

## **THE ROLE OF MONTENEGRO IN THE WARS OF THE 1990s: "FROM A CONSISTENT WARRIOR TO AN (UN)WILLING ALLY"**

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### **MONTENEGRO AND THE WAR IN BOSNIA (1992-1995)**

As early as October 1991, long before the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared its independence, a large number of soldiers and mobilised reservists from the YNA participated in numerous armed conflicts and operations that were undertaken at the Herzegovina-Dubrovnik front, performing military actions in eastern and western Herzegovina, in the territory of BiH.

Serbia and Montenegro (since 27 April 1992, the joint union state of FRY) refused to recognise the results of the referendum which was organised from 29 February to 1 March 1992, in which a convincing majority of the citizens (64.31%) of BiH voted for a sovereign and independent state. Authorities in Serbia-Montenegro (FRY) argued that BiH's constituent peoples (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) needed to reach a consensus on the state/legal status, and that the referendum was conducted against the will and despite the boycott of the Serb people who lived there. When the war in BiH broke out and flared up in April 1992, the Serbian-Montenegrin leadership sided with the Bosnian Serb nationalist political and military leadership and their troops. They planned and conducted war actions to ethnically divide BiH and form a Serb state on its soil. That state was later supposed – as projected by the centres of power who wanted a Greater Serbia – to gradually unite with the FRY, contrary to the decisions of the International Badinter Arbitration Commission on the inviolability and integrity of BiH's borders. As regards the war against BiH (1992-1995) and the aggression against it, the government in Montenegro predominantly followed the policy that was created and led by the President of the Republic of Serbia Slobodan Milošević and his regime.

Unequivocal indications of the agreement between Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman regarding the division of BiH, which was reached in Karadjordjevo, significantly influenced the character of the war. The authorities in Montenegro and Serbia, that is, the FRY, consistently officially denied their involvement in the war in BiH (1992-1995). However, on 30 May 1992 the United Nations Security Council imposed strict international sanctions against the FRY, precisely because of the role that Serbia and Montenegro played in the war. They remained in force for a long time. Ever since the beginning of the war in BiH, Serbia and Montenegro (FRY) politically, ideologically, militarily, materially, with weapons and ammunition, financially, logistically and in other ways supported and assisted the forces of the regime and the army of the war-formed entity of the 'Republic of Srpska' which was under the control and command of Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić. With the objective of separating it completely from the BiH, they waged a war against the survival of Bosnia and Herzegovina as an

internationally recognised state and a member of the UN. After the decision to withdraw the YNA from BiH in May 1992, former YNA, that is, the FRY authorities that used to control it played a crucial role in the creation and training of the Army of the Republic of Srpska. For years, this Army was financed from the FRY budget. Actors from the Montenegrin government (Republic of Montenegro) and its staff in the executive and legislative powers of the FRY also participated in this, by taking part in decision-making or approving decisions made in this regard.

From 1992 to 1997, the then President of the Republic of Montenegro, Momir Bulatović, was a full member of the Supreme Defence Council of the FRY, the body that was established on 20 May 1992 to command the Yugoslav Army (YA). Therefore, he equally participated in the adoption of all the decisions that were made by this body, as well as in those concerning the role of the FRY and the YA in the war in BiH (1992-1995). The President and the authorities of Montenegro, together with the leadership of the Republic of Serbia and the FRY, made decisions related to the budget of the Yugoslav Army. These decisions also concerned financial, arms, military, personnel and other support, supply and assistance that were provided to Serb troops, i.e. the Army of the Republic of Srpska in BiH and its war operations (1992-1995). The authorities of Serbia and Montenegro continuously supplied the Republic of Srpska and its Army during the war, mainly with oil (fuel). Also, armed paramilitary groups and individuals would leave the territory of Montenegro and fight on the Serbian side in BiH. Smuggling of weapons, oil, cars, etc. took place under international sanctions that were imposed on the FRY. There were also “weekend warriors”, who went to the Bosnian territory and participated in numerous robberies, arson, looting, rape, murder and abuse, acquiring war profits. All the while, nationalism and chauvinism spread through Montenegro, where Muslims/Bosniaks were terrorised.

In Montenegro and Serbia, the war in BiH inspired terror and crimes against Bosniaks. Despite the rejection of the request of the representative of the Republic of Srpska (Dr. Vladimir Lukić, Prime Minister) to ethnically cleanse Bosniaks/Muslims<sup>1</sup> from northern Montenegro and the Sandžak area, a number of crimes were committed, ‘confirming’ the Montenegrin government’s loyalty to the struggle of Bosnian Serbs. The criminal act of deportation was one of them. In May 1992, Montenegrin police arrested and handed over to Bosnian Serb forces more than 85 Bosniak refugees. Most of them were killed. This was one of the most horrendous crimes in the history of Montenegro, in complete disagreement with the local traditions and customs, not to mention international law. There were other crimes as well: against refugee families (the Klapuh family from Foča); against Bosniaks from Pljevlja and the surrounding areas (Bukovica); the abduction of passengers from a train in Štrpci (part of the territory of BiH) on the Belgrade-Bar railway line, which took place on 27 February 1993, when 18 Bosniaks and one unidentified person were killed; and the so-called ‘Operation Lim’, during which the Montenegrin police arrested the entire political leadership of the SDA of Montenegro in early 1994, including republic deputies. They were tortured while in custody and 22 of them were sentenced, in a rigged political trial, to a total of 82.2 years in prison. They were released from prison on 29 December 1995, after they were abolished by the President of the Republic of Montenegro, Momir Bulatović. In contrast, many people from BiH sought and found refuge in Montenegro, on their way to third countries. In addition to people who were victims of violence and organised torture, there were also countless examples of solidarity and protection of such

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information about this, see: Transcript of the 8th session of the SDC of 12 March 1993, SPOV, no. 2-6. I; Momir Bulatović, “Slobodan Milošević - Unspoken defense”, Niš-Podgorica, 2006, pp. 152-154; See in detail about it and: Prof. Dr. Šerbo Rastoder and M.Sc. Novak Adžić, “Modern History of Montenegro 1988-2017 - From the Coup to the NATO pact”, Volume II, pp. 626-627.

people by ordinary citizens of Montenegro of all nationalities. According to the records of the Red Cross and the reports of the Commissariat for Refugees of the Government of Montenegro, on 25 January 1993 Montenegro was host to as many as 64,244 refugees from the war-affected areas of the former SFRY.

The fact that the FRY (i.e. its members, Serbia and Montenegro) were participants in the war in BiH was recognised by the bodies of the international community (European Community, European Union and United Nations), great powers and other states. The joint responsibility of the governments of Serbia and Montenegro for the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina was also mentioned in the Report of the US Department of State for 1992, which, *inter alia*, clearly stated the following: *“While the governments of Serbia/Montenegro insisted that they were not involved in the 1991 war that was fought in Croatia and BiH, they were, in fact, deeply involved in widespread violations of humanitarian law and human dignity in the Bosnian war, which were committed by the YNA and Serb paramilitary forces. They armed Serb forces in both republics through the YNA. Their citizens took part in the wars as members of paramilitary formations, with the approval of the Governments. They also allowed regular YNA troops to remain in Bosnia even after May, re-named as the local ‘Serbian army’. In addition, they continued to supply Serbian forces with fuel, food and other necessities, even when such goods were in short supply in their own republics. And they are failing to condemn personnel who appear to have been involved in war crimes.”*

The request of the Republic of Srpska for the extermination of Bosniaks/Muslims in Sandžak (part of Montenegro and Serbia) was rejected, while the Montenegrin leadership tried to get out of the ‘Bosnian war hell’. Despite its unequivocal support for the Serb side in BiH, as evidenced by the transcripts of the Supreme Defence Council, the leadership in Montenegro favoured the international community’s plans to end the war. This refers to the acceptance of the *Cutileiro Plan* (1992), followed by the *Vance-Owen Plan* for BiH (January-May 1993), the *Owen-Stoltenberg Plan* (June 1993-January 1994), the plan of the international *Contact Group* (May-July 1994), all the way to the *Dayton Agreement* (21 November) and the *Paris Peace Agreement* (1 December 1995, which in fact represented the official signing of the Dayton Agreement) that ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The FRY (Serbia and Montenegro) was *de facto* forced to recognise BiH within its existing borders only at the end of 1995. Although official Montenegro, as part of the FRY, was also an integral part of the Greater Serbia conquest-oriented war project that involved war, destruction, division and conquest of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the UN Hague Tribunal did not prosecute - in connection with the war in BiH (1992-1995) - any representatives of the Montenegrin republic-level civilian government, any of its citizens, or any of its officers who served in the command structures of the YNA/Yugoslav Army.

It is extremely important to point out that the judgment of the Hague International Court of Justice of 26 February 2007, in the dispute of BiH against Serbia and Montenegro (formerly FRY), had established only an indirect responsibility of Serbia – as the only legal successor of FRY – for genocide in BiH. The verdict relieved Serbia of direct responsibility and the obligation to pay war reparations to BiH, but found it responsible for not doing anything to prevent the genocide despite the fact that it had influence on the Army of the Republic of Srpska and the Bosnian Serb political leadership. At the beginning of the verdict, the President of the Trial Chamber of the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Rosalyn Higgins, stated that “Montenegro is not a subject in the dispute, but it shares responsibility with Serbia as a signatory to the Convention against Genocide”. In the reasoning of the verdict issued by the fifteen-member panel of judges, it was stated, among other things, that “FRY did nothing to prevent the genocide in Srebrenica, despite the knowledge of the authorities in Belgrade about it”. Some of the citizens, i.e. citizens and residents of Montenegro and the FRY, had participated in the

aggression on BiH until the end of May 1992, as conscripts of the YNA and later of the Army of the Republic of Srpska. They did so also as members of police formations of the State Security Agency of Serbia, as well as numerous volunteer and paramilitary formations (1992 -1995).

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