *Nivo i tendencije mortaliteta prema starosti i polu u SR Jugoslaviji 1950-1998*, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd, 2000.

Dinkić, Mladan: *Ekonomija destrukcije*, Stubovi kulture, Beograd, 2000.

Dragaš, Nikola i Nikolić, Miodrag: *Potrošačka korpa 1987-2000*, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd, 2001.

Kedžić, Ljubomir: *Hiperinflacija i statistika*, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd, 1997.

Milić, Anđelka: “Social disintegration and families under stress: Serbia 1991-1995”, *Sociologija*, vol XXXXVII, No.4, Beograd, oktobar-decembar 1995.

*Pod lupom: kršenje ljudskih prava na teritoriji bivše Jugoslavije 1991-95*, Fond za humanitarno pravo, Beograd, 1997, str. 246.

*Popis izbeglica i drugih ratom ugroženih lica u Saveznoj republici Jugoslaviji*, UNHCR, Komesarijat za izbeglice Republike Serbsje i Komitet za raseljena lica Republike Crne Gore, Beograd, 1996.

*Popis 1991*, CD, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd, 1997.

*Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije*, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd, (izdanja za 1993, 1997, 1998 i 2001. godinu)

*The Military Balance*, Institute for Strategic Studies, London (izdanja za 1992/3, 1993/4, 1994/5 i 1995/6)

Vasić, Miloš i Švarn, Filip: “Srpske paravojne formacije: 1990-200 – Zadah zločina”, *U trouglu državne sile*, Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Serbsji, Beograd, 2001.