

## Walking on Thorns: The Mostar Symposium of 1966\*

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**Abstract:** The symposium held in Mostar in 1966, where the communists from Bosnia and Herzegovina publicly discussed the national issue of Croats, admitting also the wrong politics implemented after 1945 towards the Croats of West Herzegovina, aimed at the integration of West Herzegovina into the BiH framework, with the ultimate goal of integrating BiH for the purpose of achieving its equal status in the Yugoslav federation. After an extensive analysis of the situation in West Herzegovina that showed a mass emigration of Croats from the area to Western Europe, due to the negative political and economic situation, where they joined various immigrant groups mostly hostile towards Yugoslavia, the communist authorities had tried to end this trend and integrate the West Herzegovina area primarily around the regional centre (Mostar), and then to open the perspective of a wider integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina around the centre of the republic (Sarajevo), for the purpose of imposing Bosnia and Herzegovina as an equal member of the Yugoslav federation.

Although the attitudes presented at the 1966 symposium opened certain perspectives to Croats of West Herzegovina, some high-ranking politicians also showed resistance. Critics appeared who thought that opening of West Herzegovina, liberalisation of the political attitude towards Croats and the removal of the ustaša legacy imposed to the area opened space for revitalisation of the ustaša movement. The Belgrade press was at the forefront of such claims, using several terrorist activities that had taken place in that period in Yugoslavia (the movie theatre and the railway station attacks in Belgrade, planting explosives at the Zagreb Mirogoj Cemetery, etc.) as an argument, since the accused were Croats from West Herzegovina. BiH political leadership claimed that the attacks were orchestrated by political and intelligence circles who opposed the Mostar symposium, and that certain groups outside Bosnia and Herzegovina used those events as an opportunity to interfere into the political events in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to compromise the politics of creation of national equality, which was the main political orientation of BiH communists.

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The Mostar symposium, held on 30 September 1966, has been mentioned in literature mostly as a turning point in understanding the national relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the World War II. It opened the Croatian question, i.e., it “indicated the different forms of deprivation of the Croatian population from West Herzegovina”, simultaneously enabling the beginning of a new stage of the “Muslim question” that would become highly present in political debates. The symposium marked the opening of the process for acquiring equality of different peoples and religions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>1</sup>

The Mostar symposium is only the most significant manifestation of a longer process that the BiH communists had pursued for the purpose of acquiring an equal status of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Yugoslav federation. The process saw several stages, including some different views within the very communist elite, but the party’s main current still led to the Mostar symposium, to the “opening” of West Herzegovina and its integration to wider integrational processes. The significance of the Mostar symposium should be observed through the relationship between the political centre and the political periphery, distinguishing in the process at least two circles: the first, in which Bosnia and Herzegovina was a political periphery against the Yugoslav state centre, where the purpose of the symposium was strengthening of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a political periphery by integrating the individual political peripheries around a single centre of the socialist BiH; the second circle entailed the understanding that Mostar was a regional centre, while other parts of Herzegovina, including the area of West Herzegovina, served as a political periphery. However, it emerged that this second circle of the centre – periphery relationship was not entirely clear; rather, a certain “tension” was felt in the relationship, partly contributed by the decision to abolish the *srez* (T/N: a second-level administrative unit) in mid-1966<sup>2</sup>, which meant a certain loss of power of some regional political centres. In such an atmosphere of conflict regarding the distribution of power between the regional and local political identities, the Mostar symposium was organised in 1966.

<sup>1</sup> Filandra 1998, 229-230. Filandra sees the symposium as very important because it marked the acceptance of existence of different peoples and religions in BiH. Thus, the question of religion and nationality gained the right of citizenship in Bosnian politics.

<sup>2</sup> On 27 April 1966, Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina passed a Constitutional Law on the Abolishment of Srez, stipulating termination of all srez units from 30 June 1966, with the transfer of competences from the srez units to municipalities, or directly to the centre of the republic. (Official Gazette of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, No. 14, Sarajevo, 7 May 1966, 105-106).

This process could be observed in the context of the relationship between different layers of identity: local, regional, ethnic, national. In the case of the Mostar symposium, the issue was the integration of West Herzegovina with the recognisable regional identity within the identity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a republic. According to the model applied by Holm Sundhaussen in his research of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where he identified the notions “local”, “regional”, “national”, “national-territorial” identity<sup>3</sup>, we can conclude that the area of West Herzegovina is difficult to define in such a model. Namely, Sundhaussen understands the term region as “a part of one state or an area divided between two or more neighbouring states: a sub-national territory, or a territory at the border of several countries with *one’s own profile*. Regional identity is based on equalities (real or constructed) that differentiate a given territory and its inhabitants from the surroundings (*and the difference is not identical to exclusiveness*). Those are mostly common characteristics to which a long tradition is ascribed: for example, history with political, cultural and/or ethnic specificities”. Also, Sundhaussen speaks of the national-spatial identity, by which he means identifying with a territory “which is considered an own space by a nation. Since this space does not necessarily match a country, it is also necessary to coherently make a distinction between the national and ethnic-spatial identity, which varies from one case to another”. Thus, according to Sundhaussen’s model, the West Herzegovina area, given its the national structure and the border with Croatia, could be treated as an ethnic-spatial identity.

Still, it is best to observe the West-Herzegovina area as a modified local, regional and ethnic-territorial identity with political, cultural, religious and ethnic specificities. The Yugoslav communists, however, considered Herzegovina a separate region, while the area of West Herzegovina was for them a space with a separate local identity, consisting a wider, Herzegovinian regional identity they recognised, as is seen in many administrative divisions Bosnia and Herzegovina saw after the World War II. In all those divisions, the entire area of Herzegovina consisted an administrative unit, regardless of how the unit was called (area, district, *srez*, etc.), with temporary changes of the spatial scope of the unit.<sup>4</sup> However, within the regional identity, the communists were also aware of the existence of individual

<sup>3</sup> Sundhaussen 2009, 11-30.

<sup>4</sup> Katz 2008, 125-178; Velagić 2008. Although this communist approach to administrative divisions contained certain ideological messages in accordance with the proclaimed concept of creation of a new unity of different ethnicities, one needs to observe historical arguments as well. See: Dedijer 1991. (first published in 1909); Mastilović 2009; see also a number of texts published in the *Status* journal (No. 8, Mostar 2005/2006, 66-149), whereby I especially emphasise Ivo Lučić’s text entitled “*Ima li Hercegovine? (Tko i zašto negira Hercegovinu i Hercegovce?)*” [Does Herzegovina Exist? (Who and Why Negates Herzegovina and Herzegovinians?)], *Status*, No. 8, Mostar 2005/2006, 99-121. For an anthropological insight of the history of Herzegovina in the late Ottoman period, see: Grandits 2008; Grandits 2009, 15-38.

local identities (without elaborating, for now, the communist relationship towards the local identities), whereby for them the West Herzegovina was exactly that – a kind of a local identity, i.e. an area where Croats make overwhelming majority.<sup>5</sup> I will show this on several examples from the 1950s, when the ever-increasing debates started regarding the situation in the West Herzegovina due to a weak influence of communists in the area.

The mass displacement (emigration) from Herzegovina was the reason behind the initiation of a more serious debate about the situation in Herzegovina, especially since the data indicated a weak position of communists in the West Herzegovina area. At the Mostar Secretariat of the Srez Committee of the League of Communists session held on 19 May 1960, Mirko Brenjo, during a speech about the political situation in Herzegovina, presented the data of 34,000 people, who fought on the enemy side, and, from that number, 15,000 died, while another 15,000 still lived in the area and about 2,000 emigrated. About 16,500 people stood trial; every 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> adult citizen was prosecuted on criminal charges – that number was even greater if the persons prosecuted on the administrative charges were added. He emphasized that people were going abroad, especially from the West Herzegovina area. “About 500 people are preparing to flee right now”.<sup>6</sup>

A special analysis on the flight abroad from Herzegovina (September 1960) emphasised that the annual number of people who defected was about 30, and that the number had significantly increased by 1954, hence, in the first nine months of 1955 there were 256 people who had defected, but many were prevented as well. The analysis stated that “currently about 600 people intend to escape Herzegovina”.<sup>7</sup>

Most defections occurred in the area of West Herzegovina (Čapljina, Čitluk, Grude, Lištica, Ljubuški, Mostar and Posušje). The majority of defectors were from the rural area, mostly Croats (93%), young, unmarried, who emigrated prior to the military service.

<sup>5</sup> In the late 1950s and early 1960s, according to the Yugoslav communists, West Herzegovina consisted of the following municipalities: Čapljina, Čitluk, Drežnica, Grude, Lištica, Ljubuški, a part of Mostar, Posušje, Prozor and Seonica. Those were all areas with an absolute Croat majority. See: Arhiv Hercegovačko-neretvanskog kantona [Archives of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton] (hereinafter: AHNK), Sreski komitet Saveza komunista Bosne i Hercegovine Mostar [The Srez Committee of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mostar] (hereinafter: SKSK Mostar), kut. (hereinafter: k.) 137, Stanje privrede na području “zapadne Hercegovine” [The Economic Situation in the “West Herzegovina” Area], Mostar, 10 July 1958; for more information on the number and structure of people in the area, see: *Stanovništvo Bosne i Hercegovine po narodnosnom sastavu* [The Ethnic Population of Bosnia and Herzegovina]. Zagreb, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> AHNK SKS Mostar, k. 44, Zapisnik sa sastanka sekretarijata Sreskog komiteta Mostar [Minutes of the Meeting of the Srez Committee Mostar], 19 May 1960.

<sup>7</sup> AHNK, SKSK Mostar, k. 42, The Analysis on the Defection Abroad from Herzegovina (September 1960).

Political problems in Herzegovina, especially in the western part, were frequently discussed at the party meetings from 1950s onwards. Thus, for example, Ante Miljas spoke in his discussion at the SK Mostar Srez conference, held on 9 July 1955, chaired by Džemal Bijedić and with Franc Novak as the keynote speaker, about political issues in the field, especially in the Lištica area. “Different hostile elements are prone to discuss that little has been done in West Herzegovina, that the area is neglected and that the heavy industry has been concentrated in Bosnia. Of course, such slogans resonate easily with people, especially in relation to the living standard. The fact is that the Srez Committee of the League of Communists has done little in that respect. It is also a fact that such reactionary elements form such an opinion, while communists are frequently mere observers. They too frequently accept and are proponents of those slogans. That is why I am of the opinion that one of the main political tasks in the Lištica area is to resolve the issue of the economic upheaval, to explain the specific path of development of our industry, otherwise those masses will take the wrong way, develop chauvinism which could result in severe consequences.”<sup>8</sup>

In the following year, also at a meeting of the municipal committee secretaries of the League of Communists, held on 5 October 1956, the situation in West Herzegovina was discussed.<sup>9</sup> That was a preparatory meeting for a wider discussion at the SK Mostar Srez Committee, where the emphasis was placed on the political situation in municipalities, while economic issues that could have opened possibilities for a more realistic understanding of the situation in this part of the country, remained untreated. That is why the conclusion was that the situation in West Herzegovina should be discussed not only in the context of the political situation, but in a considerably wider context, including economic relations.

At the meeting of the Srez Committee the BiH League of Communists Mostar, held on 11 December 1956, Franc Novak warned against activities of students from West Herzegovina who studied in Zagreb, as well as against the activities of emigrants and clergy from the area. Although all these activities were considered hostile in Novak’s report, it is important to underline that Novak accentuated economic problems that negatively reflected the political situation.<sup>10</sup> However, not much was done aside from highlighting the issues. Even one of the conclusions from the meeting was to better inform the people from West Herzegovina “about the guidelines contained in the federal and republic social plans” for the purpose of

<sup>8</sup> AHNK, SKSK Mostar, k. 41, Minutes of the Srez Conference Meeting, Mostar, 9 May 1955.

<sup>9</sup> AHNK, SKSK Mostar, k. 42, Minutes of the Municipal Committee Secretaries Meeting held on 5 October 1956.

<sup>10</sup> AHNK, SKSK Mostar, k. 42, Minutes of the Srez Committee of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina Meeting, Mostar, 11 December 1956.

spreading propaganda in the area, which only meant *the constitution of a virtual reality* and an attempt to convince the population by means of that propaganda into that *virtual* reality; hence, the accent was to “spread the network of radio appliances and newspapers in as many copies as possible. In that way, the hostile elements’ attempts at using the lack of information to achieve their own purposes will be prevented.”

After that, a number of meetings of the party organisations was held in Čapljina, Ljubiški, Livno and other places, and, in 1957, a special symposium of the Srez Committee of the League of Communists Mostar was held. It was dedicated to organisational issues.<sup>11</sup> Džemal Bijedić, then President of the Srez People’s Board, opened the symposium while Franc Novak, Secretary of the Srez Committee of the League of Communists Mostar, held the introductory speech. Vlado Šegrt immediately emphasised that the situation in the Ljubiški, Grude, Prozor, Lištica and Jablanica area was worrying, since many members were expelled from the Communist Party, while the influence of clergy was also considerable. “I think we in Sarajevo were wrong when we rigorously posed the question of religious affiliation and when the comrades in Ljubuški, Lištica and in other places excluded the comrades from the party because they had engaged in minor religious ceremonies. In that way, we sent those people from our camp straight to the clergy camp, and later, when the issue of clergy is brought up, we attack the clergy as such, we attack the church, rather than pointing out to some hostile priests”. He also criticised the party activity in the field. “There are vast areas, activities of which would have remained unfamiliar to us, and which would have become renegade had there not been for UDBA; we wouldn’t have known about it”. He said that the party’s task was to amass the membership, especially in the Croat-majority areas. “We need to start from the assumption that we will not settle accounts with religion in our lifetime. Our task is to gain the trust of the religious people so that that they become our loyal associates in the development of socialism. We need to cooperate with the priests who want to cooperate (...) Only that way and through the amassment of membership can we improve the situation in the West Herzegovina (...) We need to keep in mind that if one young village woman fails to go to the church gathering, she won’t get married. Intellectuals put in effort to become members of the League of Communists, but that is not the case with the rural population.”

Džemal Bijedić addressed the issue of receiving new members to the League of Communists. He repeated the data contained in Franc Novak’s report, stating that 1790 members were dissolved in the Mostar srez from 1952 to 1956, all due to religious manifestation. Bijedić emphasised that after the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress there had

<sup>11</sup> AHNK, SKSK Mostar, k. 37, Minutes of the Srez Committee of the League of Communists of Mostar, held on 11 December 1956.



been cases of both hectic reception and exclusion of members from the League of Communists.

We have to start with the assumption that a religious manifestation is incompatible with membership to the League of Communists. If we start from the Statute, we may happen to receive such people. The fact is that we have a number of antireligious people in our villages and companies. Our villages and companies have such people indeed. I am of the opinion that these people do exist and that those are good people who partake at all work actions and it is not true that every man displays and fulfils religious tradition and that they go to church. I am convinced that there are many young people in our villages who do not go to church except for weddings and christenings. I believe there are many such people but we do not see them.

Bijedić continued his speech condemning the behaviour of an atheist who had cut the power supply to a church, causing thus the revolt of the local population of believers that accused political leaders for that.<sup>12</sup> Bijedić concluded that such behaviour caused damage to the League of Communists. He also mentioned the example when communists called for the meeting of electors in the time when the congregation went to church.

If we are talking about one such area where people go to church, I would never have called for the meeting of electors at 9, but at 11 o'clock. One should be flexible and use all that is possible politically. (...) Antireligious propaganda, if it is vulgar, can only do harm, and we do have a strong and correct antireligious propaganda in press, schools, etc. All that is, in fact, a healthy antireligious propaganda. For example, a teacher is implementing the propaganda in the natural science class. When a son throws away an icon from the wall before his old father's eyes, that does not represent healthy and useful antireligious propaganda.

The information presented served as the basis for the document entitled *Information on Some Problems in the Work of the League of Communists Organisations in Croat Areas*. The document clearly stated that the regions with Croat majority saw a heavy campaign against those who did not support the party policy, which resulted in unfavourable political consequences in the area. That was especially visible in relation to the religious activities of the population. "In all analyses conducted by the municipal committees, the issue of the relationship towards religion is seen as the most important reason causing difficulties for the admission of Croats in the League of Communists of Yugoslavia". That was the reason, according to this document, that a significant number of Croats who had become members

<sup>12</sup> Ante Ramljak mentioned at the symposium an example of a technician who had cut the power supply to a church during a ceremony with the congregation present, and that caused political problems. Ramljak also mentioned another case: "There have been cases of people get the priest drunk, then they fight and provoke him".

of the Communist Party was expelled, which additionally burdened the situation in that part of the country. Also, the document stated that “in identifying the enemy, sometimes the argument of participation in the enemy ranks is used too frequently, which not only affects the enemy, but also large swathes of the population who participated together with them”, and that also negatively affected the Communist Party position in West Herzegovina. “There are a number of examples today where the parents’ activities during the war plays a decisive role in the selection of young men into different military schools, in the selection of police officers, in granting scholarships and the like”, while not much attention is paid to the ethnic balance of staff at the state institutions. He illustrated that with the number of police officers in the area of Hutovo – Čapljina, where out of 30 police officers employed at four police stations there were only three Croats, but he added that “certain Croats also display a significant amount of chauvinism and mistrust towards Serbs and Muslims”, which is the consequence of, as the *Information* stated, “the enemy influence” whose activities “rest on chauvinism – the fight against the so-called Serb-communism, a fight to create a Croat state that would also include Bosnia. They argument this by stating that Serbs hold all the leading positions”. The *Information* does not even deny that fact, since “in certain Croat municipalities, or in the municipalities where Croats are a majority, Serbs and Muslims are at the leading positions”, but that is justified as “recklessness of the human resource policy”.

This approach expressed in the drafting of this document indicated that the situation in West Herzegovina was starting to be viewed from a somewhat broader perspective, thus at the meeting of the Srez Committee of the Mostar Communist Party held on 29 April 1957, Džemal Bijedić proposed to prepare a comprehensive analysis of the success of communists in certain Herzegovina municipalities, as well as the Mostar srez as a whole, and this analysis should serve in the political struggle to mobilise masses around the ideas of developing socialism.<sup>13</sup> A number of discussions followed at party meetings regarding the situation in Herzegovina. At the Third Plenum of the Communist Party of the BiH League of Communists held on 20 June 1957, Džemal Bijedić discussed the economic development of Herzegovina, but he also emphasised problems that the population in that region was facing.<sup>14</sup>

In the following years, debates about political and economic situation in West Herzegovina were regular at the party sessions. Although the domineering thesis was that certain political hostilities towards the communist authority were enrooted

<sup>13</sup> AHNK, SKSK Mostar, k. 37, Minutes of the Srez Conference meeting in Mostar, 29 April 1957.

<sup>14</sup> AJ, ACSKJ, II BiH, k1/5, Stenographic Minutes of the III Plenum of the CKSKBiH held in Sarajevo on 20 June 1957.



in history (even in the Ottoman Empire),<sup>15</sup> certain irregularities in the relationship of the authority towards the area were also frequently emphasised. That is why in the late 1958/early 1959, several extended meetings of the Srez Committee of the Mostar League of Communists were held at the initiative of the Srez Committee secretariat. The topic of the meetings was the economic, educational, cultural and political situation in the area of the Mostar Srez. One such meeting, held in January 1959, discussed the situation in the srez areas of Čapljina, Čitluk, Grude, Lištica, Ljubuški, Posušje and Prozor, i.e. mainly West Herzegovina. The introductory expose of the meeting emphasised that the development of this area following WWII was marked by the historically-inherited economic underdevelopment, a strong political influence of different civic and nationalistic parties, and, especially “and highly important – as a result of years-long, planned influence of the reactionary clergy”.<sup>16</sup> Insufficient development of this region following WWII, according to the conclusions presented at this meeting, is also contributed by “tradition, patriarchal upbringing, primitivism, conservatism, relationship with foreign countries, etc. (...) Also, there are the vestiges of the defeated enemy who, from time to time, acts and poses an objective and a permanent threat to settling the situation in this area; worth mentioning in this context is the influence of political and economic emigration, foreign and, in our opinion, hostile influences, etc. Without a doubt, the situation is highly complex and will be complicated to solve”. The main goal of this meeting was to review the post-war situation in the area and to define the key problems in the development. However, communists were also unable to achieve a significant success in the field of the economic development of the area, which had remained mainly agricultural; data shows that only 3% of the population was working in the industry sector. That is why they set themselves a task of “intensifying economic development of the area”, especially “finding possibilities to economically enhance Prozor and Posušje”, while, at the same time, “agricultural orientation of this area should be leaning towards the construction of an industrial base which would correspond to our possibilities, most probably in Ljubuški, since that would help an accelerated economic development of the entire area; creating a working class that would seriously influence termination of the old and introduction of the new socialist relations is highly important as well”. This is further proof that the ideological base of the communist concept of industrialisation was the desire to

<sup>15</sup> AHNK, SKSK Mostar, k. 53, SK Lištica Municipal Committee, No. 128/58 – to the Mostar Srez committee, *A Political and Economic Analysis for the Pre-War, War and Post-War Period*, 31 May 1958. It is claimed in the analysis that in that region “there still exists, to a certain extent, a covert hatred towards Serbs, although it is rarely displayed, since the possibilities for that are scarce. Still, hatred towards Muslims is the only one based on religion, and is present with older members of the population, originating from the period of the ottoman rule”.

<sup>16</sup> AHNK, SKSK Mostar, k. 53, The Report on the Situation and Relationships in West Herzegovina, Mostar 16 January 1959.

form a numerous working class which the Communist Party, as primarily a working-class party, would use to gain control over the entire society. The problem was that the authorities started realising this almost 20 years after the end of the WWII.

At that time, the society had not yet been ready to openly admit that there had been mistakes in politics in West Herzegovina after WWII. Thus, for example, there was only an opinion that “the human resource policy in education, both in the sense of professional and political qualities and in the sense of staff deployment is not satisfactory”. Only several years later, the authorities openly admitted that there were many non-Croats employed in education that had come to the area from other places, while there were only few Croat educators. They did admit a lack of understanding in the policy of increasing the party membership; certain party organisations stated that the reason for that was “the relationship between the people from this area with the Ustaša movement during the war and the remains of the movement after the war, as well as religious nature of the people as the consequence of the clergy activities, etc. Those are facts that need to be handled, but, at the same time, we need to show more understanding for the purpose of attracting masses and integrating them in the processes of the socialist development; we need to show more understanding, flexibility and political reflex. Not all people can be forever linked to the sins from the war, especially young people of a wide and densely inhabited area, although there are such cases, albeit rare. That, at the very least, is insulting; it creates apathy not only among the persons who have such beliefs, but also towards socialism as a system”. This had been a signal within the srez committee that it was necessary to remove the burden of the ustaša movement from West Herzegovina, i.e. it was “in the interest of the development of socialism” to remove that burden.<sup>17</sup> This would be clearly stated several years after this meeting, at the September 1966 symposium.

When analysing the causes, duration and effects of the Mostar symposium held on 30 September 1966, apart from the political situation in the field, one should keep in mind the fact that already in the early 1960s the issue of the survival of the

<sup>17</sup> The need of a comprehensive research of the 1960s Yugoslav communists’ change in the relationship towards this area, which was rather tenuous after WWII, should not be rejected. When the issue of the existence of Yugoslavia was open, the pro-Yugoslav communists had obviously looked for a wider social support to realise their goals. However, such a change of heading could have caused negative reactions in other areas. Still, such a change of course could have caused negative reactions in other areas. If those reactions were motivated even through strengthening of nationalism in certain national communities, one should not exclude the fact that some of them felt neglected in comparison to other national communities. General Gojko Nikoliš recorded in his memoirs to have sent several letters to Tito and Bakarić in 1967, expressing regret over the neglect of the development of areas in Croatia settled by the Serb population, but, he remembered receiving answers like: “We first need to pacify the situation in the regions that haven’t been prone to us, neither during the People’s Liberation War, nor now. Kordun is ours, since that was confirmed during the war. Kordun should be patient even now and we are counting on its political awareness.” [Nikoliš 1988, 239-253, as quoted in: Bjelajac 2009, 130.]

Yugoslav state began to be opened, and that a certain democratisation process was at the horizon. The situation in West Herzegovina was discussed mainly at sessions of the Srez Committee, and then it had become an important issue for the senior party leadership. The CKSKBiH Executive Committee (translator's note: Central Committee of the League of Communists; the CKSKBiH abbreviation will be used hereinafter), at a session held on 22 September 1965, passed a decision to prepare an analysis of the political situation in West Herzegovina. "The goal of the analysis is to provide political answers to the characteristic political manifestations in a longer time period in Herzegovina, especially in its western region. In order to implement this conclusion of the Executive Committee, a group was formed, consisting of the following individuals: Uglješa Danilović, Ivo Jerkić, Ismet Kreso. They are tasked with developing a concept of the analysis and present it to the IK CK SKBiH Secretariat."<sup>18</sup> In addition to political activists, the executive committee proposed that a number of economists, professors and political scientists also be engaged in the development of the analysis, including: Mile Alilović, Jakov Arapović, Božo Bevanda, Dragan Blažević, Ante Budimir, Esad Ćimić, Salko Ćurić, Branko Dželetović, Milorad Ekmečić, Jure Galić, Petar Jukić, Mile Kondža, Ante Miljas, Viktorija Matijević, Petar Oreč, Ferdo Palac, Mahmut Pehlivanović, Ante Ramljak, Mate Šalinović, Marko Šunjić and Ante Vrdoljak.<sup>19</sup>

The *Analysis* was completed as early as February 1966, and was discussed at the extended session of the CKSK BiH Executive Committee on 30 May 1966. In early June, the Executive Committee, in agreement with the Srez Committee, decided to organise a symposium on the issues that were subject of the *Analysis*. The CKSK BiH Executive Committee and the Mostar Srez Committee organised the symposium. I assume that the date of the symposium was prolonged because of the Brijuni Plenum and the removal of Aleksandar Ranković, so it was held only on 30 September 1966 in Mostar. Members of the Yugoslav and BiH Communist League Central Committees, members of the Control and Revision Committees, federal and republic representatives, Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) generals, members of the Srez Committee, social and political activists from Herzegovina who lived in other parts of the country at the time, a number of political activists from the West Herzegovina municipalities, representatives of the Croatian CKSK, the Split District Committee and the Mostar JNA garrison participated.

Political activists showed a significant interest for the symposium, especially given the fact that very important issues were brought up in the analysis, for example,

<sup>18</sup> AJ, CKSKBiH, IKCKSKBiH, K. 2/24, Minutes of the IKCKSKBiH meeting, 22 September 1965.

<sup>19</sup> AHNK, SKSK Mostar, k. 137, Proposal of the Work Programme for the Development of the Analysis on Social and economic Situation and the Relationship in the Mostar Srez, with a Special Emphasis on the Western Region, no date.

some aspects of the HR policy, the relationship between the League of Communists and the religion, inter-ethnic relations issues, the emergence of nationalism and chauvinism, the influence of the League of Communists on public opinion, issues relating to education and culture, misunderstandings and different attitudes related to the departure of workers abroad, the relationship between the authorities and religious communities, difficulties and problems related to schooling of young people, issues of inter-communal cooperation with a special emphasis to the role of Mostar as the most developed centre in Herzegovina, issues in municipalities that share the border with other republics, etc.<sup>20</sup> Many of these issues had previously been a subject of consideration at sessions of the communist activists, but this symposium for the first time saw the gravity of the problems, and certain flaws of the ruling party towards the West Herzegovina region, which includes Čapljina, Čitluk, Ljubuški, Grude, Posušje, Lištica, Drežnica, Prozor, Seonica and the west part of Mostar, were admitted. The analysis was conducted and was, as stated, a starting point for the 30 September 1966 discussion.<sup>21</sup>

The *Analysis* also discussed issues that concerned the wider area of Herzegovina, at the focus was West Herzegovina. Problems of economic underdevelopment were emphasised (especially the wish to develop the aluminium industry), the departure of workers abroad, mostly Germany, especially given the fact that police authorities took most care about those people. An emphasis was also placed on insufficient development of the school network in the area of West Herzegovina, which caused with people “different comments about national equality, and with politicians also certain confusion and the feeling that the direction for the opening of schools in the areas that had been significantly involved in the war was orchestrated from the centre”. That is why the *Analysis* concluded that the school system should be more in the focus of attention, especially the school staff in West Herzegovina “where the population is densely Croat and where for a long time the people of other nationalities were

<sup>20</sup> AJ, CKSKBiH, k. 5, Information on the Mostar Symposium, Sarajevo, 5 May 1967.

<sup>21</sup> ANHK, Mostar, the People’s Srez Committee (hereinafter: NOS) Fund, Mostar, k. 137, *Osnovne društveno-ekonomske karakteristike Mostarskog sreza, s posebnim osvrtom na neke idejno-političke probleme u zapadnoj Hercegovini* [The Principal Social and Economic Characteristics of the Mostar Srez, with a Special Emphasis on Some Political Problems in West Herzegovina]. This *Analysis* consists of 56 densely typed pages and has so far most extensively been used by Šaćir Filandra in a book about the 20<sup>th</sup> century Bosniak politics and it was also mentioned in an article by Husnija Kamberović about the relationship of Josip Broz Tito towards the BiH ruling elite in the mid-1960s. In this paper, as well as in the previous chapter, I use a copy from the HNK Archives in Mostar, to which Ivo Lučić, PhD, had drawn my attention. I would like to express gratitude to him on this occasion, for such a kind gesture. Apart from that, some materials related to this symposium (the materials prepared for the symposium, Gačić’s expose, Mijatović’s discussion and the Information on the Symposium) can be found in the book entitled *Savez komunista Bosne i Hercegovine u borbi za bratstvo, jedinstvo i ravnopravnost* [The League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Fight for Brotherhood, Unity and Equality]. Sarajevo 1977.

employed at education nonetheless". The issue of insufficient enrolment of students from West Herzegovina to military schools was also emphasised, as well as an unsatisfactory policy of granting scholarships to students motivated to study in Belgrade and Sarajevo, rather than in Zagreb, which had brought about "organised hostile incidents of a small number of students at the University of Zagreb". It was emphasised that the greatest shortcoming in the political activists' activities in West Herzegovina was "assessment of the moral and political character of a young man based on the standing of his parents or relatives in the war". This attitude expressed in the *Analysis* would later be most quoted in evaluations of the importance of the symposium.

That was the first time that the ruling party, who won the war, admitted to have been wrong in treating the entire area as hostile over its hostile actions during the war.

Newspaper announcements of the symposium emphasised it would be only one of the planned symposia, with the aim of assessing the economic and political situation in certain regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>22</sup> It is also a fact that both the announcements and the reports printed at the front page of the *Oslobođenje* daily prove the extent to which the authorities at the level of the socialist republic deemed this regional symposium important.<sup>23</sup> The reason for that is most certainly an attempt of the ruling political elite in Bosnia and Herzegovina to strengthen the position of BiH in Yugoslavia, in the period when all republics attempted to strengthen their identities. Bosnia and Herzegovina expressed significant dissatisfaction with the position of BiH economy, especially with the prices of BiH products and issues related to the construction of the aluminium industry and the completion of the construction of some infrastructural facilities, where the key issue was the Sarajevo – Ploče railway. In that sense, the West Herzegovina issue, as well as an attempt of integrating that region more firmly in the framework of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was highly important for the political elite.

The symposium was chaired by Vaso Gačić, Secretary of the Mostar Srez Committee of the SKBiH. In his introductory expose, Gačić primarily emphasised the underdevelopment of the region prior to the WWII, placing the accent on the "sudden development" of Herzegovina after the World War. He did not forget to mention that the economic underdevelopment and lawlessness prior to the war influenced the "confrontation of forces in this region during the WWII". He admitted that, for different reasons, and primarily for the need of "liquidating the remains of the political enemy",<sup>24</sup> there had been a "wrong approach" to the

<sup>22</sup> "Savjetovanje o društveno-političkim problemima mostarskog sreza" [Symposium on Social and Political Issues of the Mostar Srez], *Oslobođenje*, 30 September 1966, 1.

<sup>23</sup> "Povoljniji uslovi za razvitak Hercegovine" [More Favourable Climate for the Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina], *Oslobođenje*, 1 October 1966, 1, 4.

<sup>24</sup> "Povoljniji uslovi za razvitak Hercegovine" [More Favourable Climate for the Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina], *Oslobođenje*, 1 October 1966, 1. In a version of Gačić's expose that was



situation in Herzegovina after the war. In his view, such an approach was seen in “one-sidedness, a narrow understanding of the situation, in exclusiveness in the implementation of certain measures, as well as in a lack of trust in the majority of the population that they would accept and support our policy”. Gačić admitted that there were “misunderstandings between members of the staff, and that was further transmitted to the relationship between some staff and the population living in the area”. He also emphasised the “disregard of the importance of the religious feelings of the masses, an ambivalent relationship towards their expression, and especially, one-sidedness in their political treatment”, which influenced the heightening of tensions and the manifestation of rigidity and the “political caprice” towards the “population of this region”.<sup>25</sup> Gačić further stated:

Generalisation and burdening of the population with wartime events has caused significant damage to the political relations, creating an intimate dissatisfaction and an internal rebellion with people, enrooting the sense of political inequality in contrast to other areas. Assigning the wartime delusions and mistakes to the younger generations has caused serious problems. That especially reflected the policy of schooling of the youth, the attitudes about their enrolment to military academies, sending them to reserve officer and NCO schools, their admission in police schools and employment in certain services. To this day, some of these approaches have not been eliminated.<sup>26</sup>

In order to substantiate such statements, Gačić stated that “two months ago, data were collected through the Lištica police department for 300 youths who were subject to the military service, especially related to the behaviour of their parents in the war”. He also mentioned a case of two young men from Posušje, who were enrolled to the School of Reserve Officers, “only to be rejected later under the motive that their parents died fighting for the enemy, although they both come from good

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published later, the expression “liquidation” was replaced with the expression “disablement” (Cf. *Savez komunista Bosne i Hercegovine u borbi za bratstvo, jedinstvo i ravnopravnost* [The League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Fight for Brotherhood, Unity and Equality], 32.

<sup>25</sup> I here cite Gačić’s words as cited in the *Oslobođenje* daily, since they are more reliable in comparison with the version published in the discussion. The discussion published stated that there was a political caprice displayed “towards the members of the Croat nationality, especially in West Herzegovina” (Cf. *Savez komunista Bosne i Hercegovine u borbi za bratstvo, jedinstvo i ravnopravnost* [The League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Fight for Brotherhood, Unity and Equality], 33). However, at this very symposium, Cvijetin Mijatović warned against a wrong approach that was also contained in Gačić’s expose, where he persistently avoided to mention the noun Croat; rather, he used the expressions “the population or people of this area”. Mijatović did not explicitly mention Gačić’s name, but it is obvious that Gačić used the expression “the population of this area” or “the people of this area”, constantly avoiding to say that those were Croats.

<sup>26</sup> *Savez komunista Bosne i Hercegovine u borbi za bratstvo, jedinstvo i ravnopravnost* [The League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Fight for Brotherhood, Unity and Equality], 33.



families. One of the boys' father even died as a partisan, while he himself has been a member of the League of Communists since 1960 and is very socially active." Gačić emphasised the problems in West Herzegovina in the period following WWII, but he tried to portray that as a wrong individual action:<sup>27</sup>

The process of democratisation in West Herzegovina faced strong resistance because of the bureaucratization of individuals and groups and their attempts to monopolise the entire political thought and action, which brought up in people opposite tendencies, especially with the intellectual youth that was educated in some other environment and who have become accustomed to the bureaucratization processes (...) However, notwithstanding the obvious progress in all sectors of the social activity, individual opinions still exist, denying the fact that the entire social development and the politics of the League of Communists towards the national issue, as well as equality of all peoples, had a significant impact on the change and the evolution of consciousness.

Participants of the discussion admitted mistakes in the relationship towards the Croat population in West Herzegovina. Stjepan Dodik stated that "in the West Herzegovina area, people have been held suspect without valid reason only because of the political affiliation of their families during the war", while Krešo Buntić openly stated that "in the post-war period, there have been hasty moves by the state authorities towards Croats, which have had severe consequences. Thus, from the Lištica area, one could not have gone abroad because the prevailing opinion was that that all who leave would become enemies, i.e. emigrants. (...) The JNA was provided negative reports for some young men serving there". One of the participants (Simo Babić) expressed disappointment stating that the discussion was not "versatile" and that emphasising the economic issues should not be solved during such symposiums; he did, however, expressed pleasure over the fact that "the inter-ethnic relationships in Herzegovina are approached from the aspect of the current social and economic issues".<sup>28</sup>

It was evident from Vaso Gačić's and other exposes that there was willingness to call things by their proper name, although some participants were careful, especially Vaso Gačić, who kept talking about "the people of this area" against whom certain injustice has been committed after the WWII. Cvijetin Mijović, the political

<sup>27</sup> *Savez komunista Bosne i Hercegovine u borbi za bratstvo, jedinstvo i ravnopravnost* [The League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Fight for Brotherhood, Unity and Equality], 35.

<sup>28</sup> *Povoljniji uslovi za razvitak Hercegovine* [More Favourable Climate for the Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina], *Oslobodenje*, 1 October 1966, 4; Cvijetin Mijatović expresses disagreement in his expose with this approach, but he emphasised he believed Babić's discussion was "benevolent". The published version of Mijatović's discussion, the section where he mentioned Simo Babić was left out (*Savez komunista Bosne i Hercegovine u borbi za bratstvo, jedinstvo i ravnopravnost* [The League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Fight for Brotherhood, Unity and Equality], 43-49).

secretary of the CKSKBiH,<sup>29</sup> reacted against such timid statements, recalling discussions in the early stages of the symposium, stated that the situation in West Herzegovina was discussed for the first time in 1965 because of the behaviour some students from West Herzegovina in Zagreb, for “they were charged with working in an illegal, fascist organisation”. The leaderships of BiH and Croatia then met and raised a number of issues about the situation in West Herzegovina. According to Mijatović, questions were raised then about whether it would be useful to open the issue only about the situation in West Herzegovina, “are we, perhaps, going to create doubts or a reaction on the other side. Second, the question was if we were going to artificially separate things from the whole; there were serious dilemmas on whether or not we were going to discuss the entire Herzegovina in a more balanced way, unlike previously”. Mijatović concluded that, regardless of different interpretations, the Mostar symposium and opening the issues of Croats, was useful for the future development. He continued by referring to some discussions and expressed his surprise that the participants mainly spoke of the “population of West Herzegovina”, “the population of that area”, “the people of that area”, and the like:

As if we are reluctant to use the name Croat. Isn't there something we should consider? Brochures will be printed, people will read them and will notice that they are mentioned here as a nameless element; how did that come to be in our terminology? I want to say that one cannot postulate the issue like that, straight to the flat board. There are abstract issues, and those issues have a complex with Serbs, Muslims and Croats alike. What kind of a complex? Why? (...) I am convinced (...) it should be stated before oneself, before the public, openly, self-critically, bravely (...) that we have inconsistently implemented the politics related to the national issue in an array of cases in our republic (...) primarily (...) in the case of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. (...) Sadly, we did have a period, after our revolution, when it was difficult being a Croat in the Croat areas. And we should say that if we want to look the truth in the eyes (...)

Although the goal of the symposium was to create conditions for an integration of West Herzegovina, a political periphery with the BiH centre, some discussions emphasised the relationship of the Herzegovinian periphery towards Mostar as the centre of Herzegovina. Huso Koluder pointed that out, stating that “Mostar is a gravitational centre of the entire Herzegovina and that is why this city is obliged to connect all the communes in the srez, especially when it comes to economic,

<sup>29</sup> The Tuzla Canton Archives, Cvijetin Mijatović, Diskusija o savjetovanju u Mostaru 1966 [A Discussion about the 1966 Mostar Symposium]. The discussion was published in *Savez komunista Bosne i Hercegovine u borbi za bratstvo, jedinstvo i ravnopravnost* [The League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Fight for Brotherhood, Unity and Equality] (43 – 49) and it is slightly different from the original version, which is the result of the authorisation of the text, not the additional changes. I am using Mijatović's original discussion in this text.

educational, health and other common issues". That initiated Cvijetin Mijatović to speak of the role of the centre in one area:

That is one issue that does not concern solely this area. It is interesting for us and remains for us to discuss it in depth. It is certain that there is something lawful about it, since certain disputes and contradictions appear; the relationship between the centres and their surroundings sharpens – at least, we have such information about Mostar, Banja Luka, Tuzla, Sarajevo, and that also concerns other centres. Let us see what that is, where does it come from? How to overcome that? For, in that case, important issues are incorporated, such as the city – village relationship. This issue is not solely related to culture, but also to advanced currents, ideas, there is also the issue of a complex functioning of those centres, since their role will continue to be important and they will not mind us taking their administrative prerogatives now, since they are no longer the srez centres, and they will not be the centres of political leaderships either. It is early to discuss that now, but perhaps it will be an advantage. Perhaps that will create conditions on an equal basis to find a real substance necessary to achieve a more complete functioning; the realisation of that function can only be implemented by those very centres, by influencing their surroundings.

Mijatović posed a number of questions whilst speaking about the relationship between the regional centres (Mostar) and the regional periphery (the West Herzegovina municipality) and opened a very important dimension of this symposium that should be kept in mind when the importance of the event is discussed. It is important to emphasise that the issue of the relationship between Mostar as a centre and the Herzegovinian periphery was very much prominent in the early 1960s, to an extent that in 1962 certain Mostar political officials were criticised as proponents of the "Mostar localism" that led to the neglect and marginalisation of the non-Mostar officials.

This aspect of the Mostar symposium is important also because a discussion started afterwards that concerned the reaction of Mostar to the attitudes expressed at the sessions. Branko Mikulić wrote in his notes on 8 March 1967 that the reactions in Mostar regarding the Mostar symposium should be analysed, since the city "has remained deaf (...) In Mostar, they immediately label the person upon the very mention of the noun Croat, which is unfavourably met and commented in Herzegovina".<sup>30</sup>

That is why the Presidency of the CKSKBiH, at sessions held on 28 March 1967 and 12 April 1967, discussed the consequences of the Mostar Symposium, and adopted a special *Information on the Symposium in Mostar*.<sup>31</sup> The conclusion

<sup>30</sup> Archives of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter: AFBiH), Branko Mikulić (hereinafter: BM), k. 6.

<sup>31</sup> AJ, CKSKBiH, k. 5, Informacija o savjetovanju u Mostaru [Information on the Symposium in Mostar], 5 May 1967.

was that the symposium was successful, and that it was well-accepted in the West Herzegovina area, but also that there were some opinions that “certain deformations in the field of inter-ethnic relations were overemphasised and dramatized, and will cause political damage”. The *Information* deemed such opinions as wrong, stating that the reason of their existence was “a lack of information” about the issues discussed at the symposium, especially because

the time and experience have shown that the symposium has played a positive role in shedding light to a number of issues and problems that accumulated over time. An open discussion of certain problems removed prejudice that those were delicate issues, so today they are approached objectively and more realistically. It is possible to conclude today that the symposium was received and interpreted as positive with the majority of officials in Herzegovina. In the political leadership of West Herzegovina there are opinions that they should have addressed certain issues earlier and more openly and that the future practice should see a more open treatment of all political issues.

An interesting aspect of this symposium is that no conclusions were adopted; rather, the Executive Committee of the CKSKBiH was tasked, together with other state and political bodies “especially the municipal committees of this area, with finding the most suitable forms of a more thorough discussion of some of those issues, or to initiate their solution”. It was also emphasised that the Institute for the History of the Workers’ Movement and the Faculty of Political Sciences could prepare projects about the scientific research of historical events in Herzegovina in the pre-war and war period. One should not overlook the following positions expressed by the Presidency of CKSK BiH regarding the Mostar symposium:

The Presidency also emphasised that, regardless of the termination of the srez, Mostar would still play a significant role as a political, economic and cultural centre of Herzegovina. It was stated that, in the self-governing conditions, a new relationship between the communes can be developed primarily on the basis of a mutual interest of workers, their organisations and communes in general, but also that every tendency of the political closure of Mostar and prevention of normal integrative processes in different areas of social life would be highly damaging.

Regardless of the positive opinion about the Mostar symposium by the part leadership, discussions ensued later on. Thus, Branko Mikulić, at a session of CKSKBiH held on 13 November 1969, emphasised the rise of nationalism and chauvinism even among communists themselves, claiming that some of them perceived the Mostar symposium as the main cause of nationalism and extremism in Herzegovina.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> AFBiH, BM, k. 8, Branko Mikulić’s expose at the CKSKBiH session, 13 November 1969; When Branko Mikulić edited a collection of his discussions, he remarked in one of his notes about the

The main critics of that symposium spoke, for example, that it contributed to the rise of pro-ustaša extremists – saboteurs recruited from West Herzegovina. Speaking about the serious economic situation in the municipality during the meeting of the Nevesinje municipal committee, the municipal assembly chairman said that Nevesinje was being neglected especially after the Mostar Symposium! On the other hand, a group of nationalists – Croats in Mostar assembles different statistical data for the purpose of proving that Croats in Herzegovina are disenfranchised, on a brink of migrating and that this politics towards Croats is no different than that of Nikola Pašić. They are engaged in forming the Matica Hrvatska branch [a Croatian national institution], to initiate the HKL [a literary paper], etc. Serb nationalists increasingly state that “following the 4<sup>th</sup> CKSK plenum, Serbs have fallen into disfavour and are not sufficiently represented in the state bodies.” Muslim nationalists are trying to prove that Muslims are indigenous Bosnians, hence the very forming of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina is liked to Muslims, since they had nowhere to incorporate! According to them, had it (not – H. K.) been for the Muslims the Republic of BiH would not exist, despite the socialist revolution.

Apart from that, Mikulić was firmly against the interpretation of positions expressed at the Mostar Symposium exclusively as admitting that the communist politics towards Croats in Herzegovina following WWII was wrong. Mikulić had become aware of such an interpretation upon visiting some Herzegovinian municipalities in the period from 23 February to 1 March 1970, when he spoke to the political activists from the West Herzegovina municipalities (Lištica, Posušje, Grude, Ljubuški, Čitluk, Čapljina).<sup>33</sup> The *Information* from the visit states that some comments about the symposium are unacceptable:

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13<sup>th</sup> session of the CKSKBiH held on 13 November 1969 that the symposium had attracted a considerable interest, but that communists also expressed opposing attitudes related to the “nature, significance and the need of the symposium. The unitarist perception of the national issue and relations was also expressed, nationalist attitudes surfaced, as well as a direct resistance to the League of Communists’ attitudes about inter-ethnic relations. On the other hand, there were also wrong perceptions that the very symposium would solve all the issues of West Herzegovina that had been seriously underdeveloped in comparison to other areas, and in which certain vestiges of the past influenced the political situation, causing serious confrontation and divisions even among the officials in Herzegovina. The ‘critics’ of the symposium especially attacked the discussion of comrade Cvijetin Mijatović”. (Mikulić 1978, 28). By publishing his discussion, Mikulić also made certain corrections to the source text (for example, by leaving out the discussion of the president of the Nevesinje Municipal Assembly on the alleged neglect of Nevesinje after the Mostar symposium, etc.).

<sup>33</sup> The Croatian National Archives, Central Committee of Croatia, D – 4468, Information of the Centre for Information and Documentation of the CKSKBiH No. 12/70, Utisci i ocjene o političkom stanju i problemima materijalnog razvoja jednog broja hercegovačkih opština [Impressions and Evaluation of the Political Situation and Problems of the Economic Development of some Herzegovinian Municipalities].



Namely, some individuals still perceive the symposium as almost exclusively an act of self-criticism of the SKBiH policy and its forums towards this area, and less as an organised event that has brought forth some important tasks and obligations of the Herzegovinian communists for an accelerated overcoming of weaknesses in the League of Communists' organisation, its closedness and sectarianism of sorts, in order to advance unity and connectedness among communists, etc. Those facts were emphasised during the conversation and we have also come to an understanding that the Mostar symposium conclusions should be again presented to the cadre of the area, especially younger individuals.

However, whilst rejecting, on the one hand, such remarks, Mikulić and the ruling elite of the time also kept a firm grip on the degree of opening of the West Herzegovina area. That was the model that the ruling communists implemented in the case of the recognition of the national identity of Muslims: to recognise the identity, but to not let its development outside the set boundaries, and every such transgression of the preestablished boundaries was characterised as “nationalism and chauvinism” and was subject of sharp sanctions. In that way, the affirmation of the national identity of Muslims, as well as the opening of the West Herzegovina area in order to affirm the national identity of Croats simultaneously faced repression against the persons who had been faster in that work than the set boundaries, regardless if those were activists outside the communist movement, or members of that movement. One such example in the case of West Herzegovina was the trial of Ivan Alilović in the mid-1970s,<sup>34</sup> as well as the case related to the trial of Miljenko Hrkač, since they indicate the true opposers to the attitudes expressed at the Mostar symposium. Namely, during November and December of 1969 and January 1970, 18 Yugoslav citizens were arrested on charges of belonging to a terrorist organisation and to have perpetrated several acts of sabotage in 1968. However, several of them were released immediately, while the remaining four stood trial in Maribor, but they too were released.<sup>35</sup> Of the 18 arrested citizens, 14 were from West Herzegovina. That led to a new stigmatisation of West Herzegovina, but due to the fact that the majority of the arrested were released after the investigation, the BiH authorities saw that as an attack not only against West Herzegovina, but also as an attack against Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>36</sup> A delegation from Bosnia and Herzegovina which consisted of

<sup>34</sup> Lučić 2006, 356-357 and the bibliography presented there.

<sup>35</sup> Yugoslav Archives (hereinafter: AJ), Cabinet of the President of the Republic (hereinafter: KPR), *Idejna strujanja* [Ideological currents] (hereinafter: II – 4 – a), SRBiH Executive Council – to the President of SFRJ, 23 February 1971; See also: *Izveštaj Komisije za kontrolu rada Službe državne bezbjednosti u SRBiH u akciji “Drava”* [Report of the Committee for the Supervision of the State Security in SRBiH in the “Drava” Operation], Sarajevo, February 1971.

<sup>36</sup> [The Miljenko Hrkač process should be distinguished from the Božo Hrkač process. The two brothers stood trial – Miljenko Hrkač in Belgrade, and Božo Hrkač in Maribor. The two trials



Džemal Bijedić, Branko Mikulić, Dragutin Kosovac and Todo Kurtović visited Tito on 8 February 1971 and informed him about the case.<sup>37</sup> Todo Kurtović informed Tito that several persons from Bosnia and Herzegovina were arrested in relation to the arrest and trial of Miljenko Hrkač in Belgrade, but were all released due to a lack of evidence,<sup>38</sup> which negatively impacted the political situation in West Herzegovina, where the majority of the arrested people came from. Kurtović continued:

A considerable suspicion is expressed regarding our relationship towards the area and Croats of the area. The population living in that area of our Republic, due to certain circumstances, had previously expressed suspicion and resentment, for example, regarding some films, actions and statements of certain people, writing of certain magazines, etc. From the beginning, there has been a lack of trust there related to these arrests, which has created a special political atmosphere among citizens, especially among the highest-ranking officials of the Lištica municipality. Those arrests were deemed illegal, as a matter of fact, an attack against their freedom, threatening the principal legality.

The Lištica municipality officials, where the arrested persons mostly come from, have even openly protested us. All that has accumulated a very grievous atmosphere. To that it should be added, I daresay, a rather scandalous writing of some press, some papers (...) about this area and about this case. The press wrote that the cases of sabotage mostly come from West Herzegovina, implying that those all were the ustaša and terrorist hotbeds and places (...) which has certainly left consequences.

Todo Kurtović then mentioned that Tito passed through West Herzegovina some ten years prior, and gave a statement that, according to Kurtović, was “historical” and which the people of West Herzegovina would later mention, to which Tito

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were separate. While Miljenko Hrkač stood trial in Belgrade, accused of undertaking terrorist activities in Belgrade with a group of like-minded individuals, a process was initiated against Božo Hrkač in Maribor for preparing terrorist activities, and that the preparations took place also in Maribor. Božo Hrkač was indicted on 20 May 1970, but the defence filed a complaint regarding the territorial jurisdiction of the Belgrade District Court. The complaint was sustained and the Maribor District Court took over the case. This court also accepted the local jurisdiction for the indictment issued in Belgrade. During the Božo Hrkač trial in Maribor, Stanko Marušić Piža was also accused, having confessed in Belgrade prior to the indictment to have planted a mine under the monument to the People’s Heroes in Mirogoj, and that Miljenko Hrkač kept watch. He later withdrew the statement and the Maribor Prosecutor’s Office withdrew the indictment, while the District Court terminated the proceedings due to a lack of evidence. However, Miljenko Hrkač was sentenced to death at the Belgrade trial.]

<sup>37</sup> AJ, KPR, The Meeting of the Delegation with Tito (hereinafter: II – 2), Conversation between the President of the Republic Josip Broz Tito and Representatives of the Authority from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 8 February 1971.

<sup>38</sup> [During the trial, Miljenko Hrkač mentioned several people as his accomplices in the attack to “20 October”, a Belgrade movie theatre, and the railway station, which triggered arrests in Slovenia. However, there were no evidence and all the people arrested were released.]

responded: “I know, in Široki Brijeg, one man stopped and said ‘Well, wait, Tito, we are not now what we used to be’”. Kurtović informed Tito that the leadership of Bosnia and Herzegovina has to react, especially in reaction to the *Borba* and *Politika* newspapers who were lying about the entire issue. Kurtović stated that Bosnia and Herzegovina had established a special committee aimed to investigate all circumstances of the arrest of those persons, and announced measures that would be taken against those who had made such mistakes. He also said that the federal authorities would be informed about it. “For, after living in socialism for 25 years, this is a difficult issue for an ordinary man, and we will have to continue taking measures in order to secure such cases never happen again. Still this is about 19 (sic!) people”. Branko Mikulić added that this “opened up old wounds that we have for years treated there. Now we again see the perception of the Croat people as ustaše”. Kurtović then talked about professor Alilović, who was in prison, but who would most probably be released because of the atmosphere created around the Hrkač case, so that the Croat population in West Herzegovina regains trust. The stenographic record from the meeting shows that Kurtović stated the following:

Writing of the press was similar on this occasion too. (B. Mikulić: That is that professor). The present articles related to the Hrkač case has brought us to the situation to consider the procedure in the Alilović case, i.e. his serving the sentence. This also is a chauvinist who is, undoubtedly, guilty. However, we will now most probably take certain measures considering the circumstances (B. Mikulić: and release him from prison) of his release when the moment is most appropriate. We will solve those individual cases in order not to add fuel to the atmosphere in the area where the development is, essentially, positive. One can indeed fully believe a worker from that area, since those are hardworking people who, if no other option exists, go abroad to earn some money, and then return; essentially their relationship is patriotic.

Branko Mikulić then stated that the Executive Committee of Bosnia and Herzegovina would announce to the public, after the committee completes the report, “that the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina defended the principal interests and constitutional rights of citizens”.

When the committee completed the report, the Executive Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina sent the information to Tito, emphasising that the arrests, and the successive acquittals of citizens, left negative political consequences and raised suspicions over the justification and legality of the prosecution authorities.<sup>39</sup> It was emphasised that all those events had been taking place in the time of intensive

<sup>39</sup> AJ, KPR, II – 4 – a, Executive Council of SRBiH – to the President of SFRY, 23 February 1971; See also: Izvještaj Komisije za kontrolu rada Službe državne bezbjednosti u SRBiH u akciji “Drava” [Report of the Committee for the Supervision of Work of the State Security in SRBiH in the “Drava” Operation], Sarajevo, February 1971.

efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina to improve inter-ethnic relations, hence that the case had caused the unrest and mistrust of citizens. The Report of the Committee for the Oversight of Work of the State Security Service in SRBiH, the Executive Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina accepted the conclusion that this was a failed operation that left serious political consequences. It was reported that the entire operation was executed under the leadership of the State Security Service of the Federal Secretariat of Internal Affairs, and was based only on Miljenko Hrkač's statement. The Republic's State Security Service proposed not to go ahead with the arrests, but to continue with operational activities in order to gather more evidence, but the State Security Service of the Federal Secretariat of the Internal Affairs ordered the operation, hence the Republic's State Security Service was "brought into a position in which it only executed the orders of the arrests of citizens against whom a criminal proceeding had been initiated. State Security Service representatives in the BiH Secretariat of the Internal Affairs insisted that the social and political representatives in the republics be immediately informed about the operation. Representatives of the Federal Secretariat of the Internal Affairs did not accept that; rather, they later, after the arrests, passed the information to the social and political factors in the republics. Considering all that, the BiH Executive Council decided to urge the Federal Executive Council to investigate this case and decide on the steps to be further taken in the issue, since the political damage was significant." The annex to the address to Tito contains the Report of the Committee for the Oversight of Work of the State Security Service in SRBiH in the "Drava" Operation, dated February 1971. It can be concluded from the Report that the BiH State Security Service did not have a complete insight into the "Drava" operation execution. Instead, it had only assisted the Federal State Security Service. The Report also emphasised that both the Military Court and the Military Prosecutor did not accept to take on the case, so the Belgrade District Court conducted the investigation. That court also issued the arrest warrant, so the BiH Secretariat for Interior Affairs had to participate in the arrest, for it was obliged to enforce court orders.

At that time, sabotages were frequent in the country and the press, especially the Belgrade press, presented West Herzegovina as a hotbed of terrorists, portraying the entire area as "terrorist and ustaša". However, a true shock ensued after some of the persons arrested were released, i.e. after the indictment against them was not confirmed, following the investigation. That left an impression that those people were arrested only because they were from West Herzegovina, hence the issue of an equal status of Croats was raised. "For that reason, in that area of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the action had a very negative impact, causing distress and suspicion, as well as a negative political development in that area and in the republic as a whole". The report also emphasises that it had become clear that the "Drava" operation was

a failure; the investigation lasted over a year with no results. “The existence of an organisation was not proven, but still a considerable number of people was arrested because of the suspicion that they belonged to the organisation”.

During Tito’s visit to Herzegovina, from 5 to 7 April 1971, BiH political leadership again complained, and Mikulić expressed a conviction that the “Hrkač” case was used “for interference and aggravation of the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as that the forces who were against the Mostar symposium platform and the policies we implemented were behind all that. Comrade Tito stated that he too shared that opinion. He emphasised that he, as the head of state, did not find it comfortable to ask that the Hrkač issue be removed from the agenda as soon as possible, since Hrkač’s guilt had been proven for he asked our engagement in that direction”, Mikulić wrote.<sup>40</sup> One should keep in mind the fact that in the time when the “Drava” operation started and when Hrkač was arrested, Radovan Stijačić was the SFRJ minister of interior, and he was in conflict with the BiH leadership. He, according to Mikulić, “expressed reservations about our positions on national equality, especially the conclusions adopted at the Mostar symposium in 1966, as well as towards the implementation of the policy of appropriate national representation in educational and cultural institutions, political and state bodies”.<sup>41</sup> For that reason, Bosnia and Herzegovina asked for his removal from the federal government.<sup>42</sup>

Echoes from the Mostar symposium were felt also after the Hrkač case. However, it then had already become visible that the approach to assessing its relevance had become much calmer. Thus, in August 1972, Mikulić, at the occasion of a sod-cutting ceremony for the construction of a needle bearing factory in Lištica, spoke of the efforts put into the development of the underdeveloped areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina, placing in that context the sod-cutting ceremony for the factory, announcing also the beginning of the construction of a hotel in Lištica, of a needle bearing factory in

<sup>40</sup> AFBiH, BM, k. 8; It was revealed later that Hrkač agreed to falsely testify that he had planted the explosive in the movie theatre in Belgrade, since he believed that would grant him the passport more easily. (Dabčević-Kučar, 1997, I, 399-400). The press wrote that the interrogators in Mostar promised Hrkač “swearing on the state and the party” that nothing would happen to him if he admitted to have planted the explosive. The *Večernje novosti* newspaper wrote the following in one issue: “Numerous circumstances are related to this marathon trial, all implicating that the young carpenter from Mokro was not the only one playing the strange game with and before the court. Radovan Stijačić, the Federal Interior Affairs Secretary, approved the tapes (Hrkač’s interrogation in Mostar, H. K.) be presented to the court, but that never happened”.

<sup>41</sup> Husić 1991, 56.

<sup>42</sup> In the late 1970s, Branko Mikulić claimed that the widespread media exploitation of the “Hrkač case” in the early years of the decade in various Belgrade newspapers was a kind of an “opposition to the attempts of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina to liberate citizens from certain areas of the republic from the imposed complexes because compromised war criminals originated from their areas”, and that it was also a “planned attack against the Mostar symposium by those who had initiated such writing”. (Mikulić 1978, 310).

Ljubuški, the completion of the construction of a decorative cloths' factory in Gacko and Prozor, as well as preparations for the construction of the first industrial object in Grude, a reconstruction and expansion of industrial capacities in Ljubinjje, Čapljina, a new irrigation system in Čitluk, and the construction of modern roads throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. "It is truth, Mikulić added, that there has been some reluctance here in the post-war period, sectarianism, as well as a lack of trust in the people by individuals, given the economic, especially industrial, underdevelopment" Mikulić said. Hence, we can observe that Mikulić reduces the "lack of trust in the people" to the level of the relationship of an individual, not the Communist Party or the authority as a whole. In addition, Mikulić emphasised that the Mostar Symposium "by measures and attitudes presented, has accelerated social and political processes in West Herzegovina, while, with regard to the realisation of the policy of fraternity and equality of peoples, its significance and echo are even greater". Since then, according to Mikulić, Herzegovina saw an accelerated social development, the renewal of human resources, as well as the development of the education system, especially high schools, industry began to develop together with traffic, etc. "Sadly, there were individuals who either failed to understand or who did not accept the messages from the Mostar symposium. By losing or abandoning the class position in the interpretation of the events from the more recent history, they have spread doubts into the loyalty of certain peoples to the self-governing socialism". Mikulić emphasised that the opponents of the positions expressed at the Mostar symposium "either minimised or kept silent about the truth that traitors existed among members of all peoples and nationalities". Mikulić called those who understood the Mostar symposium positions that they "started to promote national reconciliation (...) under the excuse of the struggle for national equality and affirmation (...) Of course, we were determined against that, since we see it as an attack against the brotherhood and unity and equality of peoples living in BiH and in Yugoslavia". In that way, Mikulić clearly stated the position of the Party: certain changes for the purpose of the "opening" of West Herzegovina and affirmation of the Croat national identity are possible, but only to an extent necessary to confirm the ruling position of the Communist Party, where no cooperation with the bearers of the traditional nationalism would be acceptable. The political leadership of Bosnia and Herzegovina had apparently learnt lessons from the Croat case, when Tito had removed from the political stage the Croat leadership the very moment when the Croat national communists established a certain contact with the traditional Croat nationalists.<sup>43</sup> Hence, the BiH political leadership did not want any contact with the traditional nationalists in order to preserve their own ruling position. For communists

<sup>43</sup> Sekulić (ed.), 2004, 42-43. This book also contains parts about the relationship between the traditional and communist nationalism, hence, this model can be used also to observe the situation in the communist movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as to open discussions about national identities of Muslims and Croats in BiH in that period.

of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the traditional nationalists remained key opponents who were fiercely chased.<sup>44</sup> In that sense, the 1966 Mostar symposium only meant opening possibilities to initiate the fight against the traditional nationalism on behalf of the communist nationalism, but the events in a wider Yugoslav context, especially related to the Croatian Spring and the resistance in the process of national equality, which had been rather fierce in some centres of the communist power, prevented a consistent realisation of the Mostar symposium positions.

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<sup>44</sup> There are numerous examples of that hunt after nationalists. See, for example, AFBiH, SSRN BiH, unsigned (*Informacija o nekim antisocijalističkim i antisamoupravnim pojavama u SR Bosni i Hercegovini i o reagovanjima na njih*). [Information on Some Anti-socialist and Anti-Self-governing Phenomena in the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Reactions to Them]. Sarajevo, Chairmanship of the SSRN BiH Conference, September 1972).



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