

LANG SLOBODAN

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The conversation is recorded, the label of the recording is

Langs.wav

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The conversation took place in Zagreb

OK. Our Dictaphone is turned on. Please, in the beginning of the recording, introduce yourself; give me your name and your last name, the date and the place of your birth, your occupation and place of residence.

My name is Slobodan Lang, I'm a doctor, a university professor, I am quite internationally active, and I am one of the founders of the Center for Human Rights in Harvard. My works are being studied in Peace Academy. I have been active during the course of the whole war, starting with 1998, when I wrote the request for the ending of hatred...

1998?

1988.

OK.

I have been a part of Kosovo activities until 1999. There are numerous dissertations I published back then. They are widely available, in English and they are published; they're dealing with improving humanitarian work. I was a member of Council of Europe, and a member of the World Parliament of the Interplanetary Union. First I acted independently since 1994, and then in 1994 I became president Tuđman's counselor for humanitarian questions; I was the only person in Croatia holding that office, nobody before or after me was involved with humanitarian questions in Croatia on a state level. My principle of work was... members of my family were murdered in Jasenovac and I considered this had to be stopped, and I was impressed with the role of the righteous one among the nations... The armies didn't save the Jews in Europe, as was Hitler holocaust winner, he performed it; Jews were saved by individuals prepared to put their neck on

the line to help the others. That's why I considered there was an obligation in trying to prevent the suffering. I acted through the whole war in that direction, that's when I went to all, to all the concrete places where the events took place, having a very concrete goal in mind – to prevent killings, to minimize suffering, to protect no matter who it was. I primarily acted within Croatian community, but nationality or faith meant nothing more to me than showing them respect for who they are. People are not abstract – if he is a Muslim, I will respect his right of practicing his faith, and if he's a Jew, to practice Judaism. So, I don't see people as naked monkeys, but as women, as Croats, as believers, and that they should be respected completely. That's what I was doing to the best of my knowledge. There you go, is that OK?

As an introduction.

OK.

As an introduction, yes.

Yeah.

We conduct this conversation because of the charges against...

OK.

And the defense of general Praljak. It would be great to be able to use your rich experiences and the numerous events you witnessed, to try to approach the part about the connections...

Yes.

...Between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina in that period, approximately from 1992 till 1994.

Yes – as for relationships with these events and Praljak himself. First of all, general Praljak and I, we are from the same generation and none of us has anything to do with the army. As a doctor, as I'm not a clinical doctor, I don't practice medicine but public healthcare and humanitarian work, this is a digression, which is interesting because I turned down a military rank. After the request of granting me a military rank, I warned president Tudman that I was a defender, a doctor for the people, and not for the army. And that in

modern wars population gets hurt, and that doctor's role isn't defending the armies, but people. Praljak, on the other hand, wasn't a medical worker. He couldn't perform that kind of job but had to actively participate in the defense. He was an engineer, and actor and director, an artist, and he had to perform that job. So we both did it our way, and I felt close to him in the sense that he was also operative in his own position, and in this sense he was active. Both of us were there at the beginning, we both acted in Croatia, we were there in the hardest time for Croatia, and we both went to Bosnia-Herzegovina when the suffering began there. People were getting hurt and as I was a member of the Helsinki Committee, and it was my responsibility as I went to the camps. Why did I leave to another state? Hmm. You see, that makes me laugh. Should I be limited in my right to go and help people because they're in another state? To me, whose family, I was born knowing that my grandparents, all of them murdered for being Jews? Should that mean I can't help people if I need to cross the border? I mean... That's simply... I don't even know what to say. That was a major discussion in the national committee, should we cross the border. I can cross the border wherever I feel like it if I'm helping people, and no person can stop me. Praljak crossed it his way. We were... Formally he was in the Croatian Army ever since Sunja and I was... nothing. Later, I went to Bosnia and acted, I did my thing.

When did you go to Bosnia for the first time?

I entered Bosnia for the first time in April 1992. I was already a key figure in Dubrovnik defense. After I left to USA, in January 1992 I talked to the senator, the future vice-president of USA, Al Gore. He warned me what was to happen in Bosnia and pleaded to protect Bosnia, when Kosovo and Croatia couldn't have been protected. He said he would do so. When this happened, in April 1992 I traveled Posavina, all parts of Bosnian Posavina at the time. I crossed the bridge and went for Brčko, having no documents. Back then the bridge in Brčko was already torn down so you had to walk over a plank; those were the last parts to be crossed over... By Brod there was a mass exodus, an attack on

east Bosnia and a massive flee of Muslims. Back then crossing of the Muslims to Croatia was unthought-of. In the bridge in Brčko signs were put up that it was used for II World War Jews, for their rescuing and departure. There were some signs. Associations and notions were certainly immensely strong – suffering was taking place and our own humanity will undergo a test, we were to be tested. The Muslims were coming in... it's hard to describe it. They used rafts, boats, they were swimming. There were waves of Muslims. I had two mixed...

Over the bridge?

Over the bridge too, they swam over the river and took rafts. There was a great deal of people. There were two very strong emotions in me. One emotion was that I was tremendously sorry for those people. Another one was that I was perhaps never more proud of my Croatian nation than then – as my country was willing to accept them. And that now, when the people are suffering, regardless the fact that Croatia itself was attacked, cut off and broken, we took them in, even though we already had Croatian refugees coming in from Slavonia, from the Knin area – and that we without saying a word, that my country... That's when I felt a great deal of loyalty for Croatia, as it was ready to take in all those people.

How did Croatia take in those people?

Completely.

Was anything organized?

We already had things organized, because Croatia was attacked, as this was 1992. For us it started in summer 1991. But I could tell you since I was with the first refugees when it st... From when first refugees were coming from the vicinity of Knin, from Potkonje, and when first refugees came from East Slavonia, I was there both times, when the first refugees arrived. That took place in summer 1991... Concretely, for Knin, it was 1st May 1991. Number of Croatian refugees was large even then. We had services formed for these refugees, so that when the wave of Bosnians appears, Croatia takes them in,

without a single international representative. I was the only outsider there.

You were there as an individual or you represented somebody?

I left everything and I was there as an individual, completely as an individual. I was completely alone, I even my family wasn't with me when I went there. What was the name of UNHCR representative in Zagreba, was it Carlos or what? He recommended me for a special award. There were no international representatives; I went down to Bosnia and observed – no international representatives. For example, a great deal of refugees came from Goražde and nobody could see what was going on, the events that took place in Posavina. So that there, when these people were driven out, there was nobody, and we heard reports from people about crimes being conducted over the Muslims, crimes that were meant to be highly demonstrative. I can't tell you if they were true, I wasn't a witness. There is a possibility that they were propaganda and made up, but they were placed on the scene so that you'd know you have to leave.

And they worked?

And they worked in the sense I mentioned, as sex organs mutilation. Because what they were showing, men raping, that sent out a message that there is no more life there for you. That was a way of using the crime of propaganda, and its goal is to make people leave themselves. That was one of the very well worked through methods, as they studied its use in order to manufacture fear, to...

To make you go away faster?

To make you willing to go away. A great deal of people fled, and Croatia took them in.

How long did this wave last, the one you're referring to, this wave of moving people? It lasted for days I presume.

For days, for days, it lasted all the way since June; it lasted all the way till summer, till summer. I was in Derventa by June. In Derventa I coined a term which in the meantime became a standard word in the English language:

Urbicide. It means killing the town; I was referring to driving out population, Muslim and Derventa population in general. There was a building there. There were no more people, people are running away. There was a lot of shooting in Derventa. And there was a huge residential building, and there was... even though it was June, there were heavy rains and it was cold, the time was very bad, and the wind extremely strong. And the only... the only sounds you could hear were collapsing of the buildings glasses, and then there was the wind taking out the curtains that were swinging. At those curtains were swinging, and I watched it, and I told to the guy who was with me: «The town is being murdered here. This is, this is urbicide.» I wrote that and it was taken over by the newspaper, and then later it became a term to be used, and it was also used around Mostar 1993. If you type it into Google, you will see that the term is being used today. So there was the whole wave around Posavina at the time, unlike this part. The attack on Mostar was conducted in May 1992. Yes, and that's when I came to the mosque. After this, after what happened in Posavina, I came to the mosque and warned them, I was the first to tell them that there will be suffering. There were also Muslims from Bosnia working in Germany, and I was the first to tell them about the suffering of these people and what was to happen there from that moment on, from that moment, to the absolutely last moment, there was an organized form of helping the Muslims in Croatia.

When you said, tell us a few more words about that, when you said «organized form of helping» - what does that mean, what does that include and what sort of help was there that you knew of because of your presence?

They were completely taken care of in the Croatian camps for refugees. They got the full medical attention possible, a complete willingness of being transported to a third country. The part I know nothing about is connected to the arming or military activities. I know nothing about it,

since it's not my area of expertise. But they were completely accepted as people, they were offered a possibility of a transfer. They got the possibility of medical and later humanitarian aid through Croatia. Much more possibilities, since I was in Macedonia as well, while here many people accepted them in their homes. People took them in... other people... It was like that in Croatia. At that moment Croatians felt less jeopardized, they felt a less threat. They are more willing. Croatians are quite open for accepting people of different nationalities and religions. They will take them in if they're in trouble. They won't perceive them as Muslim, but simple as people in need, and there is a huge willingness to take them in. That willingness was continuous.

What do you mean continuous?

Until, let's say, Davor, until the transfer after Oluja (Storm). So, when the Muslims are driven away in that wave again. Whenever there were sufferings, Croatia was always willing to help.

So, when you say that, you're also referring to 1992 we're talking about now?

Yes, definitely.

And 1993?

Totally.

And 1994?

Absolutely definitely.

And that's when you became president's counselor?

Yes, totally, totally. You have inappropriate media...

I ask you like this deliberately...

I understand. You have inappropriate media... In the service for refugees there are no stops. There are no stops in the healthcare facilities. There are no stops in the basic relationship and communication.

Same goes for diplomatic relations?

It's not like that. You have inappropriate media texts or statements, so somebody is trying to prove something, to show off. That's why there are those elements when the conflicts start occurring. But there was never such a breach from Croatian side, so when these needs occur, certain waves, when things take place, there occurs an ability to react, to give. So, I say, from that moment on. There was never a breach. The other moment I said was bothering me was a question of the ability of forming a common defense. They had to face the fact that Croatian and Bosnian sides are absolutely unarmed, and there is an open, unconcealed readiness for chasing people away. We have to know one thing: ethnic cleansing is a product of antifascism. It was being done to Germans after World War II and the experience of a victor after World War II was that a certain portion of population was allowed to be chased away from certain areas, for example Germans from Yugoslavia – there are some controversial opinions with regard to the Italians. I'm not qualified enough to speak about it. But you have these Germans – borders were re-drawn, and it was unthinkable to change them anymore. Those actions were not a product of fascism, but antifascism, after World War II. Milošević, or whoever was the strategic mastermind, applied something that was allowed in the way wars were waged in Europe, on the side of a victor. That means that it pays out to, chase away the population. And as this action is being conducted, you see that you'll be chased away, you have no guns to protect yourself, pressure is being applied and people have to manage. They then group around their communities as much as possible. Some of them avoid each other and they're trying to defend in conditions where it's practically impossible to defend. Among all this there are mutual tensions, people are too weak to put up a realistic defense, to stand against incomparably stronger military force, which puts pressure on mutual relationships, but also makes it more difficult to the groups themselves – then there is Martin Buber principle, warning us that when a man is in a good position, then he is a tolerant individual, and when it comes to risky situations,

he forms groups and indulges in solidarity. They are forming groups from one place to another – these groups then have their religious and national determinant, and then they form mutual alliance; in this phase there was a complete alliance between Croats and Bosnians. They were standalone groups, and not individuals, so it doesn't matter who it is; Bosnians were a part of HVO (Croatian Defense Council) as they still didn't have their army, but in that phase Croats respected their right to be different. However, as people are being chased away, there are tensions, accusations, why did you do that, why did they brake you there, your defense was inadequate, demographic balance is being deranged. Muslim men unable to fight came to Croatia and Croatia is protecting them. In the same time, those able for a fight brought dominance to certain places in middle Bosnia and mutual tensions form. It seemed that the international community was ready to give up to 70 % territory to the Serbs, and then there were those shameful conferences where they redefined the charts week in and week out. So, there is a readiness from the side of international representatives to talk about which belongs to whom and then later stimulate... So, from these meetings they stimulated the following relationship on the field: look at what you can win until next week. In this way people were encouraged to win more territory. And that caused the conflicts in relationships, they were becoming increased. However, I have to say that in the beginning, while I was still with them; I witnessed them fighting side by side...

Who?

Croats and Bosnians were defending against the Serbs side by side. So, as they were actively defending together, I...

Where were you then?

I was in the vicinity of Travnik, and in Mostar. For example, in 1992 I went to Liska graveyard; I performed the funerals when we established this new graveyard, common for Croats and Bosnians. The roots of the community were there; they were easily established, especially after the fled to Croatia I

mentioned previously.

Before we turned on the Dictaphone, you told me a story...

So, this took place when this conflict occurred...

When did it take place?

In 1992, by the end of 1992.

By the end of 1992?

By the end of 1992.

We're talking about Travnik now?

By the end of 1992 in middle Bosnia, I was afraid they won't be able to stick together.

Why?

Because they were being condensed in space, they were being pushed at each other. They allowed from the bringing in of ammunition to the Serb Army from the outside. They allowed for destruction, for attacks on Sarajevo. This force was not being opposed and... They simply... I was reminded at the experiences with mice, as they are bread, and then they have no alternative but to engage a mutual conflict, as they had no other chance. That's when you start mutual conflicts, so, I when I...

And then you came to Travnik, what was the occasion?

I came to Travnik, I spoke for a week, asking them to keep the peace and I have to say, you could see that, unlike Herzegovina, there was a common life in middle Bosnia, but by the end of 1992 Mujahedeen fighters were in Travnik. They also had their barrack. That was by the end of 1992 and in this moment, meaning that...

That's when you met them?

Yes, yes, and that's open, that's no secret. Hmm, so, hmm... There was another relatively unknown event. There were the refugees that Croatia took in, Bosnian refugees from Bosnia, that western Europe didn't want to accept, but they were accepted by Iraq, Libya and Iran – and Europe showed

no compassion for them; they were not suitable, as they were the Muslims.

You were the witness of that?

No, that can be seen from the paper, you can take a look... And Croatia took them in. But the international community wouldn't take them in, but they had to... So, Europe didn't put it first the fact that they were European, and that European refugees can be taken in Europe, but the Europe with its policy allowed for making Muslim faith more important category than being European. Thus they legalized a disgraceful, inadmissible, over-sensitive in all lines of human rights. So these poor people, had no alternative but to mutually connect – that's when, in a certain period, Turkey played a crucial role of European state that took back the role of the European primate, and so they played the role of protecting European interests; Turkey got my reverent bow for their contribution and the way they played their role. They did, I think they did more to prevent a sort of, a sort of fundamentalism than did the others, and if I were on the place of Izetbegović, not Izetbegovića, I would be a complete fundamentalist, because he has no choice. The man didn't have anything, Serbs were being freely armed, his people murdered, nobody wanted to take them in – what else could he give to these people other than tell them it's honorable to lose one's life? And then there were some... I'm not sure if they were adventurists or, I don't know. Those people, who then, whom he...

You're referring to the Mujahedeen fighters?

Yes, only they could show these poor people, to their people that somebody is there, and something needs to be done. So, middle Bosnia cumulates this burden of Bosnia. This burden is being inflicted to them, and then when it came to a conflict, that means a greater separation would come with great...

With all the consequences that kept rolling. But you can feel that

burden by the end of 1992, when you were in Travnik, right?

Absolutely...

Can you remember the event you noted under "Will you stay together". So, what was really...

In Turbet. In Turbet. In Turbet Serbian Army attacked them.

So, Serbian Army attacked in Turbet.

And now Croats, Muslims and Croats se are defending shoulder to shoulder. They are, they are different armies...

They kept the line together?

They are two armies, but they are on the line, for me they are the same, and I asked them individually...

You were going on the line?

Yes, yes... I asked them – will you stay together? They said they will, and I told them I didn't believe that, and then they signed up.

When you asked «will you stay together», your question was referring to whether they will...

Croats and Muslims, will you – like you are here together now, will you stay together and defend together? Will you keep the ability to stay together and stick in the defense? They swore they would, I said I didn't believe that, and I asked them to sign up. So I have a number of people who signed up with the promise of staying and sticking together, that they will keep defense lines together.

If I understood you well as we talked before we turned on the Dictaphone, that's when you met Praljak?

I also met Praljak, Praljak was in Bugojno. Praljak was then, he came as an individual visiting middle Bosnia. He was sort of, we were close in that respect, he was enlightening, and he would simply go to these people, telling them what is to happen. He wasn't there we a unit, he went by himself.

When you say that he was enlightening – in what sense, in what way?

Well, they didn't know how to do anything, they weren't real soldiers.

You mean trench-digging and things like that?

Yes, that, and in that sense they didn't know how to defend, and the war was coming; they had to organize, they had to have some, they need to do something about it. Now, when all this was going on, they were completely... And I organized a hospital in a church.

You organized a hospital, where?

In Nova Bila, in Nova Bila.

That was in 1992?

1992. Yes, 1992, 13th November. The hospital was organized in 1992 in, 1993 I came and on Human Rights Day 1993 I named it Franciscan hospital. There were more hospitals in an extraordinary state because they couldn't anymore, the relationship snapped and they couldn't be in Travnik hospital, Croats that is.

I'd like to stop you for a moment there. So, the headquarters, medical headquarters that functioned and that tried to unite everything in 1992...

Yes...

... how exactly did the envisage Nova Bila?

Like a military hospital.

Like a military hospital from the beginning, or was it initially a warehouse with medical material with the intention to...

I don't know what it was supposed to be, a warehouse or a military hospital. They had 5, 6 of them in Vareš. In Konjic, in Bugojno, in Nova Bila, they were going around the field; there was a group of younger doctors, Gverić, Šarac, Bagarić, Torbak etc... They were going, the group of young...

You had contacts with them?

Yes, yes. They were doing it. They were at the moment, they were volunteers. This medical headquarters was from the very beginning

extremely, they worked hard, they had great people there, very young people, and then our men joined in, even younger. I came independently; they knew about my interventions, it wasn't explicitly a military, but a Franciscan hospital. It wasn't to be enough, this military component wasn't to be enough, it needed to be given a new level as well so, there was a strict principle, that no division between patients should take place, and that they are...

Just tell me, before we continue – why Nova Bila and when did it become evident that Nova Bila needs to become a hospital?

Nova Bila was there when I came; they already had a hospital, as they made it. It became evident to me because they built an oversized parish church and they had the space. When we observed where to do anything, there was the building that was available, and it was a very practical decision. And there was a considerable population count in Lašvanska valley.

Was it possible to take people elsewhere, to transfer them? What was the situation with...

No way, that is an island, the isolated Lašvanska valley, it way like an island, and we lost connection with Travnik. That's where Croati doctors used to jump through the window in order to escape, and then run away to Nova Bila. So, the connection was lost between the doctors in Travnik.

When was that?

That was in 1992.

We're still in 1992.

Yes, the end of 1992, when other connections used to break down. Not all, not all, as some Croats stayed there and they were experiencing very difficult and hard times, ugly times. A very renowned surgeon that works today, back then used to work as a garbage man in Travnik, he was cleaning the roads in Travnik. Hmm... But there were some that stayed. On the other hand, the international community showed an inability of

performing – a clear example is the time when typhus appeared, there was an epidemics of typhus in 1994. When the international troops were deep inside, they weren't ready to go, (*stutters*), and up stream there is Travnik from Nova Bila and you need to go to Travnik in order to stop the epidemics, but they weren't capable of doing so, even if they were international forces. That's when I, I went to Travnik, not knowing what was to happen, but the epidemics needed to be stopped. Although they had quite a few units back there, they weren't able to work at that level. So, for example, as they transported children to Great Britain from Sarajevo with airplanes, but there were also other children in the same position, and they didn't organize a second trip. They would give it a theatrical note, but they didn't go systematically, in order to see how they could help. So they would recognize all sorts of obsolescence of humanitarian work and it was as if though these rules that existed for the whole time, Red Cross and humanitarian work rules, as if though they were obsolete. That was very evident in Bosnia, although they started doing that even before, in Croatia. The difference was that they even more, much more than us used these events, and keep using them today, up to high academic levels, they're writing books and call upon knowledge that came from that, while it wasn't the case here, except for me and I don't know perhaps some other people who were prepared and able. So, experts arose from the international community out of the experience of the suffering of these people. That didn't happen in our circles. Very renowned American professors today, and they were never here, they are making research studies about this war, and up to now our historians didn't really show the interest in exploring what happened here, right?

So, we have Nova Bila?

Then later you have what you wrote in that report.

Yes, we have Nova Bila, shall we discuss Nova Bila further? So, you were extremely active, I can recall from the media in that time...

Nova Bila was based on the idea of Petrova gora. During World War II, on Petrova gora, in the area where Serbian population lived, the communist party organized a hospital. Many of the Jewish doctors were accepted in this hospital, and they worked there – one of them was the legendary doctor Marija Šlezinger. I studied that before the war. I learned that lesson previously. I applied that in Nova Bila, as I had the experience of organizing a hospital in the times of trouble. I recognized Franciscans as a sort of party. What characterized Petrova gora was that the Red Cross and the so-called international organizations were like Pontius Pilate, they were incapable for identification on the level of efficacy. When they wanted to do it, that was fine, but if that didn't work, (*another person interrupted the conversation*) I recognized that you can't rely only on the abstract strength while performing humanitarian work; in that case you don't have real power. That's what I noticed here, I knew that if I lean on the expectation that the Red Cross and the international help should come, that won't be enough. So, now I recognized that what used to be the communist party and the partisans, those were Franciscans to me.

Have you told them that?

Yes, I told them – you are my communists. Because, you know, that was a real strength, they had to be there and that was the strength that we could lean on. They were there, that was an authentic strength. On the other hand, there was the feeling of nationality, which was also strength. I imitated Petrova gora, with one difference – unlike Petrova gora, I came to the conclusion that Nova Bila, will, other the survival in time of trouble, have the effect of giving an impulse and a meaning of life to the people after the war. It meant that you stood behind them and that you're building something for life, that you believe that people will live there and that's why it's important to build a hospital. That was to encourage them to stay in their houses, to look after schooling, to look after their jobs, to take care of other things. So, that was supposed to be the nucleus of the thesis "There will be life". You understand? So, it wasn't

just, I couldn't just stay on the idea of Petrova gora as they could've had Karlovac on Petrova gora after the war, and these couldn't. Because there were, the separations that stayed up until today, and finally Dayton made its own hypothesis pod; for example, Dayton didn't even try to achieve a holistic communication between the hospitals up until today. Their high representatives failed to submit a complete report on the work of a healthcare system and hospitals and conclude that everything was open to everybody. Even up today, nobody held a joint meeting with the doctors in order to put them at public disposal. Nobody did that. So they never, they never talked seriously about their jobs. If I held a position of United Nations commissioner for Bosnia, I would've taken care of that a long time ago. But they never approached their job seriously, but they had... the rebels don't even know. The best one was Klein, but he didn't hold that position. But, I mean...

What period was the hardest for the hospital in Nova Bila?

The hardest?

When was pressure the strongest?

I... no, no... the hospital in 1993 became a symbol of the survival of the whole nation. So, it was at the peak of its importance back then, and in the same time in the hardest position. How could I tell you that? It was a lighthouse of Croatian national being, everything was concentrated there, because if the hospital survives, so will we; if not, we won't either. It never before or later had this role. So there came to be a white road as...

What is a white road?

The white road was about when we tried to achieve the idea of peace hospitals je u tom, in Mostar. It was the idea of having to modernize war approach to hospitals, that it's obsolete since it hasn't been modernized since 1945, 1948. You know what? You need to know another thing. The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the war in Croatia, in these areas, this was the first war in

Europe after the Red Cross convention about civilian protection in war was brought, after the Declaration of Human Rights, after the existence of United Nations. So, this was the first war after the realization that civilian suffering is to be handled under human rights; that wasn't the case before. All this was taking place, it all started happening. The same was with the functioning of the hospitals. That's when we came to the idea of the White road, based on the notion of organizing peace hospital in Mostar. Ninety people contacted us from the hospital in Nova Bila by the end of 1993, saying it won't survive. Communication lines were disabled, it couldn't be approached, and they were unable to, the army was unable to go, they tried something with helicopters. And that's when the three of us: Ante Damjanović, Ivan Bagarić, put there by the mayor, and myself, we said that we need the White road; the expression white road comes from the term White squad – it was referring to the group of us doctors when we left for Kosovo in 1989 when there were miners, and we were the white squad. Now we said we needed the white road, we needed something clean. We didn't need the bloody road, the army road, or the victory road; we needed the White road. We said we need to open a white road for the transportation and we said that on TV – we showed what it should be like, and that caused an explosion in Croatia. In order to understand it better – if it's to be international, then it's like Libertas convoy, and we had the experience with the Libertus convoy. It was a civilian sea passage toward Dubrovnik, based on the ideas of Gandhi of Salt March and Martin Luther King's March on Washington. So we started here, and people started applying massively. There was an explosion of applications. We took about a hundred trucks and went for middle Bosnia.

When was that? Approximately.

We started with it on 10th December 1993, and we talked about it in October, I'm not sure what TV show it was. That's when we said it. And... we went there with these trucks and managed to break through. However, there was a problem of going back, as they informed us that we will be attacked and

that's when I took the risk. I said we will go back no matter what happened. They attacked us. One of the drivers got killed. It was Ante Blajić, and that was crucial.

Who attacked you?

The Muslims did.

Where was the attack?

They attacked us by Gornji Vakuf. It was a heavy attack.

They were informed that you were to pass there?

Everything, they were throwing everything at us as we were approaching, stones and everything. And now we were there. But we need to have in mind that one of their convoys going for Tuzla in June was attacked in the Croatian territory, so there were some sediments there... As I said, we couldn't say that they started the violence on the white road, that this was the first occurrence of violence, but it is our attempt to put an end to it, to stop it. To...

Do you have armed backup?

No, no. Nothing.

So, you had no ammunition at your hands?

No ammunition, but we have the United Nations with us. We met with them two, three days before that. Before that there was already a convoy, waiting in Rama, and we went to meet United Nations commander in order to sign the truce. And so we got the permit; their commander, along with Croatian commander obliged to keep it peaceful during Christmas and Christmas Eve. That had to be done; otherwise there would've been attacks, as a massive crime was being conducted there. There was an attack in a Croat village, at the precise time for which the truce was signed. Hmm. International representatives stepped back when this killing took place and they wanted to go further... We offered to the international representatives to take us out, because of the attack, but they wouldn't take another road. They wanted to take this direction, even after a man

was killed. They still wanted to expose the trucks. That's when I stopped those from the British camp from going any further. And so... the protection was successful. But, a man was killed, and that was very important. There was a conflict and then there was an offer, a possibility connected with the killing of this man, Mr. Blajića. This man was retired two days before we took the trip. Hmm, hmm... This was to become a proof of the absolute, impossibility of cooperation. However, right away we met with the Muslims in Zagreb, with their leaders, and we founded Convoy of Peace and Love. And together with leading the White road, I was also leading a Muslim convoy going through Croat parts.

So, we're in the beginning of 1994?

No, no, simultaneously with the White road I...

Simultaneously?

Simultaneously...

Simultaneously? December 1993?

I took them in the white road so that Muslim convoy, being led by their embassy, would remain intact. They were going through Croat areas.

Could you say that you had somebody in Zagreb who you could lean on?

I had my group here, a group we formed using Dubrovnik experience. We had a group White road, we had a humanitarian organization, we worked, we cooperated with the organizations... there were renowned doctors and professors there: Vlado Čulo, Matko Marušić, a great deal of renowned people were engaged here.

I need to ask you a practical question here. It's the end of 1993. The conflicts are ongoing, the White road, the convoy was going there, they shot at it, a man was killed, so there is an ongoing war between Muslims and Croats...

Yes.

And you're in the middle of Croatia, in Zagreb, you are organizing a convoy and to help the Muslims...

Yes.

Is that right?

Yes.

Convoy of Peace and Love?

That was later, that was later, with Šefko Omerbašić...

I'm interested in the following. In that moment, were there problems in Zagreb about your idea and its realization...

No.

...of helping the Muslims?

No, no.

How is that possible?

No, I tell you, this never stopped in Zagreb.

So, no matter the ongoing conflict, dead people, literally dead people...

Literally, no, no.

And help was supplied?

No, we were able to do that without... we were not trying to spread hatred.

That's right.

But we had no problems because we tried to organize cooperation.

So, there was no...

Nothing, no risk from me working with the Muslims. So, I, we could've started encouraging the conflicts, we could've done that easily, if I wanted to supply statements filled with hatred for the Muslims, they would be published, and I would be applauded.

But if...

But if I didn't feel like it, if I wanted to cooperate with them, nobody would touch me and nobody would hold it against me.

OK, that's an important piece of information.

No, no, no courage was needed to advocate cooperation in Zagreb. No courage at all. That's when Šefko Omerbašić and Franciscan leaders went and worked with the Peace and Love convoy – that was the most encompassing cooperation of Christians and Muslims in the time of war that was ever recorded, anywhere in the world. Can you understand that, the most encompassing cooperation, there is no larger cooperation than this one; there is no example for a more encompassing cooperation. And so, they forbade me to go. Šefko won't let me go, because now I became a prominent man, and he was afraid something might happen to me, so Lang wasn't to get hurt. Now Lang had to stay, Lang was a star. I couldn't be there and I was pissed off because of that, but there was nothing I could do about it and then we breached, we breached the whole...

When was that?

1994.

In the beginning, or?

Right away, right away, in January. We kept breaching through. Not that we would come to Nova Bila, but we came to many places.

What was in those, in those boxes?

Food, humanitarian aid, things like that...

Medical supplies...

Once our guys put some bullets inside, and that was disgraceful. I claimed that there were no such things. One of the characteristics of the opposition was that I was attacked back then; you can't organize humanitarian aid and know if something is being inserted or not. This is the problem with the international regulations, because whoever is organizing humanitarian aid should be protected, you can't... you're not a soldier; you can't know

what is there. So, there was this disgraceful insertion. I even said to the Muslims: If you find a bullet inside, you can shoot me. I had no idea that there could be some idiot to insert certain things and fuck around with that. Later there wasn't... that was the basis for the upcoming Washington Treaty. That made possible the Washington Treaty.

So it was the beginning of 1994, the most encompassing cooperation, convoy, the most encompassing cooperation between...

Ever.

Ever. At that point you're already in the position of counselor...

That's when he invited me, Tudman, to be his counselor for the human rights issues. . .

OK, but did he invite you before or after that?

After, after...

So, after that event?

After it, he called me after it and asked me to be his counselor for the human rights issues, which I declined.

Who asked you that?

Tudman.

President Tudman.

And I declined that, I declined that. I didn't want to be a counselor for human rights. You have lawyers which you can have as counselors for human rights. They will tell you what's wrong. I, Lang, have absolutely no interest in that. I am prepared to be your counselor for humanitarian issues. And he asked me what is humanitarian. You understand? But he accepted. I said to the president: get a lawyer to interpret what is wrong. I have no interest in that. And he gave mi this. I. . . he gave me absolute control over that. There is no way that something could be different, he accepted it. We did the thing with the convoys. And we achieved things, Granić went to Washington and Washington Treaty was born. That's how it came to be. While, while it was doable, I tell you, the whole Croatian

village was murdered at Christmas, on the 20th, 22nd December 1991, an entire Croatian village. So mostly, in the midst of this total, definitive conflict, we became a catharsis for the beginning of peace and the notion that we could be able to live next to one another. That was because we didn't say, let's all go to our homes and then everybody will have their peace. And that's when they went to Washington. They made arrangements with one another, modeled after Dayton, and I managed to persuade Tuđman to go to Nova Bila and promise them a hospital. When the president came to Nova Bila, he was a real star, and as he sat in the parish church, he said: "You know what, when all this passes, there is a man we can't forget. And he started talking about a man that who cannot be forgotten, because that wouldn't be OK and... And I started feeling sick because if he speaks my name, I'm finished, I'll lose my authority. You understand? And I started this whole action for them... and he continued: "We mustn't forget Dr Lang." And then the idea of the hospital came, I came to the idea of the hospital based on the conception of Oxford, based on how Oxford, Cambridge and Harvard were formed. Because when the English went, they said they needed a place where they will have the center of their thought, where thinking will take place, like in Harvard. Now that Croats were driven away from the towns, they lost their cultural centre. There is a memory of the grammar school, and I thought to myself, let's start making a campus in which we will build a hospital, then a school, then an information centre, then a library, so we will make a place, modeled after that, so if they could make Cambridge or Oxford on a lawn, so can we. So, that's how I decided for this kind of construction, and after we started with the hospital, nuns came from Spain and built an old people's home. That's when Petrians became a little bit jealous of the Franciscans, so they decided to renew catholic grammar school in Travnik. Franjo Topić came to me and decided to start a business centre in Vitez. So, when people saw, people were sitting there for a week, they

were sitting by the hospital, watching if it was really being built, is it possible that something was happening there. Then they decided to open up businesses. They started inhabiting the houses. So you see, that immediately started happening there, so we managed to beat I won't say genocide, but ethnic cleansing. Because we made it in the critical moment, and then if you offer life, then you get a municipality that is fifth most developed in Bosnia-Herzegovina today; now I'm applying for a scientific project: "Preventing genocide" and this is the example of how to do that. I have more material than we submitted for Dubrovnik, we have it in ten or so places. I'm not an advocate of merely gathering information which describes how something happened, but also how we managed to prevent suffering. There is a preventive, it's an abstract term, it needs to be understood, that means we can't admire antifascism, we need to admire stopping wars and peace, and not seku... these relationships. So, this was the basis for the development of this case and today you naturally have, things were made possible and they were created, even though they said it would be impossible. I was pushing for the Medical College in Mostar. I told the president, that there couldn't be a nation without a medical school. There are no countries without a medical school, so we founded this medical school, and today you have doctors who got their degrees there. We started in the midst of this war where the poor, where Croatia was attacked. We started accepting refugees, over the bridge in Brčko; four hundred doctors went to work in Nova Bila.

Four hundred doctors, where were they from?

From Croatia.

Four hundred Croatian doctors?

Croatian doctors.

Went to work?

There. It was. Hospital was dedicated to the wounded Christ. In 18 square meters since 1992 to 1999 4 000 children were born, and in average women

who gave birth stayed here for three hours, you understand? While I was here, double the amount of children were born, then there was those killed when Christ was born; our last child was born in our ho... in the hospital in the church on 10th December 1999. In the same day, a first child was born in the newly built Croatian hospital; this Croatian hospital was located in the area called Dubrave and the same day President Tuđman died in the hospital in Dubrava. So there you have... you understand, that was the creation... It was developed, so within ten years we started from departures, and came to finished doctors. This happened since we managed to overcome the genocide. That's what happened. One of the Croatian interventions was... it was a direct line of interventions that had a special meaning like it was, like I said it was never broken with the opponents, and it was never broken, but we rather developed the medical union and offered healthcare. On the one hand, we kept reaching out to the Muslims, and in the same time we were concentrating on the hospital in Bila, so I was visiting all Croat and Bosnian hospitals, but the truth is that I wouldn't let the help be distributed at any point. So...

What do you mean by help being distributed?

I wanted to concentrate the energy to put up a hospital in middle Bosnia. To leave it as strength, understand? Not to divide pieces, but to achieve manifestations. Result. Which happened. They then organized ambulances in Bugojnu, the Franciscans organized them, and then they put them up in Banja Luka. They were afraid this might become Catholic Church, the church was afraid. They didn't know that the church possessed 25.000 catholic institutions. They got used to it here. All of them were afraid as to how to do all that in that moment. But you see; that one was never finished. I said that now, it was opened with the education and with the university; it's never less with the schools. Yesterday there was a very good TV piece about Croat schools in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but, for example, Travnik grammar school isn't connected to a single school in

Croatia. Because there is a bunch here... Croatia never managed to realize how to achieve this kind of cooperation, what is a normal cooperation. I don't know, they have a sort of fear. And this was a sort of a base for the Washington Treaty. It was so that this whole energy came out. And on the world level, we kept coming out with suggestions as to how to improve camps, how to improve hospitals, how to stop genocide. We were there absolutely, we kept giving from there.

I suppose that since 1994, when you became President Tuđman's counselor, you became close to him and contacted with him often...

Yes, often.

How did he perceive your attempts, your earlier work, how did he perceive 1994, in which there was a stabilization until the re-establishment...

The president and me, our relationship was entirely, our relationship remained in an entirely written form, except one conversation we had at Brijuni. I contacted with him using logic, like when a primary healthcare doctor goes to a specialist. I wrote him official texts, I have all of them, I will publish them, I don't know how the others did it, but I have all my texts in a written form – description of the state, prognosis of the situation, proposition of therapy. That was my relationship with him, and I have some 170 letters. We used to talk, but I didn't take that seriously, but when he got it from me, there is no other way but in a written form, so that everybody can take a look at it. Tuđman once stopped me when I wanted to go to Banja Luka in the beginning, in 1995, he told me I shouldn't and hmm and then a month later he told me I could. So that was... I don't know... Things being said about Tuđman concerning these things are entirely false. About his wife, there were some quotations, some false quotations... And, on the other hand, I'm surprised at some people. I never heard him say anything negative about another nation, and if he would do that, I wouldn't stay with him anymore.

And some people asked if he gave me orders – nobody in this world can tell me to do something that's wrong. And Tuđman could've given me orders, within the borders of human rights and professionalism. Orders can be given out within these borders. You can't give out orders that violate human rights and the knowledge.

OK, but this is important, if I understood you correctly. From what you said, it seems that Tuđman never gave you any...

Nobody.

...personally or through somebody...

No way.

...in the sense of disabling, in the sense of delaying...

Nothing.

...the help that was intended for...

Nothing, nothing.

...the Muslims. So you had...

That wasn't the case with him.

... no problems with that. Tell me about your meetings with, general Praljak?

With general Praljak...

During the course of the war.

Yes.

I know you knew him before the war, but what was it like during the war?

I met with general Praljak two times. Once we met in the area of Herzegovina.

When was that?

In 1992, by the end of 1992. By that time, let's say that I hmm... I have no status, I didn't hold any particular position, and he was the commander. So I relatively marginally contacted him, more because we knew each other from before. I had no idea I was going to play a role of any kind,

and he was so busy that it was relatively irrelevant. Another meeting took place in Bugojno, in middle Bosnia, and I would say that we were both in the world of uncertainty then.

That was by the end of 1992.

Yes. We were in that world. This, this in Bugojno took place in 1993.

1993.

Yes. It was during 1993, I think it was somewhere in the autumn of 1993. We didn't know what was to happen, what will happen to this people. So we spent the night there. He was acting less as a commander; it was more about the dilemma what was to happen with the people. There was a worry what was to happen later, and naturally, I met him in the office of the president. However, when we met in the office of the president, I got the feeling he thought he was unimportant. There was a moment when he was in the military, I came to his office, and I got the feeling he was a little jealous of me. I was on the field, I was active, and he ended up in the office. I think this made him a bit jealous. He used to tell me, in his own style: "What are you doing, are you crazy?» I think he was jealous. That he was already tied. He couldn't be in action anymore, he needed to become important.

When you say Bugojno, and as you watched Praljak you said you were worried, especially since you knew him from before.

Yes.

In what way was he worried?

He saw that these people can't defend themselves, and that according to all analysis of the strengths comparisons, we won't be able to make it. And I say that, this was the end of 1992, when he asked me for a statement. That they will stay together. He wanted that...

Now you lost me. So, you had two encounters in Bugojno...?

Two encounters, two.

The first one was in 1992, in the end of 1992, when

The end of 1992, the end.

When the statement was

In progress.

And the second one was in 1993.

When he sees these, yes. And he sees that Croatia lacks strength and he was there... you couldn't expect great constructions such as this White road. You can't expect him to come up with a White road of his own. That he will go and make a sort of an alliance, in the moment when all their connections are breaking, that we will manage to form a coalition, a Christian-Muslim alliance. And I tell them that my father is of Jewish origin and that I report to them as a third line they can use... and that I was never in HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union), I came as a third line, which in a way enabled them... probably I played a role in communication. No?

Mr. Lang, I took a lot of your time today...

OK.

But I think we came to the end of the conversation, of this part of the conversation