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## A FAILED ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON THE DEŽELIĆ FAMILY IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY IN 1965 BY THE YUGOSLAV SECURITY SERVICE

**Abstract:** The article analyzes the failed assassination attempt by the Yugoslav communist security service on Croatian émigré Berislav Đuro Deželić and his family in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1965. The unofficial position of the Yugoslav communist regime was that only those political opponents who engaged in violent anti-Yugoslav actions were killed abroad. Based on the documents of the Yugoslav Security Service, it is proven that Deželić was not involved in such activities, but that the Yugoslav regime tried to kill him for exclusively non-violent political work.

**Key words:** Croatian émigrés, Berislav Đuro Deželić, communist Yugoslavia, political assassination, Federal Republic of Germany

### Introduction

One of the indicators that a part of the Croatian people rejected communist Yugoslavia (1945-1991) as their state and desired the creation of an independent and democratic Croatian state was the existence of a numerous political emigration of Croats in the West.<sup>678</sup> Although the Croatian émigrés could not seriously threaten the Yugoslav communist regime, they nev-

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<sup>678</sup> Čizmić, Sopta, Šakić, *Iseljena Hrvatska [Emigrated Croatia]*, 311–343.

ertheless represented an adversary that could not be ignored.<sup>679</sup> Therefore, Belgrade made constant attempts to discredit them as fascists and extremists, and over a hundred Croats were killed, wounded or kidnapped by the Yugoslav security service from 1946 to 1989.<sup>680</sup> The official explanation of the Yugoslav regime was that these killings were mutual confrontations in the “criminal émigré underworld”, while the unofficial version was, and still prevails in a part of Croatian society and even among political elites, that only those who planned and carried out armed actions against Yugoslavia and its diplomatic missions and personnel around the world were killed. In short, the message was that the murders committed were justified.<sup>681</sup>

<sup>679</sup> This is supported by the extensive activities of the Yugoslav security and diplomatic services against Croatian political emigration, as well as the media. For example, the basic division of the security services’ „areas of work” looked like this: „Internal enemy”, „Enemy emigration”, „Foreign security services”. See more about this in: Krašić, „Služba državne sigurnosti Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske potkraj 1970-ih i početkom 1980-ih” [“The State Security Service of the Socialist Republic of Croatia at the end of the 1970 s and early 1980 s”], 355–387.

<sup>680</sup> Vukušić, *Tajni rat Udbe protiv hrvatskoga iseljništva* [Udba’s secret war against Croatian emigrants].

<sup>681</sup> The explanation that the killings were mutual settlements between émigrés was used even in official discussions in the highest state institutions. Thus, at the meeting of the Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order of Socialist Republic Croatia on 15 September 1981, it was stated that the Croatian political emigrant Stanko Nižić was probably killed in Zurich by “rivals” from the “terrorist underground”. Hrvatski državni arhiv (HDA) [Croatian State Archives], fond [Record Group] 1561, Sjednice SZUP-a 1975-1989 [CPSO’s Sessions 1975-1989], 69-3, 461. The procedure for making decisions about murder or kidnapping abroad was unofficial but sophisticated. Although lower levels of the government and security services participated in the process, for example by proposing or giving approval for such action against a particular émigré, federal institutions in Belgrade played a decisive role in the decision. Also, as long as the Yugoslav leader Tito was alive, no such action was carried out without his consent. Vukušić, *Tajni rat Udbe protiv hrvatskoga iseljništva* [Udba’s secret war against Croatian emigrants], 204–206.

Apart from newspapers and journals, one could read such allegations in public in the novels of the journalist Đorđe Ličina, such as *Dvadeseti čovjek* (*Twentieth Man*), *Tragom plave lisice* (*In the Footsteps of Blue Fox*), *Roverova braća* (*Rover’s Brothers*), in which Croatian émigrés are portrayed as fascists, terrorists and criminals. When writing his novels and newspaper articles, Ličina used documents provided by the Yugoslav Security Service.

The leader of the Croatian Peasants’ Party and Croatian MP Krešo Beljak commented on his Twitter profile in early 2020 on the report of the American of Croatian origin Katie Pavlich about more than 100 killed Croatian political emigrants with the words: “Obviously not enough”. „Beljak na Twitteru o udbaških ubojstvima emigranata: ‘Više od 100? Očito nedovoljno!’” [“Beljak on Twitter about Udba murders of emigrants: ‘More than 100? Obviously not enough!’”].

It should be added that two girls, as collateral damage, were also killed in the Yugoslav Security Service assassinations. They were three-year-old Dinka Domančinović, who was killed in a bomb explosion at the Croatian Home in Buenos Aires in 1960, and nine-year-old Rosemarie Ševo, who was executed by a Yugoslav assassin in Italy in 1972, together with her mother Tatjana and stepfather Stjepan Ševo, a Croatian political emigrant. Vukušić, *Tajni rat Udbe protiv hrvatskoga iseljništva* [Udba’s secret war against Croatian emigrants], 232, 292–298.

However, the Yugoslav Security Service also killed or attempted to kill Croat émigrés who did not advocate or use violence in their anti-Yugoslav actions.

One of them was Berislav Đuro Deželić, an émigré in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), who, together with his wife and pregnant daughter, survived the 1965 assassination attempt despite being seriously wounded.<sup>682</sup> The paper posits that Deželić was targeted by Belgrade not because of his involvement in planning and carrying out violent actions against Yugoslavia, but because he functioned as an unifying factor of the divided Croatian political emigration. More specifically, he was head of a committee that collected aid for Croatian émigrés, who found themselves before a German court for the 1962 attack on the Yugoslav trade office in Mehlem. Indeed, one of the main aims of the Yugoslav Security Service in its crackdown on Croatian political emigration was to provoke the deepest possible divisions and tensions. The trial in Bonn was used as a stage by the Croatian émigrés to present the motives for the attack in Mehlem. The immediate cause was numerous crimes and acts of violence committed by the Yugoslav communists against a part of the Croatian people. But at the root of their protest was the desire for the creation of an independent and democratic Croatian state. Such appearance irritated the Yugoslav communist regime. Belgrade also wanted to send a message that anyone who physically endangered Yugoslav interests would be severely punished. Since the attackers from Mehlem were convicted and ended up in prison, Deželić was chosen as a suitable target to send such a message, even though he was in no way connected to the aforementioned attack.

The paper is based on the documents of the Yugoslav Security Service and articles from newspapers and magazines of the Croatian political emigration. The activities of the Yugoslav Security Service have been the focus of a part of the Croatian public since the collapse of the Yugoslav communist system, and this largely unexplored topic causes a lot of controversy in Croatian society. It is used and even abused especially in political life. The situation has changed significantly in recent years, when a large number of documents of the Yugoslav Security Service, kept in the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb, were made available to the public. However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of important documents were destroyed and stolen in an attempt by those involved in the repression to destroy evidence of their activities, as many of them participated in political, economic and intellectual life in the democratic Republic of Croatia after the fall of communism. This kind of situation leaves room for various speculations. But, more and more historians and other researchers are paying attention to this topic, which significantly contributes to eradicating numerous myths, half-truths and untruths

<sup>682</sup> Vukušić, *Tajni rat Udbe protiv hrvatskoga iseljništva* [*Udba's secret war against Croatian emigrants*], 233–234.

that exist about it among the Croatian public, and the topic is of interest to foreign researchers as well.<sup>683</sup>

## Croatian political emigration after the World War II

One of the consequences of the establishment of communist regimes in Central, South-east and Eastern Europe after World War II was the flight of numerous political opponents of communism to the West.<sup>684</sup> While the waves of refugees were most massive immediately after the end of the war, persecuted and marginalized people from the communist countries of Europe continued to arrive in the West in small groups or individually until the collapse of communism in the late 1980 s and early 1990 s. When it comes to multinational Yugoslavia, the Croatian people are far ahead of other nations in terms of the number of political emigrants.<sup>685</sup> After the Serbs, the Croats were the most numerous people in Yugoslavia, with an unbroken tradition of statehood since the early Middle Ages and a rich culture. A part of the Croatian political elites and people therefore believed that the Croats should have their own state, especially after the experience of the marginalization of Croatian territories in the first Yugoslav state (1918-1941), the imposed attempt to create the “Yugoslav nation” and the widespread repression against Croat dissidents carried out by the Belgrade authorities, which included assassinations.<sup>686</sup>

During the World War II, under the auspices of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, the Independent State of Croatia (ISC) emerged, ruled by the Ustasha movement. The latter arose as an expression of the aspirations of Croats for an independent state in the early 1930 s, immediately caused by the instalation of the dictatorship of King Aleksandar I of the Serbian Karađorđević

<sup>683</sup> Of the scientific monographs recently published in Croatia dealing with this subject, see: Radelić, *Obavještajni centri, Ozna i Udba u Hrvatskoj* [Intelligence centers, Ozn and Udba in Croatia] i Jurčević, *Komunistički teror i mučeništvo Crkve* [Communist terror and martyrdom of the Church]. Of the books of foreign authors, see the following: Nielsen, *Yugoslavia and Political Assassination*.

<sup>684</sup> Some of these émigrés joined multinational associations under the auspices of the West, especially the United States of America (USA), and thus the World Anti-Communist League and the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations were formed. See, for example: Stetsko, *The West's Strongest Allies*. On the International Peasants' Union to which the Croatian Peasants' Party (CPP) belonged, see: Tepeš, „Političko djelovanje Hrvatske seljačke stranke u emigraciji” [“Political activities of the Croatian Peasant Party in exile”], 157–169.

<sup>685</sup> Krašić, *Hrvatsko proljeće i hrvatska politička emigracija* [Croatian Spring and Croatian Political Emigration], 26–29.

<sup>686</sup> Banac, *The national question in Yugoslavia*. Perić, *Hrvatska u monarhističkoj Jugoslaviji* [Croatia in Monarchist Yugoslavia]. Čapo, *Kraljevina čuvara* [Kingdom of the Guardians]. Janjatović, *Politički teror u Hrvatskoj: 1918. – 1935.* [Political terror in Croatia: 1918 – 1935].

dynasty. Initially, it was a nationalist movement, while under the influence of Italy, where its leadership was located, it took on more and more fascist features, so that the ISC was modeled after its patrons. The Ustasha movement had little support among the Croatian population, mainly because of its policy of persecution of national minorities and political opponents, which the ISC pursued, and because of the generally totalitarian nature of the Ustasha regime. However, a considerable number of Croats welcomed the foundation of the ISC as, in their opinion, a realization of the desire for an independent state and supported its existence, as well as the struggle against the People's Liberation Movement (PLM), led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY).<sup>687</sup> The latter military-political factor, with the support of the Western Allies and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), gained complete control over the territory of the failed Kingdom of Yugoslavia by the end of the war. Taking advantage of its monopoly over the PLM, the CPY established a one-party dictatorship that carried out mass murders, repression and discrimination against all real and potential opponents.<sup>688</sup>

Numerous Croats who supported the ISC regime and others left communist Yugoslavia in the face of death threats and long stays in labor camps and prisons. However, life in exile was also chosen by a number of members of the Croatian Peasant Party (CPP), which had by far the largest support among the Croatian population in the interwar period. The party leadership advocated the reorganization of the Yugoslav state along confederal principles, while among many members and sympathizers of the party there was a growing belief that decentralization was only the first step on the road to the creation of an independent Croatian state. Because of the radical transformation of social relations carried out by the Yugoslav communists, people who were not involved in political life and the events of the war but who, as so-called class enemies, found themselves exposed to the regime's repressions also fled. That is, they owned certain property that the communists wanted to nationalize or had a certain social influence that the CPY did not want to tolerate in order to achieve a complete monopoly in the control of society.<sup>689</sup> It should be noted that many Croatian political refugees found not only the Yugoslav state intolerable, but also the communist system. One of the reasons for this is that for a large part of the Croatian people Catholicism was an integral part of their national identity.<sup>690</sup>

<sup>687</sup> Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret [Ustasha-Domobran Movement]*. Matković, *Povijest Nezavisne Države Hrvatske [History of the Independent State of Croatia]*.

<sup>688</sup> Horvat, *Represija i zločini komunističkog režima u Hrvatskoj [Repression and crimes of the communist regime in Croatia]*.

<sup>689</sup> Krašić, *Hrvatsko proljeće i hrvatska politička emigracija [Croatian Spring and Croatian Political Emigration]*, 15.

<sup>690</sup> On the relationship between the Catholic Church in Croatia and the Yugoslav communist regime, see, e.g.: Akmadža, *Katolička crkva u Hrvatskoj i komunistički režim 1945. – 1966. [The Catholic Church in Croatia and the Communist Regime 1945 – 1966]*. A number of Croatian Catholic priests

Although there is no accurate research on the number of Croatian political emigrants, at least tens of thousands of Croats left Yugoslavia after the end of the World War II. From the late 1940 s to the early 1960 s, illegal flight continued, mostly by Croatian young men who had experienced various forms of regime repression or did not want to serve in the Yugoslav army.<sup>691</sup> During the above period, on average, several thousand people from Croatia attempted to leave Yugoslavia illegally each year; many succeeded, some were arrested by the Italian and Austrian police and returned to Yugoslavia.<sup>692</sup> To this must be added the hitherto unknown number of Croats who fled Bosnia and Herzegovina and who were particularly exposed to the regime's repression until the mid-1960 s (especially from western Herzegovina).<sup>693</sup> Since the beginning of the 1960 s, Yugoslavia, under the pressure of the economic crisis and high unemployment, in order to avoid greater social unrest, has allowed part of its citizens to seek work in Western European countries. In this population group, whose members were colloquially called *gastarbajteri* (from the German word *gastarbeiter* – guest worker), Croats again strongly dominated in the context of nations in Yugoslavia, as well as in political emigration. But even among the guest workers there were many who left Yugoslavia for mainly political reasons or a combination of political and economic reasons, but in a legal way, with a Yugoslav passport. Some of them joined political emigrants and openly expressed their anti-Yugoslav stance. There were many more who were hidden enemies of the Belgrade regime, but they did not openly express this feeling because they did not want to come under the regime's repression either abroad or during their stay in the country, mostly during holidays.<sup>694</sup>

The Croatian émigrés in the West who left Yugoslavia after 1945 were thus a distinctly heterogeneous category, with different life paths, emigration motives, ideological attitudes, and political orientations. What united them was the desire to create an independent Croatian state. On the other hand, the Yugoslav communist regime labeled all Croatian émigrés, whom it considered enemies, as Ustasha, fascists, mass murderers and terrorists. In this sense, it conducted an extensive media and diplomatic campaign against them, but also various forms of repression, the most radical of which were murders and kidnappings.<sup>695</sup>

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took part in the activities of the Croatian political emigration. The best known were Fr. Dominik Mandić and Krunoslav Draganović. About them see: Ivurek, *Život i djelo Krunoslava Draganovića* [*The life and work of Krunoslav Draganović*] i *Dr. fra Dominik Mandić* [*Dr. Fr. Dominik Mandić*].

<sup>691</sup> See note 8.

<sup>692</sup> „Udba je u svojoj kartoteci emigracije imala oko 150 tisuća dosjea” [“Udba had about 150 000 personal files in its emigration file”].

<sup>693</sup> Lučić, „Komunistička represija nad Hrvatima u Hercegovini od 1945. do 1966.” [“Communist Repression on Croats in Herzegovina from 1945 to 1966.”].

<sup>694</sup> Čizmić, Sopta, Šakić, *Iseljena Hrvatska* [*Emigrated Croatia*], 231–233, 240.

<sup>695</sup> While the demonization of the entire Croatian political emigration one can best be acquainted by reading the Yugoslav press. For example, members of the Society of Friends of Matica Hrvatska



## Unsuccessful assassination attempt on the Deželić family

Berislav Đuro Deželić was a member of the famous Zagreb Deželić family, whose grandfather Đuro Stjepan (1838-1910) and father Velimir (1864-1941) distinguished themselves in the political, intellectual, social and cultural life of the Croatian capital.<sup>696</sup> Berislav was born in 1896, graduated in law and worked in banking. During the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, he served as an emigrant envoy to Germany. He was a supporter of the CPP. According to documents of the Yugoslav repressive authorities, he was not associated with the ISC regime during the World War II, although there was speculation that he had various connections (acquaintances, friendships) with certain German officers in Zagreb. After the war he was arrested by the new communist authorities for alleged smuggling, therefore spent some time in prison, and all his property was confiscated.<sup>697</sup> According to the testimony of his daughter Marijana, a far more severe fate befell him, for she claims that he was sentenced to four years in prison. She also described that her father was a diplomat in South America and Germany during the existence of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, but was dismissed because he was a Croat. According to Marijana, the Yugoslav communist regime's repression of her family continued even after her father served his prison sentence – the police often broke into their small room where they lived and strip-searched them, and her father could not find work because of political ineligibility. Therefore, the whole family emigrated to Germany in 1954, because Deželić's wife was a German from Duesseldorf.<sup>698</sup> Very soon after his relocation, Deželić became involved in the activities of the Croatian political emigration, which will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

The assassination attempt on the Deželić family – Berislav, his wife Marija and pregnant daughter Marijana was carried out by four assassins on 30 June 1965 in Duesseldorf. All three family members were hit by multiple bullets, as well as all three were shot in the head. Marijana was also wounded in the hand she was holding on her stomach to protect her unborn child. All the members of the Deželić family managed to survive despite the most serious injuries, but only after a long recovery. West German police identified four assassins who fled to France after the crime and then to Yugoslavia via Italy. One of them, Ratimir Stanišić, was arrested

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„Matija Gubec” from Sweden were called Ustashes and terrorists, although its members were not associated with the ISC regime, did not celebrate its founding day (April 10) like most other Croatian émigré organizations and resolutely rejected the use of violence in anti-Yugoslav activities. *Poruka slobodne Hrvatske*, no. 4, 1983, 28–29. *Duga*, June 30, 1984, 28–30.

<sup>696</sup> „HR-DAZG-823 Obitelj Deželić.” [”HR-DAZG-823 Family Deželić.”].

<sup>697</sup> HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 300757 Deželić Berislav, 1, 4, 7, 9–11, 14–16.

<sup>698</sup> Vukušić, *Tajni rat Udbe protiv hrvatskoga iseljništva* [Udba's secret war against Croatian emigrants], 263–264.



in Trieste in 1980 and extradited to FRG, where he was sentenced to fourteen years in prison in 1982.<sup>699</sup>

### **Deželić was not involved in the planning and execution of violent anti-Yugoslav actions**

Given the Yugoslav communist regime's unofficially proclaimed position that it would kill abroad only those political opponents who advocated or used violence in their anti-Yugoslav activities, it can be assumed that this characteristic also marked Deželić's work. Deželić was not a member of any émigré organization with a prominent political flavor. In the late 1950s, the Croatian Social Service (CSS) was founded in the FRG to help Croatian emigrants, and among the organization's goals was the preservation of Croatian culture, language, and Catholic religion. Of course, the organization also acted in a political sense and, very important for its activity, was registered with the German authorities as a humanitarian organization. Deželić was at the head of the CSS and enjoyed increasing popularity among emigrants. Deželić became far better known as the head of the Joint Committee for the Defense of Imprisoned Croats in Germany (hereafter: the Committee). It was an organization that collected aid and led the legal defense of Croatian émigrés who found themselves on trial for the 1962 attack on the Yugoslav trade office in the town of Mehlem, which was demolished and set on fire, and in the armed confrontation that followed, a Yugoslav official Momčilo Popović was killed.<sup>700</sup>

Deželić's personal file, which consists of documents from the Yugoslav Security Service, contains no specific information that he was involved in planning or carrying out violent actions against Yugoslav diplomatic missions around the world, or against diplomatic personnel or in Yugoslavia. Deželić's activities remained in the area of cultural and humanitarian work with Croatian political refugees, intellectual work (writing articles for émigré magazines and newspapers), anti-Yugoslav propaganda speeches (e.g. in the German media), and lobbying and organizing legal and financial aid for the Mehlem attackers. However, Deželić maintained contact with a large number of Croatian émigrés because he was collecting aid for the Mehlem attackers, and did not belong to any of the predominantly political émigré organizations, most of which were in conflict among themselves. Some of these émigrés in the first half of the 1960s advocated the need for a revolution of the Croatian people against the Yugoslav communist regime at an opportune moment (such as in the case of a new world war, this time of the capitalist West and the communist East, or a serious crisis in Yugoslavia) or sabotage actions that

<sup>699</sup> Ibid, 233–234, 264–265.

<sup>700</sup> HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 300757 Deželić Berislav, 18, 20. Krašić, *Hrvatsko proljeće i hrvatska politička emigracija* [Croatian Spring and Croatian Political Emigration], 23.

would weaken the regime and encourage the Croatian people to revolt. One of them was an émigré in Spain, Vjekoslav Luburić, alias Maks, who was responsible for running the concentration camp system of the ISC, so he became one of the personifications of the implementation of the policy of terror. In the 1960 s (he was assassinated by the Yugoslav Security Service in 1969), as the leader of Croatian People's Resistance (CPR), he advocated the preparation and education of young people for the Croatian revolution, but also the policy of reconciliation of former supporters of the ISC and at least Croats who were members of the PLM, but especially their descendants who did not participate in the Croatian fratricidal conflict during the World War II.<sup>701</sup>

In September 1964, Deželić reportedly visited Luburić in Spain. The two concluded that the émigrés' previous efforts against Yugoslavia were not sufficiently effective and needed to be improved. They also assessed that the focus of the actions had to be in the FRG because the authorities and other influential political and social circles were supposedly "tolerant" of Croatian émigrés, then because of the proximity to Yugoslavia and the possibility of raising more money among the numerous Croatian émigrés. Of particular importance to this issue is that both believed that only "political and propaganda activities" could be considered in the current phase of the struggle against Yugoslavia. A later intelligence report on Deželić from the same year states that he said at a public appearance that communism would be defeated by morality, Christian ethics and democracy.<sup>702</sup>

The other Croatian émigré organization of the aforementioned character with which Deželić was in contact was the Croatian Democratic Committee (CDC). It emerged as a result of a split in the Croatian National Committee (CNC), which was probably the most influential Croatian émigré organization in Western Europe in the 1950 s.<sup>703</sup> Among a number of elements, the activity of the Yugoslav Security Service informant Miroslav Varoš, who managed

<sup>701</sup> About CPR see: Boban, *Pisma Vjekoslava Maksa Luburića [Vjekoslav Maks Luburić's Letters]*. Krašić, *Hrvatsko proljeće i hrvatska politička emigracija [Croatian Spring and Croatian Political Emigration]*, 33–66.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid, 19–20 c.

In this context, it should be noted that although Luburić strongly advocated preparations for an uprising in Croatia, the Yugoslav security service did not receive any information about concrete preparations for such an undertaking (organisation of groups to infiltrate Yugoslavia, military training, procurement of weapons and other necessary equipment for guerrilla warfare), nor did it attribute any of the violent actions of Croatian émigrés against Yugoslavia to the CPR during Luburić's lifetime. HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 4, šifra [Code] 4.1., broj [Number] 281, *Neprijateljska djelatnost Vjekoslava Luburića [Enemy activity of Vjekoslav Luburić]*.

<sup>703</sup> About CNC see: Jareb, *Političke uspomene i rad dra Branimira Jelića [Political memories and work of Dr. Branimir Jelić]*. Krašić, *Hrvatsko proljeće i hrvatska politička emigracija [Croatian Spring and Croatian Political Emigration]*, 139–207.

to infiltrate the leadership of the CNC and then the CDC, contributed significantly to the aforementioned split. In accordance with one of the basic goals of the Yugoslav Security Service to act against Croatian political emigration – to provoke the strongest possible splits and deeper conflicts – Varoš continued his destructive activities in the CDC, which experienced two splits, and by the early 1970 s the organization's activity had almost completely died out.<sup>704</sup>

An informant from Yugoslav Security Service, who reported on contacts between Deželić and the CDC, for example on the CDC's plans to smuggle armed groups of people into Yugoslavia, said that for the most part it was actually propaganda.<sup>705</sup> In documents produced by the Yugoslav Security Service on CDC, a group talks about Deželić, but the documents do not contain any information suggesting that he was in any way connected with plans for any violent action.<sup>706</sup> It should be mentioned that the CDC was banned in the FRG in 1967 because three of its members were sentenced to prison for bringing explosives from Belgium in 1966, allegedly to help them start a revolution in Croatia.<sup>707</sup> Although there is no doubt that the leading people of the CDC believed that violent action against the Yugoslav communist regime was necessary to create a Croatian state, and that they took some steps in this direction (spreading revolutionary sentiment among Croatian émigrés, studying guerrilla warfare, attempts to procure weapons), Varoš also took part in such activities in accordance with the instructions of the Yugoslav Security Service. During the first split of the CDC, one of its more prominent members, the former Croatian communist Ante Ciliga, who lived in Italy, left the organization with a group of CDC supporters because Varoš advocated the formation of combat groups whose task would be to carry out diversions in Yugoslavia.<sup>708</sup> One of the tactics used by the Yugoslav security service to compromise Croatian émigrés was to get them to break the law in the West, for example, by acquiring weapons illegally. Then the police or security service of a particular country in the West would receive an "anonymous report" that a particular Croatian émigré possessed an illegal weapon, which would not only lead to his arrest, but the Yugoslav media and diplomacy would launch a campaign against the Croatian anti-communist communities to portray them as extremists and terrorists.<sup>709</sup> Varoš was able

<sup>704</sup> HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 229557 Orlović Branko, 404–406, 464, 473, 513, 687, 682.

<sup>705</sup> HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 300757 Deželić Berislav, 31 c.

<sup>706</sup> HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 1, broj [Number] 10.9, Hrvatski demokratski odbor [Croatian Democratic Committee].

<sup>707</sup> HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 229557 Orlović Branko, 386–387, 414–420.

<sup>708</sup> Ibid, 405.

<sup>709</sup> The most famous case of this kind was the trial of the so-called „Croatian six in Australia in 1979, when six Croatian émigrés were sentenced to long prison terms on the basis of false testimony by a Yugoslav Security Service informant who had infiltrated their ranks. The „targets” of the „Croat

to act in the manner described because, with the knowledge of the Yugoslav Security Service as an informant, he also cooperated with the West German security service.<sup>710</sup>

The third group that advocated the use of force in anti-Yugoslav activities and with whom Deželić made contact was the United Croats of Germany (UCG) and its secret organization SRUU – Secret Revolutionary Ustasha Units. Namely, besides the former members of the ISC military forces, Mile Rukavina and Dane Šarac, the leader of these organizations was Nahid Kulenović, who married Deželić's daughter Marijana. Nahid was the son of Džafer Kulenović, who was the leader of Yugoslav Muslim Organization, the political party that brought together the largest number of Muslims in the first Yugoslav state. During the existence of the ISC, Džafer Kulenović performed a number of the highest state functions, and he died in political exile in Syria.<sup>711</sup>

Mile Rukavina and Nahid Kulenović founded the SRUU as an expression of the desire to break with the previous policy of the leadership of the Croatian Liberation Movement (CLM), which had been founded in 1956 by the former head of state of the ISC, Ante Pavelić. This organization insisted on a policy of waiting for a new world conflict, radical anticommunism, and attempts to win Western sympathy for the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Some CLM members, especially young men who had fled Yugoslavia in the 1950 s, considered this policy obsolete. After Pavelić died in late 1959, the authority around which much of Croatian political emigration had rallied disappeared, so some émigrés began to come up with other ideas, including Rukavina and Kulenović.<sup>712</sup>

Although the exact course of the dissolution remains to be investigated, a Yugoslav Security Service document states that in early 1961 UCG president Rukavina and board member Kulenović, with the approval of the president of the Central Committee of Croatian Societies in Europe (CCCSE), an organization that was part of the CLM, Dr. Andrija Ilić, founded an “illegal terrorist organization” called Secret Revolutionary Ustasha Units. It should also be said that Kulenović was the vice president of the CCCSE. Then, in 1963, the Supreme Council of the CLM expelled Rukavina, Kulenović and another like-minded émigré, Franjo Vlajačić, from the UCG and the CCCSE because, as the decision stated, they were not working “in the spirit of the CLM principles”. However, in the same year, at the UCG annual meeting, Rukavi-

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terrorists” included the theater and the municipal waterworks in Sydney. McDonald, *Reasonable Doubt*.

<sup>710</sup> HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 2, šifra [Code] 202.2, broj [Number] 37, Informacija o organizaciji, metodama i djelatnostima njemačke obavještajne službe [Information on the organization, methods and activities of the German security service].

<sup>711</sup> Stuparić, *Tko je tko u NDH?* [Who is who in the ISC], 216–217.

<sup>712</sup> Vukušić, *Tajni rat Udbe protiv hrvatskoga iseljništva* [Udba's secret war against Croatian emigrants], 18–21.

na and Kulenović were elected to the leadership. Thus, the CLM leadership expelled Rukavina and Kulenović from the organization, and the members of the UCG, an organization that was part of the CLM, re-elected them to the leadership. Some members of the UCG, who remained loyal to the policy of the CLM leadership, founded a new organization – the Croatian Home Guard (*Hrvatski domobran*).<sup>713</sup>

The goal of the SRUU was to prepare to carry out revolutionary actions in Yugoslavia, which the leadership believed would gradually turn into an uprising of the Croatian people against the Yugoslav communist regime. The Yugoslav Security Service also assessed that it was, according to reports, a sabotage-terrorist organization, which at the time of its formation had about 200 members and was working on training its members to carry out the aforementioned actions and on procuring weapons and explosives. Offshoots were established in the FRG, where there were the most members, followed by Austria, Belgium, France and Sweden.<sup>714</sup> Although many accounts spoke only vaguely of a desire and effort to procure weapons, it appears that certain quantities of explosives and small arms, especially pistols, were eventually obtained.<sup>715</sup> Also, one of the former SRUU members from France testified to the author of this paper that military courses were organized for the members and weapons were procured.<sup>716</sup> However, no Yugoslav Security Service report mentions the use of procured weapons, either in Yugoslavia or abroad. After the formation of the SRUU, the Yugoslav Security Service received information not only about the intention of SRUU members to procure weapons, but also about the desire of certain members to go to Yugoslavia and carry out revolutionary actions there.<sup>717</sup> It seems that the SRUU was not in favor of carrying out attacks on Yugoslav diplomatic missions in Western Europe at that time, as Rukavina said at a meeting that the Mehlem action brought a lot of attention to the Croatian émigrés, but also difficulties in their work because they came under increased control of the FRG security services, which would no longer allow such excesses.<sup>718</sup> Several members of the organization entered

<sup>713</sup> HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 1, šifra [Code] 10.10, broj [Number] 12, Osvrt na nastanak i aktivnost TRUP-a i TUP-a [Review of the origin and activity of SRUU and SUU], 7.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid, 7–9.

<sup>715</sup> HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 312057 Rukavina Mile, 106. HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 1, šifra [Code] 10.10, broj [Number] 8, Ujedinjeni Hrvati – Tajne ustaške revolucionarne postrojbe [United Croats – Secret Revolutionary Ustasha Units], 70, 136–137, 147, 151–155, 163–164, 175, 178, 193–194.

<sup>716</sup> M. B.'s e-mail to the author. January 6, 2020.

<sup>717</sup> HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 312057 Rukavina Mile, 72, 95, 106. HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 1, šifra [Code] 10.10, broj [Number] 8, Ujedinjeni Hrvati – Tajne ustaške revolucionarne postrojbe [United Croats – Secret Revolutionary Ustasha Units], 70–71, 88–89, 140.

<sup>718</sup> HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 312057 Rukavina Mile, 61.

Yugoslavia illegally, but were quickly arrested without taking any action, and their main goal was intelligence work and finding like-minded people.<sup>719</sup> Also, Rukavina and Kulenović had discussions about cooperation and the procurement of weapons and their shipment to Yugoslavia with the student Ante Uroda, who founded the illegal organization Croatian Resistance Movement in Croatia to work on organizing an uprising in Croatia. Although the contact had existed for some time, no cooperation took place and no weapons were sent to Yugoslavia.<sup>720</sup> To sum up, until the assassination attempt on the Deželić family, the SRUU did not succeed in creating realistic conditions for carrying out well-organized violent anti-Yugoslav actions, although some steps were taken in this direction.

What is even more important is the fact that Deželić is not mentioned at all in the extremely numerous Yugoslav Security Service documents on the UCG and the SRUU. Thus, the remark of the Yugoslav security service informant with the pseudonym “Maksimirski” that Nahid Kulenović, as a son-in-law, could use Deželić to materialize his own goals, proved to be unjustified. It is possible, however, that this information and the Deželić-Kulenović connexion in general contributed to the Yugoslav regime’s treatment of Deželić in the most radical manner. The Yugoslav Security Service used the information it received selectively, apparently ignoring the information from the same informant that Deželić was not happy about his daughter marrying a member of the Kulenović family, whose members were high-ranking officials of the Ustasha regime.<sup>721</sup> It is reasonable to assume that there might be a fear that, although there was nothing to suggest that Deželić wanted or intended to participate in any way in violent anti-Yugoslav actions, he might, because of his influence or the money he had at some point, be used by some organization or individual willing to undertake such actions. Apart from the fact that it was only a guess, that there was no information indicating that such a thing was being prepared at any particular time, it must be said again that many émigrés knew, were in contact with, were friends with, and had similar relations with people who advocated violent actions against Yugoslavia, but they did not experience any repressive measures by the Yugoslav communist regime, let alone an assassination.

The personal files of persons under surveillance by the Yugoslav repressive services in Yugoslavia and abroad consist of various types of documents, most often reports written on the basis of information received from informants. However, there were also types of documents found in the personal files of the vast majority of émigrés that contained basic infor-

<sup>719</sup> HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 1, šifra [Code] 10.10, broj [Number] 12, Osvrt na nastanak i aktivnost TRUP-a i TUP-a [Review of the origin and activity of SRUU and SUU], 12, 7–8. HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 312057 Rukavina Mile, 62.

<sup>720</sup> Krašić, *Hrvatski pokret otpora* [Croatian Resistance Movement], 133.

<sup>721</sup> HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 300757 Deželić Berislav, 25 c.

mation about them, their activities and the plans of the Yugoslav repressive services about the measures to be taken against them. One such document is the Questionnaire on Yugoslav Emigrant. It was prepared for Deželić on 28 June 1963. In addition to basic personal details, it contains information that he was “politically active”, that he participated in the work of “enemy emigration”, and one of the classic formulations of the Yugoslav communist regime attributed to many advocates of the creation of an independent Croatian state – that Deželić was a “instigator of national hatred”. But there is no mention of any links to the planning and execution of violent actions.<sup>722</sup>

Another typical document is the Treatment Plan, prepared on March 2, 1965. It mentions Deželić’s role in gathering and organizing help for the Mehlem attackers, and states that he writes “hostile articles,” works on the unification of émigrés and has a number of connections and acquaintances. The Yugoslav Security Service used various methods in dealing with Croatian émigrés – threats (to them, their families or relatives in Yugoslavia), blackmail, spreading slander in immigration countries in the West (e.g. that certain émigrés were fascists and war criminals), spreading misinformation in Croatian communities that certain émigrés were informants of the Yugoslav Security Service and the like. In planning the measures against Deželić, it was concluded that he could not be “demoralized”, i.e. forced to be passive in his anti-Yugoslav actions, with the above measures. It was recommended that he be “intensively monitored”, which could only be done through an informant with the pseudonym “Plavi” (who, to all appearances, was in the FRG). An informant with the pseudonym “Braco” also lived in Yugoslavia and maintained contact with Deželić. The Yugoslav security service was in the process of recruiting another informant who knew Deželić and had the ability to monitor him. They also suggested to the Yugoslav judicial organs that criminal proceedings be instituted against Deželić.<sup>723</sup> This happened very soon after the proposal was made – on the 17 th of March in the same year. However, the contents of Zagreb District Public Prosecutor’s Office’s Investigation Proposal had an important novelty in relation to all previous documents on Deželić. It said that Deželić advocated violent regime change in Yugoslavia. Significantly, the Zagreb District Court opened a preliminary investigation against Deželić on the same day.<sup>724</sup> There is no record of the results of the investigation, a possible indictment, or a verdict in absentia. Since the assassination was carried out three and a half months later, it seems reasonable to assume that the investigation documents were a mere farce, as if the remark about incitement to “violent regime change” in Yugoslavia was added arbitrarily in order to justify Deželić’s assassination in some way.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid, 5–7.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid, 33–36.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid, 37–38, 42–43.



## Attack on the Yugoslav mission in Mehlem

On 29 November 1962, when Yugoslavia was celebrating its most important national holiday – Day of the Republic, a group of Croatian émigrés attacked the premises of the Department for the Protection of Yugoslav Interests in the FRG in the town of Mehlem, near the capital Bonn. It was a kind of trade office located on the premises of the former Yugoslav embassy, since diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and the FRG were severed in 1957 because Yugoslavia established diplomatic relations with the German Democratic Republic, i.e. Eastern Germany. According to the attackers, both in their statements to the court and in their memoirs recorded forty years later, the aim was to destroy the alleged file that the Yugoslav security service kept on Croatian émigrés. The file contained the information used by the Yugoslav repressive system in persecuting the emigrants and their families in Yugoslavia. Moreover, the participants wanted to point out to the whole world that the Croatian people were not given the opportunity to claim the internationally recognized right to self-determination and that without choice they found themselves not only in a Serb-dominated Yugoslavia, but also in the communist system. They chose to use force with no intention of causing human casualties for two reasons. First, they rightly believed that the democratic world remained deaf to the cries of anti-Yugoslav and anti-communist persecuted Croats in their country and political refugees in the West, and second, because the Yugoslav communist regime responded to the slightest expression of discontent with brutal violence. Finally, the attackers were mostly younger émigrés who believed that older émigrés who had left Yugoslavia immediately after the end of the World War II had “fallen asleep” and were waiting for a new world conflict that might lead to the collapse of communist Yugoslavia. Therefore, with this action they wanted to “wake up” the Croatian political emigration, to encourage them to a more energetic commitment to the creation of an independent and democratic state, which did not necessarily require the use of violence (mass protests, hunger strikes, etc.).<sup>725</sup>

The Croatian émigrés succeeded in entering the courtyard of the building and the building unhindered, whereupon the officials of the Yugoslav mission opened fire on them with a pistol, to which the Croatian émigrés returned fire. The shooting killed a Yugoslav official, Momčilo Popović, who was described by the Croat émigrés as an officer of the Yugoslav Security Service. The court experts did not definitively establish that Popović was wounded by a bullet fired by one of the Croatian émigrés, although in the end the émigré Franjo Perčić was convicted of this. As the conflict continued, Croat émigrés demolished and set fire to the

<sup>725</sup> Nova Hrvatska, January-February 1963, 1, 3, 7. Obrana, January 1, 1963, 2. Hrvatska gruda, May 1964, 3–5. Danica, December 19, 1962, 12–13. Krašić, *Hrvatsko proljeće i hrvatska politička emigracija* [Croatian Spring and Croatian Political Emigration], 23. Vjesnik, July 22, 2005, 71. Vjesnik, 23./24. July 2005, 87.

premises of the Yugoslav trade mission. Majority of them calmly greeted the West German police and surrendered without resistance. They explained to the Germans nearby that it was a political event, apologized for the noise and rioting, and pasted posters explaining the background of their actions.<sup>726</sup> The epilogue of this event was the trial, postponed and interrupted several times, which was concluded in Bonn in the spring of 1964, in which 26 Croatian émigrés were convicted; Perčić received the highest sentence, 15 years in prison.<sup>727</sup> The Mehlem attack and the Bonn trial caused a great echo in the Yugoslav, West German and even European media. Moreover, the event strained the already poor relations between Yugoslavia and the FRG. Besides, it temporarily and to some extent homogenized the divided and partially conflicted Croatian political emigration. Deželić, on the other hand, was one of the main actors in the aforementioned trials and events.

### **The Bonn trial – a „Croatian issue” in the focus of West German and European public opinion**

The Mehlem attackers achieved in part what they wanted – Croatian political refugees in the West and their demands for an independent and democratic Croatian state received considerable attention from West German and other European media. Among others, the following magazines and newspapers wrote about the event: *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, *Rheinische Post*, *Deutsche Zeitung*, *Neue Ruhr Zeitung*, *Aachner Folkzeitung*, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *The Guardian*, *The Evening News* and *The Daily Telegraph*.<sup>728</sup> A Croatian émigré magazine *Nova Hrvatska*, published in London, wrote that a number of European television stations were broadcasting unusual footage of the burned building and devastated offices, footage consistent with a state of war. The camera lenses paused on a symbolic scene – a torn image of Josip Broz Tito, the undisputed Yugoslav leader and the main cohesive factor of communist Yugoslavia, lying on the ground.<sup>729</sup> The same magazine rightly assumed that the real opportunity for a powerful propaganda strike against Belgrade was yet to come, since „the defendants would have a rare opportunity for defense purposes to appear

<sup>726</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, January-February 1963, 3. *Hrvatska gruda*, June 1964., 2–4. *Obrana*, January-February 1964, 2. *Vjesnik*, July 22, 2005, 71.

The Croatian émigrés had no intention of killing Yugoslav mission officials, as they were all told to leave the building before launching the attack, which Yugoslav head of mission Milan Georgijević was forced to confirm to reporters. Danica, December 19, 1962, 13.

<sup>727</sup> For a complete trial transcript, see: HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 1, šifra [Code] 10.3, broj [Number] 2, predmet [Item] 3, Suđenje grupi ustaških emigranata [The trial of a group of Ustasha emigrants].

<sup>728</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, January-February 1963., 7.

<sup>729</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, January-February 1963., 1.

as accusers of communist Yugoslavia, as witnesses to its criminal regime which oppresses its people, which insidiously kills their fathers and brothers in camps and prisons, which denounces and spies on them even in the free world”.<sup>730</sup>

In their testimony in the pre-trial proceedings and especially in court, the accused, although the judge and especially the prosecutor, tried to prevent them from explaining the background of their actions by testifying about the persecution by the Yugoslav communist regime that they, their families and part of the Croatian people had experienced. On the latter, they provided details of the massacres of captured ISC soldiers and Croatian civilians perpetrated by Yugoslav military units after the end of the World War II. This subject, on the other hand, was not allowed to be spoken about publicly in Yugoslavia, and such testimonies and information, mostly disseminated by the media, irritated the Belgrade regime. In the same way, like-minded émigrés appeared throughout the West. Croatian émigrés, who wanted to evoke a sense of solidarity with the Germans, also presented information about the Yugoslav regime's crimes against captured Wehrmacht soldiers as well as members of the German national minority in Yugoslavia, which further distanced Bonn and Belgrade from each other. The need to investigate some of the testimonies on the latter subject was even debated in FRG parliament, leading to strong criticism in the Yugoslav press.<sup>731</sup> It should be added that Croatian émigrés acted similarly during the attack on the Yugoslav trade mission – they carried banners reading „Thus the Berlin Wall will be torn down”, and in addition to „Long live free Croatia” they also carried the inscription „Long live indivisible Germany”. The Yugoslav press and diplomacy claimed that the attackers were Ustashas and war criminals and wanted to compromise them as Nazi and fascist collaborators. However, German newspapers also noted that most of them were young people who had been children during the World War II, which led to even stronger attacks on Croatian emigrants and German authorities in the Yugoslav press.<sup>732</sup>

In addition to the defendants in the investigation and trial and the appearance of some Croat émigrés in the media West German, the strong anti-Yugoslav propaganda activity was spearheaded by an organization established to collect and coordinate material aid for the convicts. Various names for this organization appeared in émigré newspapers and magazines, but

<sup>730</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, January-February 1963., 3.

The émigré weekly *Danica* wrote that Yugoslavia wanted to turn this court case into a trial to the entire Croatian people and their desire for an independent state. It went on to suggest that it was up to Croatian émigrés to make it a trial against Tito's communist regime and Yugoslavia. *Danica*, January 30, 1963, 3.

<sup>731</sup> *Obrana*, February-March 1963, 6. *Obrana*, January-February 1964, 1. *Hrvatska gruda*, May 1964, 1. *Hrvatska gruda*, June 1964, 4. *Nova Hrvatska*, May 1963, 1.

<sup>732</sup> *Obrana*, July-August 1963, 4. *Nova Hrvatska*, January-February 1963, 7. *Nova Hrvatska*, May 1963, 6.

the name Joint Committee for the defense of Imprisoned Croats in Germany (hereafter: the Committee) was most frequently used. Leading members of various organizations of Croatian political emigration found a place in it, and it was headed by Deželić. The Committee was founded in Cologne in January 1963, with a statement made to the media by West German that the attack in Mehlem was perpetrated because of the increasingly difficult situation of Croats in their homeland, namely the destruction of the Croatian people and their thousand-year-old culture. It was a response to the attempt to destroy a nation and a warning to the world public that it was consciously or unconsciously supporting the dictatorial Yugoslav regime, it said. It was also pointed out that Croats at home and abroad welcome this action, but at the same time regret the violation of German hospitality. Furthermore, all Croats who have such knowledge were asked to send the Committee information about communist crimes and witness statements, which should be notarized or judicially certified, to be used in the trial of the Mehlem attackers.<sup>733</sup> The Yugoslav Security Service received information that Deželić, on behalf of the CSS, sent a request to the International Red Cross in Geneva to organize the excavation of mass graves of ISC soldiers and Croat civilians killed immediately after the World War II.<sup>734</sup>

As head of the Committee, Deželić took every opportunity to appear in the media of West German to explain the background of the events in Mehlem, and he had some success. There was also lobbying of various German government officials, and Deželić and some members of the Committee wrote several brochures in German explaining the essence of the Croats' struggle for an independent state, which they sent to German journalists and public service employees.<sup>735</sup> As for lobbying, Deželić claimed after the trial that the Committee, through a direct connection with Dr. Zoglmann, a member of the Free Democratic Party, influenced the passage of a new law with lower penalties for explosive attacks shortly before sentencing, resulting in the immediate release of eighteen defendants. The law was even given the colloquial name *Lex Croata*. More likely, however, the change in the law was significantly influenced by the desire to lessen sentences for FRG citizens who damaged the Berlin Wall in much the same way that the Croatian émigré damaged the Yugoslav mission in Mehlem. Nevertheless, in the prosecution's closing argument, Chief Public Prosecutor Horn criticized the Committee, claiming that its members had knocked on all doors to government officials to influence the verdict – which speaks volumes about the Committee's lobbying efforts.<sup>736</sup> On the eve of the trial, the Committee sent out tens of thousands of various promotional materials to the FRG

<sup>733</sup> *Obrana*, February-March 1963, 1.

<sup>734</sup> HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 300757 Deželić Berislav, 22.

<sup>735</sup> *Obrana*, January-February 1964, 2.

<sup>736</sup> *Obrana*, July-August-September 1964, 2. *Nova Hrvatska*, March-May 1964, 1. *Vjesnik*, 23./24. July 2005, 87.

government and parliament, foreign embassies and consulates, newspaper editors, cultural and public service workers, trade unions, professional associations, and the like.<sup>737</sup> In addition, on the first day of the trial, the Committee held a press conference at Zentral Hotel, where Deželić and some other members of the Committee spoke, and propaganda materials were again distributed. A significant number of West German journalists, as well as correspondents from other European countries, even from the United States of America (USA), turned up for the conference.<sup>738</sup>

From a series of testimonies in court, it is worth mentioning that of Vlado Murat who, before answering questions, kissed the Croatian flag he had pulled out of his pocket. Speaking about communist crimes, he said that Tito was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Croats and members of the German national minority, calling him Eichmann number two. This caused a great stir in the courtroom, and the prosecutor protested the insult to the foreign statesman. This statement was echoed in the press of FRG, but also in other European countries. Even Yugoslav newspapers reported it and criticized the judge for allowing such appearances. In this context, a number of West German newspapers quoted Deželić as saying, "Murderers should be called murderers. We can provide evidence for the truth of Murat's claims".<sup>739</sup>

The Mehlem, the investigation and trial of the attackers in Bonn were events which were an unpleasant propaganda blow to Belgrade. It should not be forgotten that Yugoslavia was one of the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement which, among other things, advocated the liberation and self-determination of African and Asian peoples from the European colonizers. According to *Danica*, a prominent Croatian émigré weekly from Chicago published by the Franciscans, Belgrade assumed the role of imperialist and colonizer of the Croatian people thanks to the events in Mehlem.<sup>740</sup> In the European public sphere, the so-called Croatian question resurfaced as one of the issues that most burdened the interwar South Slavs state. The CPY claimed that the national question had been resolved in the second, federally organized Yugoslavia, but Yugoslav state propaganda received an effective denial in the form of an attack in Mehlem. Although the use of force was criticized in the FRG media, some of them showed understanding for the actions of the Croatian émigrés and intoned articles in an anti-communist and anti-Yugoslav manner. Along with the defendants, Deželić, as head of the Committee that supported the latter, became the main factor in the anti-Yugoslav campaign that brought Belgrade's "dirty laundry" to light and informed the Western public about the mass crimes

<sup>737</sup> *Obrana*, March-April 1964, 2.

<sup>738</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, January-February 1964, 1.

<sup>739</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, June-July 1964, 3.

<sup>740</sup> *Danica*, January 23, 1963, 1.

committed by the communists at the end of World War II and the ongoing brutal persecution of political dissidents. Particularly frustrating for Yugoslavia was the fact that almost all of the participants in the events at Mehlem were young men who had no part in the war and could not be compromised by links to the Ustasha regime, as well as the fact that Deželić was a CPP supporter.

But the fact that the Mehlem attackers were young men was a defeat for communist Yugoslavia in another field. *Danica* wrote about this in the first article about the events in Mehlem. The text said, among other things: "These Croatian workers in West Germany mostly graduated from schools in Tito's F. P. R. Yugoslavia and were educated in communist schools in a strictly communist and Yugoslav spirit. Tito and his communists constantly boast that "the greatest achievement of the people's liberation struggle is the brotherhood and unity of the Yugoslav peoples sealed in blood." These recent patriotic demonstrations of young Croatian workers in Bonn against the Belgrade robbers and tyrants and their Serbian representatives and guardians of 'brotherhood and unity' ... show very eloquently that the Croats are against any 'Yugoslavia' and for their free Republic of Croatia, ... ". *Danica* justified the use of violence in the anti-Yugoslav protest by saying, among other things, that "the young Croatian generation has learned a lot of bad habits from the communist masters. One of these acquired experiences is certainly how to attack the enemy everywhere and by all possible means."<sup>741</sup> For the Yugoslav communist regime, the fact that the Mehlem attackers were mostly workers was also a kind of defeat. From a Marxist point of view, they were members of the working class, nominally the ruling class in Yugoslavia.<sup>742</sup>

### **The defense of the Mehlem attackers in the context of efforts to unify Croatian political emigration**

As mentioned above, almost since 1945, Croatian political emigration was characterized by a tendency of division, which was the result of different views about the recent past, especially about the ISC period (conflicts about the way the ISC was run and organized, its collapse, etc.), but also different points of view about how the struggle for an independent Croatian state should be conducted. This situation was also favored by personal conflicts and the frequent quest for supremacy among prominent individuals. In the early 1960 s, however, the opposite tendency began to emerge. In December 1959, Pavelić passed away. Some émigrés felt that there was no person among them who had merit in Pavelić's line (ISC's foundation), regardless of the criticisms they leveled at him, and that the opportunity opened up to unite all émigrés

<sup>741</sup> *Danica*, December 12, 1962, 1.

<sup>742</sup> *Danica*, October 2, 1963, 2.

who were in some way associated with the ISC – whether they remained loyal to Pavelić in exile, whether they launched their own political initiatives. The capacity of those eligible to create a numerically large and strong Croatian émigré organization expanded as CPP leader Vladko Maček grew older and sicker, and his imminent death was expected. His successor, Juraj Krnjević, announced that he would change the political direction of the CPP – openly opting for the need to create an independent Croatian state, an idea supported by almost all members of the CPP. By then, in fact, all the negotiations Maček conducted with Serbian émigrés on the organization of a common state after the collapse of communism had failed, but he still refused to clearly support the idea of an independent Croatian state, believing that such a statement was not necessary in the current conditions, i.e. as long as the West supported communist Yugoslavia and the Belgrade regime was stable. This was particularly encouraging to some of the émigrés who had been part of the ISC regime, as they appreciated that the CPP's entry into a joint émigré organization would give it some kind of legitimacy in the West, since the CPP had the overwhelming support of the Croatian people in the interwar period. During the World War II it did not cooperate with the fascists and Nazis (Krnjević was a member of the Yugoslav royal government in exile). Efforts to unify paid off in part at the end of the summer of 1962, when a number of Croatian émigré organizations and groups united at All-Croatian Congress in New York to form an umbrella organization called Croatian National Council (CNCO). The organization existed until the end of the 1960 s, and one of the reasons for its demise was that it failed to win over the two largest Croatian émigré organizations – CPP and CLM – for cooperation.<sup>743</sup> The CNCO also failed to gain prominence in Western political circles, in part because it attempted to portray the Ustasha regime in a manner acceptable to the West – particularly in light of the struggle for national freedom and anti-communism – while avoiding condemning the regime's numerous crimes.

The main aim of the Yugoslav Security Service was to provoke divisions and conflicts among Croat émigrés as much as possible, in order to prevent the accumulation of larger numbers of people and various resources whose activities and concentration could be dangerous for Yugoslavia.<sup>744</sup> This is illustrated in this paper using CNC and CDC as examples. The trends described from the early 1960 s were therefore relevant to the Yugoslav Security Service. In relation to the title of this paper, the formation of the Committee headed by Deželić should be understood as a strong expression of solidarity and unity of a large part of the Croatian

<sup>743</sup> Krašić, "Nastanak, rad i gašenje prvog Hrvatskog narodnog vijeća" ["Creation, activities and the downfall of the first Croatian National Council"].

<sup>744</sup> Krašić, „Služba državne sigurnosti Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske potkraj 1970-ih i početkom 1980-ih” [”The State Security Service of the Socialist Republic of Croatia at the end of the 1970 s and early 1980 s”], 381–382.



political emigration. The Committee included a representative of the CLM branch in the FRG, i.e. the organization Hrvatski domobran, but also that of the UCG, an organization that used to be part of the CLM, but under the leadership of Rukavina and Kulenović came into conflict with the CLM leadership and acted independently since the early 1960 s. Furthermore, the Circle of Friends of the Drina joined the Committee, which was an offshoot of the CPR in the FRG. The CDC organization was also mentioned as a member of the Committee, and for publicity reasons, the CPP, although in reality it was not part of the Committee, but was mentioned because Deželić was a sympathizer of the party. Some other Croatian émigré intellectuals from the FRG were also members of the Committee. This information dates from the middle of 1963, and the news about the founding of the Committee from the beginning of the same year shows that its foundation was supported by prominent members of the CNC: its *spiritus movens* Branimir Jelić, then Krunoslav Batušić, Stjepan Buć and Josip Krivić.<sup>745</sup> This is also important because Buć, along with another prominent member of the CNC, Mato Frković, was in conflict with Jelić.<sup>746</sup>

Marijan Šimundić also supported the establishment of the Committee.<sup>747</sup> Although not mentioned, he was one of the leaders of Croatian Revolutionary Brotherhood (CRB) in Europe in the mid-1960 s. The aforementioned organization was founded in Australia in 1961 and distinguished itself in Croatian political emigration by most consistently advocating and carrying out violent forms of struggle against communist Yugoslavia.<sup>748</sup> Šimundić was killed by the Yugoslav Security Service in 1967. Another CRB member, Nikola Kovačić from Stuttgart, was on the Committee's list of supporters.<sup>749</sup> Besides Deželić, the most prominent role was played by the Munich-based journalist Milan Ilinić, who took part in writing reports for Croatian émigré magazines and newspapers on the development of events surrounding the investigation and trial.<sup>750</sup> His text in *Danica* on the founding meeting in Cologne stated that it was of "historical significance" due to the participation of representatives of all Croatian émigré organizations in the FRG and prominent individuals, and that it was an example of "fraternal cooperation" that other émigrés should emulate.<sup>751</sup>

<sup>745</sup> *Obrana*, February-March 1963, 1.

<sup>746</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, May 1963, 6.

<sup>747</sup> *Obrana*, February-March 1963, 1.

<sup>748</sup> See more about CRB in: Vukušić, *HRB: Hrvatsko revolucionarno bratstvo: rat prije rata* [HRB: Croatian Revolutionary Brotherhood: War Before War].

<sup>749</sup> *Ibid*, 40, 45–46, 115–119.

<sup>750</sup> *Obrana*, March-April 1964, 2.

<sup>751</sup> *Danica*, January 30, 1963, 5.

Assistance committees were also established in other countries, cooperating with the one led by Deželić in the FRG. Those in the USA stood out for their activity. At the head of the committee for the Chicago area were members of the CPR, Stjepan Šego and Eugen Tomić, and at the head of the committee for the Cleveland area and Akron Rudolf Erić. With the help of local CPR commissioners throughout the USA, they were able to raise significant aid, so much so that in February and March 1963, *Obrana*, the CPR's magazine, reported that \$1 000 had already been sent to the FRG and the fundraising was continuing.<sup>752</sup> In the very next issue, *Obrana* reported that various Croatian organizations and individuals in the USA had raised nearly \$1 800, and the list of donors included over 200 names.<sup>753</sup> On the other hand, the cost of defending the Mehlem attackers, again according to *Obrana*, exceeded DM 100 000. By mid-1963, only 21 000 DM had been raised, so efforts to raise more money continued.<sup>754</sup> The action took on a planetary character, so that in addition to a number of cities in the FRG and the USA, aid was also collected in Paris, Zurich, Sweden, Great Britain, Canada, Australia and South America.<sup>755</sup> The money was donated by some CPP members from Belgium and the FRG, as well as by some branches of the largest fraternal organization of Croatian emigrants in North America – the Croatian Fraternal Union – which is especially important, since its leadership was pro-Yugoslav.<sup>756</sup> Since Croatian émigrés in the USA were particularly active in collecting aid, and the newspaper appeared weekly, most of the data on the collection of aid for the Mehlem attackers was published in the weekly *Danica*. For example, at the end of May 1964, *Danica* reported that 4 142.48 DM, 2 261 US dollars, 500 Belgian francs, 68.56 Australian pounds, 38 Canadian dollars, and 10 francs had been collected in the Western World.<sup>757</sup> In some articles, the contribution to the defense of the Mehlem attackers, who are called heroes, is called the sacred duty of all Croatian emigrants.<sup>758</sup>

In addition to the gathering of various émigré organizations and émigrés who did not belong to any organization in the Committee, a number of prominent Croatian émigrés visited both Deželić and the Mehlem attackers. *Obrana* wrote that Deželić was visited by representatives of all Croatian organizations, “which is proof that concord is becoming more and more prevalent in Croatian ranks, which is the wish of the majority of Croatian emigrants”. One of them was Ante Došen, vice president of the international organization Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of

<sup>752</sup> *Obrana*, February-March 1963, 6.

<sup>753</sup> *Obrana*, April 1963, 3.

<sup>754</sup> *Obrana*, July-August 1963, 4.

<sup>755</sup> *Obrana*, January-February 1964, 2. *Danica*, September 25, 1963, 3.

<sup>756</sup> *Danica*, May 27, 1964, 4.

<sup>757</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>758</sup> *Danica*, January 23, 1963, 2.

Nations, member of the Honorary Court of the CNCO and founder of the organization *Hrvatski domobran* (Croatian Home Guard) in the USA in the interwar period. Then Miro Gal, vice-president of the CNCO and president of the branch of the United American Croats "Dr. Ante Starčević" in New York. Then the former senior officer of the Armed Forces (AF) of the ISC Ibrahim Pirić-Pjanić from Munich, in the role of a representative of the Circle of Friends of the Drina, with the local representative of the Drina Josip Kereš from Duisburg. Also, Jakov Barbarić, CLM councilor and CLM-AF commander from Argentina, and Josip Biošić, CLM councilor and editor of the magazine *Hrvatska gruda* from Munich. Deželić was also met by Alojz Kovačić, Secretary of the Croatian Home Guard from Munich, and Josip Vlaho, CLM commissioner for Austria, as was the aforementioned Rukavina, president of the UCG from Schogau. Mention was also made of the leaders of the two opposing CNC factions, Branko Jelić from Berlin and Stjepan Buć from Munich. From the CDC organization, the president Franjo Pavičić and the secretary and editor of the magazine *Mlada Hrvatska* Branko Orlović met with Deželić, along with councilors Nado Gladić and Juraj Milovac. In addition to the independent lawyer and journalist Ilinić, mention was also made of Jure Petričević from Bruges, one of the most prominent Croatian émigrés from Switzerland and political commentator for the best intellectual and cultural magazine of Croatian political emigration – the *Croatian Review* (*Hrvatska revija*). In addition to Pirić-Pjanić, a Croat of Muslim faith, Deželić was visited by Derviš Šehović, the secretary general of Central Committee of Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Sandžak Muslim from Paris, and Sulejman Grabus, the organization's representative from Duisburg. Priests who were émigrés were especially respected by the majority of political emigrants. Those who visited Deželić were Vilim Cecelja from Austria (head of Croatian Caritas in Salzburg), Ivan Tomas from Rome, Franjo Lodeta from Essen and Franciscan Krsto Šušnjar from Aachen.<sup>759</sup>

However, the division of the Croatian political emigration remained in relation to fundraising as well. The CLM, while participating in the joint committee, also formed its own committee that carried out independent fundraising activities.<sup>760</sup> The CLM committee also collected aid from around the world, so that 790 bolivars arrived from faraway Venezuela for the prisoners.<sup>761</sup> Despite a high degree of unity and cooperation in the form of the joint Committee, some émigré organizations continued to attack each other, so that the two factions of the UCG and also of the CNC clashed in court.<sup>762</sup> Such events reduced the possibility of Croatian political emigration to use the events in Mehlem for anti-Yugoslav propaganda and,

<sup>759</sup> *Obrana*, January-February 1964, 2.

<sup>760</sup> *Hrvatska gruda*, November 1963, 4. *Hrvatska gruda*, December 1963, 6. *Danica*, July 15, 1964, 5.

<sup>761</sup> *Hrvatska gruda*, May 1964, 5.

<sup>762</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, May 1963, 6. *Danica*, June 24, 1964, 2, 5–6.

above all, reduced their prestige and influence in political and public life of FRG.

In addition to his work as head of the Committee, Deželić wrote a substantial part of the reports on the course of the investigation and trial, which were published in émigré magazines and newspapers. Together with several attackers from the Mehlem group, his name very quickly became synonymous with the Mehlem attack and trial. *Nova Hrvatska*, a magazine that was not affiliated with any émigré organization, also noted that Deželić was “following the course of the trial most closely” and ran a photo of Deželić speaking at a press conference.<sup>763</sup> That Deželić, as a member of the CPP, was an unpleasant opponent of Belgrade who advocated the creation of an independent Croatian state, at a time when the CPP began to advocate the same idea after Maček's death, and when there was a possibility of uniting most of the Croatian political emigration, is shown by the direct attacks on him in the Yugoslav press. *Nova Hrvatska* reported the attack from Zagreb's *Vjesnik*, in which Deželić was described as an organizer of Ustasha gangs. *Nova Hrvatska* commented, “Could there really be more irony? To call one of the most prominent and well-known representatives of the CPP in Europe – ‘Ustasha’?”<sup>764</sup>

Despite the fact that some émigrés were against the use of force in anti-Yugoslav activities, the majority nevertheless expressed some form of support for the Mehlem attackers. *Nova Hrvatska* advocated the use of political and propaganda forms of struggle for an independent Croatian state, but gave a detailed account of the events in Mehlem, the investigation and the trial. In the process, criticism of the Mehlem attackers was cleverly camouflaged and delivered in small doses. In the opinion of the editors, more effort should have been made to maximize the propaganda effect of the protests and to minimize or completely avoid the use of violence. One of the reasons for the latter was to pre-empt Belgrade in propagandizing against Croatian émigrés as fascists and terrorists.<sup>765</sup> On the other hand, *Nova Hrvatska* writes in the first text on the events in Mehlem that „the Croats in the world, and especially those in Germany, had until then shown a rare solidarity”.<sup>766</sup>

Messages about the need to unite political emigration in the context of supporting the Mehlem attackers were particularly numerous in the CPR's magazine, *Obrana*. This is evident, for example, in the headline of an article that reads “The Mehlem Trial Seeks Sacrifices – Croats Unite!”<sup>767</sup> The CPR also used the event as an opportunity to criticize the CLM and its policy of waiting for a new world conflict, as it advocated the preparation of the “Croatian revolution”.<sup>768</sup>

<sup>763</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, March-May 1964, 12.

<sup>764</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, May 1963, 6.

<sup>765</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, January-February 1963, 3.

<sup>766</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, January-February 1963, 1.

<sup>767</sup> *Obrana*, July-August 1964, 4.

<sup>768</sup> *Obrana*, April 1963, 1.

*Obrana* was critical of some émigrés from the FRG who had allegedly betrayed the Mehlem attackers, saying: “The rest of us were welded by ‘Mehlem’ into an anvil whose edges can be damaged, but which no one can break”.<sup>769</sup> During the trial, *Nova Hrvatska* quoted a statement by one of the defendants, Stjepan Bilandžić, against the division of emigration: “And emigration had to be awakened by the Mehlem action, because every patriot must think of saving the fatherland before he can concern himself with party differences”.<sup>770</sup>

After the trial, *Obrana* conducted an extensive interview with Deželić, in which the latter spoke a great deal about the necessity of uniting Croatian émigrés. In this context, the testimony of the CPP president for Belgium, Mate Brčić, was also transmitted, who said that he would work for the creation of an independent Croatian state, even if it meant acting against the instructions of the party leadership. Moreover, *Obrana* reminded Deželić that Krnjević also protested against the possibility of extraditing former ISC Minister Andrija Artuković from the USA to Yugoslavia. Deželić’s assistance to the Mehlem “revolutionaries” was placed next to the above statements in order to send a message – CPP members cooperate with the rest of the émigrés and want to create an independent Croatian state. Deželić, on the other hand, replied that he had been a supporter of the CPP since 1926, that he had been imprisoned in communist Yugoslavia for a year and a half, and then spoke about the disunity of Croatian political emigration as a major problem. But, he went on to explain, after Mehlem there was an “awakening” of political emigration, party and personal interests increasingly took a back seat and the emigrants became imbued with the spirit of unity. He also pointed out that after the trial of the Mehlem attackers there was nothing left to wait for, that is, it was the last moment for the unification of political emigration. He added that party and other differences should be left at a time when Croats are free people in their own country. The interview ended with the following words, “I would like to end this conversation with a message so that the Mehlem trial remains the best memory and message for all of us for tomorrow. Broken emigration is the best prey for the red wolves (communists, ac.). If we do not want to stay abroad for another twenty years and live a miserable emigrant life, let us all come together to the last in the harmonious emigration of Croatian fighters, with only one goal: a free Croatia!”<sup>771</sup>

### **The attack in Mehlem – the beginning of the anti-Yugoslav mass protests**

The attack by Croatian émigrés on the Yugoslav mission in Mehlem marked the beginning of protests by Croatian émigrés throughout the Western world in front of Yugoslav diplomatic

<sup>769</sup> *Obrana*, January-February 1964, 8.

<sup>770</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, June-July 1964, 2.

<sup>771</sup> *Obrana*, July-September-August 1964, 3.

missions. In the following years, this became one of the most significant forms of action of Croatian political emigration. The protests were also organized on the most important Yugoslav national holiday – Day of the Republic – to remind the world public that a part of the Croatian people identified this date not with the founding of their state Yugoslavia, but with their dungeon.<sup>772</sup> Protests in front of Yugoslav embassies and consulates also began to be organized on other occasions – for example, in solidarity with persecuted intellectuals in Croatia or after the assassinations of Croatian political émigrés by the Yugoslav Security Service.<sup>773</sup> In a 2005 interview, Bilandžić also claimed that the with the Mehlem attack began a tradition of protests in front of Yugoslav diplomatic missions on the Day of the Republic.<sup>774</sup> Already in the first edition of 1963, *Nova Hrvatska* foresaw such a development, writing that the Mehlem attack was neither the first nor the last expression of the revolt, which is most pronounced on November 29, and then concludes as follows: „The recent action of the group of Croatian workers in Germany, however, was by far the largest and most widely noticed so far. And to such an extent that in the future there will be an inevitable association of every new November 29, both in our ranks and among our enemies.” It goes on to say that because of the Mehlem action, not a single November 29 will pass without protests by Croatian émigrés outside Yugoslav embassies and consulates in the Western world.<sup>775</sup>

The events in Mehlem, the investigation and the trial reported in the media really “awakened” and encouraged a part of the Croatian political emigration – exactly what the organizers of the action wanted to achieve, among other things.<sup>776</sup> One of the forms of this new spirit on the part of Croatian political emigration was the organization of protests, which were almost exclusively non-violent. Such a form of public action in the cities of the West further distorted the image that the Yugoslav communist regime projected to the world – how in communist Yugoslavia the so-called national question is solved and that in Yugoslavia there exists a humane form of socialism, in contrast to the Soviet one. On December 11, 1962, the Croatian Home Guard in the United States, along with several other Croatian societies, organized a protest in New York against the granting of American aid to Yugoslavia. Just as in Mehlem, the participants were mostly young men who had fled communism, according to the protest report. About a hundred demonstrators marched on the building United Nations (UN), car-

<sup>772</sup> Bilandžić said in the investigation that the reason for the attack on that date was that „Yugoslavia is celebrating the establishment of its communist regime on November 29, and we mourn the loss of our freedom and independence”. *Danica*, August 14, 1963, 2.

<sup>773</sup> Krašić, *Hrvatsko proljeće i hrvatska politička emigracija* [Croatian Spring and Croatian Political Emigration], 20, 29–30.

<sup>774</sup> *Vjesnik*, 23./24. July 2005, 87.

<sup>775</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, January-February 1963, 3.

<sup>776</sup> See notes 48 and 94.

rying Croatian and American flags and a number of English-language banners condemning the Yugoslav communist regime and Tito and demanding freedom for the Croatian people. After an hour in front of the building UN, the demonstrators went to the Yugoslav Embassy, where they also stayed for about an hour. There they made statements to journalists about the “communist terror” against Croats and the persecution of Croatian refugees in Austria and Italy, many of whom were sent back to Yugoslavia and then punished for fleeing.<sup>777</sup>

Of the similar protests at the time of the events in Mehlem, the protest by CLM organizations in Sweden on May 8, 1964, stands out. Several hundred demonstrators marched through the main streets of Stockholm and eventually proceeded to the Yugoslav Embassy, where speeches were made in Croatian and Swedish. A delegation of six demonstrators then delivered a memorandum to embassy officials demanding the creation of a UN -controlled Croatian and Serbian state and an end to the violence against the Croatian people, but this did not happen because the Yugoslav diplomats would not let the demonstrators into the embassy.<sup>778</sup>

### **The attack in Mehlem – the beginning of the violent anti-Yugoslav actions of a part of the Croatian political emigration**

Since the beginning of the 1960 s, the use of violence to achieve political goals began to appear as one of the methods in the activities of Croatian political emigration. There were several reasons for this development: the emigration of young men subjected to various forms of oppression by the Yugoslav communist regime, the democratic West’s support for communist Yugoslavia as a defense against the Soviet invasion of the Mediterranean, which in the eyes of Croatian émigrés was a hypocritical trampling on democratic principles and the internationally recognized right of the people to self-determination, and the absence of supreme authority, at least for part of the émigrés. This situation led to the belief among some younger émigrés that communist Yugoslavia could only be overthrown by force and that one should rely primarily on one’s own forces and not wait for the outbreak of a new world conflict that might overtake Yugoslavia. The attack in Mehlem was the first action of young Croatian émigrés in which violence was used. Thus, for many Croatian young men who had experienced communist oppression, miserable lives in refugee camps in Austria and Italy, and a lack of

<sup>777</sup> *Hrvatska gruda*, February 1963, 8.

<sup>778</sup> While the CLM magazine *Hrvatska gruda* wrote about the protest as a great success, *Nova Hrvatska* was more critical reproaching the protesters of highlighting symbols in connexion with the ISC regime, which harmed the protest, as the Swedes’ initial sympathies largely dwindled due to this aspect. *Nova Hrvatska* in turn highlighted the fact that of the approximately 1 200 Croats in Sweden, perhaps ten had participated in the events of the World War II, i.e. they were associated with the ISC regime. *Hrvatska gruda*, June 1964, 5–8. *Nova Hrvatska*, June-July 1964, 4.



understanding in the West for their sufferings and aspirations, Mehlem became a symbol, a signpost for an action that will lead to the freedom of the Croatian people. Something similar happened with the CRB's operation in 1972, when nineteen members of that organization invaded Yugoslavia and waged a month-long guerrilla war with the vastly superior Yugoslav military and police forces. As fighting began around the town of Bugojno in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the event became known as Bugojno Action. The thoughts of a part of the Croatian political emigration could be summed up in a sentence from the text of the title „Is Bugojno a turning point?” from the magazine *Republika Hrvatska*, which read „We believe that only the Bugojno policy will liberate Croatia.”<sup>779</sup> Ten years earlier, the Mehlem attack was a „turning point”; ten years earlier, some émigrés believed that only the „Mehlem policy” could liberate Croatia.

Yugoslavia did not have to wait long for the next similar action, for the following year, 1963, the CRB carried out its first operation, infiltrating nine members into Yugoslavia who were divided into groups of three to carry out diversions. All were arrested and convicted, and only one group successfully sabotaged the railway in the province of Gorski kotar.<sup>780</sup> This tendency to spread revolutionary sentiment among some Croatian émigrés led to retaliation by the Yugoslav Security Service, so that in 1965, when the assassination attempt on the Deželić family took place, one of the founders of the CRB, Geza Pašti, was kidnapped and then killed in Yugoslavia.<sup>781</sup> The need for the assassination of those Croatian émigrés whom the Yugoslav communist regime held responsible for organizing and carrying out attacks on Yugoslav diplomatic missions and acts of sabotage in Yugoslavia was discussed at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia on September 13, 1963. Among other things, the meeting stressed the „necessity of liquidating at least some of the most prominent emigrant organizers who are abroad and operate completely unhindered.” It was added that „this kind of struggle” is also used by the security services of other countries.<sup>782</sup>

Until the collapse of communist Yugoslavia, part of the Croatian political emigration continued violent anti-Yugoslav activities, while the Yugoslav Security Service retaliated with murders and kidnappings of émigrés, along with various other forms of repression (various

<sup>779</sup> Krašić, *Hrvatsko proljeće i hrvatska politička emigracija* [Croatian Spring and Croatian Political Emigration], 319.

<sup>780</sup> Vukušić, *HRB: Hrvatsko revolucionarno bratstvo: rat prije rata* [HRB: Croatian Revolutionary Brotherhood: War Before War], 37–42.

<sup>781</sup> Ibid, 44–47.

<sup>782</sup> *Zapishnici Izvršnog komiteta Centralnog komiteta Saveza komunista Hrvatske (10. travnja 1959. – 27. studenoga 1963.)* [Records of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia (April 10, 1959 – November 27, 1963)], 756–757.

harassments, spreading false news about certain émigré in Croatian communities, as well as before the authorities of the Western countries where the émigrés lived, etc.), which also resulted in the deaths of those who, like the Deželić family, had not participated in any way in the planning or execution of violent actions.<sup>783</sup> Since the early 1960 s, the Yugoslav communist regime has had to invest considerable resources in defending its borders and diplomatic missions in the West, as well as monitoring and controlling some of the Croatian political emigration because of the risk of violent attacks. The Mehlem attack and the CRB operation of 1963 marked the beginning of this process.

### **Despite the court's verdict on the Mehlem attackers, Belgrade was not satisfied**

The Yugoslav communist regime conducted a large-scale media campaign in the country against the entire Croatian political emigration regarding the Mehlem attack. The Zagreb edition of *Borba*, the official organ of the League of Communists, published the text entitled „Rots and Shoots of the Crimes in Mehlem” in seventeen episodes, and the Zagreb weekly *Vjesnik* wrote on the subject in seven episodes in the first half of 1963, demonizing the Croatian political emigrants and calling them Ustashas, fascists, criminals and bandits. West German authorities, the judiciary and the police were also widely criticized.<sup>784</sup> At this time, the second most powerful man in Yugoslavia, Aleksandar Ranković, sent a „stern telegram” to the president of the Social Democratic Party of the FRG, Erich Ollenhauer, claiming that the „fascists” had found in the FRG not only refuge but also conditions for free action and support. Belgrade also sent an official note to the FRG government expressing the hope that the so-called criminals would be severely punished, but also that measures would be taken to prevent further activities of Croatian emigrants of any kind in the FRG. *Nova Hrvatska* rightly assessed that Yugoslavia carried out a broad diplomatic-media campaign against Croatian political emigrants full of untruths, with the aim of achieving a ban on the activities of all Croatian émigré organizations in the FRG. Thus, the Yugoslav authorities took some symbolic steps to demonstrate their insult, for example, the Belgrade ensemble „Kolo” and Zagreb Philharmonic were forbidden to participate in the previously agreed performance in the FRG. However, *Nova Hrvatska* conc-

<sup>783</sup> On part of this issue, see in detail: *Hrvatsko revolucionarno bratstvo: rat prije rata* [HRB: Croatian Revolutionary Brotherhood: War Before War].

<sup>784</sup> For example, the Federal Chancellor of the FRG, Konrad Adenauer, was depicted in a caricature in the Zagreb *Vjesnik* surrounded by armed Ustasha and members of Nazi SS units. *Danica*, 23 January 1963, 4. Moreover, an article on this subject in the same weekly was entitled „Vampires under the auspices of IV. Reich.” *Danica*, January 30, 1963, 3.

luded that the possibilities of Yugoslav sanctions against the FRG were extremely limited, and as an example, it was pointed out that Yugoslavia did not prohibit the further mass departure of its citizens for so-called temporary work in the FRG, which it allowed because it was in a severe economic crisis in the early 1960 s. The situation is perhaps best described by the headline from *Nova Hrvatska* – „The impotent rage and disappointment of Belgrade”.<sup>785</sup>

A further blow to the already poor relations between Yugoslavia and the FRG, as well as to Yugoslavia's reputation, was the discovery that one of the legal experts sent by Yugoslavia to oversee the trial, and who prepared the Yugoslav version of the indictment, was one of the leading officials of the State Commission for Establishing the Crimes of the Occupiers and their Aides after the war in Belgrade. Among other things, this institution sentenced 25 high-ranking Wehrmacht officers to execution. As reported by the émigré magazine *Hrvatska gruda* from Munich, the West German public protested to the authorities, demanding his arrest and even sentencing to death. After the discovery, the said Albert Vajs immediately left the FRG.<sup>786</sup> It is worth noting that Vajs's first act after arriving in the FRG was to protest the existence of the Committee.<sup>787</sup> The West German weekly *National Zeitung* reported on an interview with Croatian émigré and former communist camp prisoner Ivan Boras, who claimed that as a prisoner he was forced to transport the bodies of children, members of the German national minority in Yugoslavia, and that the murdered Momčilo Popović led a gassing operation in which some 5 000 German children were said to have been killed.<sup>788</sup> Part of the West German public supported the Mehlem attackers as freedom fighters for their nation and anti-communists, especially soldiers and officers who had been captured and allegedly tortured in communist Yugoslavia after the war, as well as Volksdeutsche expelled from Yugoslavia.<sup>789</sup>

On the other hand, there was no lack of newspaper and television reports, with which Belgrade was mostly satisfied, since the Mehlem attackers were presented in the context of the Ustasha movement and the ISC regime.<sup>790</sup> Also, just as in the case of the CNCO, which failed to gain some support in the West, the Committee's propaganda activities were limited by the lack of a clear distancing from the Ustasha regime, primarily by the condemnation of

<sup>785</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, May 1963, 6.

The magazine *Danica* also wrote extensively about the demonization of all Croatian émigrés as Ustasha and the numerous Yugoslav pressures on the FRG authorities. *Danica*, December 19, 1962, 13–14.

<sup>786</sup> *Hrvatska gruda*, May 1964, 4. *Danica*, July 31, 1963, 1.

<sup>787</sup> *Danica*, May 29, 1963, 4.

<sup>788</sup> *Danica*, March 6, 1963, 2.

<sup>789</sup> *Danica*, September 11, 1963, 3.

<sup>790</sup> *Danica*, May 29, 1963, 2, 4.

its crimes, although Deželić declared himself a CPP supporter, and the fact that most of the Mehlem attackers were young men who were not associated with the ISC regime. In general, a part of the Croatian political emigration considered any kind of mention of the Croats, Croatia and the “Croatian question” in the media in the West a success, regardless of the intonation of the reports; regardless of whether they were in favor of Belgrade or in any way condemned the repression over a part of the Croatian people. On the other hand, some émigrés felt that a more considered approach to this type of action was necessary, i.e. that the appearances in the Western media should be shaped according to Western social norms and historical experience, especially from the World War II. These two different views then led to disagreements and conflicts. However, without going into further details, it must be said that some Western journalists and intellectuals abstained from more explicit support for the part of Croatian political emigration in order not to be accused of solidarity with fascists and terrorists.

The court’s verdict only partially satisfied Yugoslavia, which was also expressed in the aforementioned journal *Borba*. This thesis is supported by the fact that the prosecutor demanded a life sentence for Perčić and higher sentences for the other defendants than those to which they were sentenced.<sup>791</sup> *Nova Hrvatska* rightly concluded that after the tirade that Belgrade conducted against the Croatian political emigration and especially against the accused, it would be satisfied only with the death sentences. Moreover, such a development of events was supported by some communist newspapers in Western Europe. While the death penalty was an unrealistic expectation, except in the case of Perčić, what Belgrade wanted to achieve was a comprehensive ban on the activities of Croatian émigré organizations in the FRG and what was demanded in an official diplomatic note. Shortly after the attack in Mehlem, Yugoslavia handed over a list of Croatian émigrés and émigré organizations to the FRG authorities and demanded their punishment and a ban on their activities.<sup>792</sup> All Croatian émigrés in the FRG have been portrayed in some way as responsible for the attack in Mehlem.<sup>793</sup> The Yugoslav press even suggested that the Mehlem attackers should be extradited to stand trial in Yugoslavia. Communists also organized protest rallies in a number of factories and various organizations and associations in Yugoslavia, sending telegrams to the FRG Ministry of Foreign Affairs demanding extradition as well.<sup>794</sup> What was officially requested was the extradition of all émigrés who had been declared war criminals in Yugoslavia.<sup>795</sup> Some of the émigrés suspected by the FRG authorities of planning and carrying out attacks on Yugoslavia and its diplomatic mis-

<sup>791</sup> *Nova Hrvatska*, March-May 1964, 1. *Nova Hrvatska*, June-July 1964, 1.

<sup>792</sup> *Danica*, December 19, 1962, 14. *Danica*, January 30, 2.

<sup>793</sup> *Danica*, January 2, 1963, 2.

<sup>794</sup> *Danica*, January 2, 1963, 2. *Danica*, January 30, 2.

<sup>795</sup> *Danica*, January 30, 2.

sions were monitored by the security service and the police, which carried out various forms of repression against them, while the political, lobbying, intellectual, propaganda and cultural activities of Croatian political emigration in the FRG continued largely unhindered.<sup>796</sup>

Yugoslavia was thus anything but satisfied with the sentences for the Mehlem attackers or the actions of the FRG authorities against Croatian émigrés in that country in general. On the other hand, the Mehlem attack, the investigation and the trial damaged the country's international reputation and encouraged some Croatian émigrés to engage in more determined anti-Yugoslav activities – from mass protests to the use of violence. Therefore, the Yugoslav authorities wanted to punish the Mehlem attackers themselves while sending the message that any anti-Yugoslav action, especially if it contained a violent component, would be met with a swift counter-action by Belgrade. Such an attitude undoubtedly derived from a document of early November 1965, which gave an overview of Perčić's anti-Yugoslav activities. It states, among other things, that in the Yugoslav Security Service's action plan against Perčić on 27 February 1965, it was suggested that in the event of his release or escape from prison, action should be taken with the aim of assassinating him.<sup>797</sup> However, the most severely convicted attackers from Mehlem remained in prison for some time, which means that there was no possibility of revenge by the Yugoslav communist regime for the attack on them. But there was one person at large whose name was identified with the attack and the trial – Berislav Đuro Deželić – and who was the ideal target to send the message that no attack on Yugoslavia and its interests in the world will go unpunished.

<sup>796</sup> A 1968 study by the FRG authorities, probably in response to Yugoslav complaints that anti-Yugoslav activities by Croatian and Serb political emigrants were tolerated in the FRG, listed a series of repressive measures (investigations, arrests, trials) to which Croat political emigrants on the FRG had been subjected since the Mehlem attack. HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 1, šifra [Code] 10.3, broj [Number] 4, Teroristička aktivnost jugoslavenskih emigrantskih organizacija u SR Njemačkoj [Terrorist activity of Yugoslav emigrant organizations in FR Germany], 1–11.

On the other hand, it was stated that „To the Yugoslav opinion that the émigrés in Federal Republic Germany should be forbidden any political activity directed against the regime in Yugoslavia, it should be added that this is not possible for purely legal reasons, since any measure taken by the German authorities is strictly determined by German law. As long as the political activity does not violate legal and other regulations, the German authorities have no power to intervene.” HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 1, šifra [Code] 10.3, broj [Number] 4, Teroristička aktivnost jugoslavenskih emigrantskih organizacija u SR Njemačkoj [Terrorist activity of Yugoslav emigrant organizations in FR Germany], 12.

In the context of the political and lobbying activities of Croatian political emigrants in the FRG, see in detail about the activities during the 1960 s and early 1970 s of one of the most prominent Croatian émigrés in the FRG, Branimir Jelić, in: Krašić, *Hrvatsko proljeće i hrvatska politička emigracija* [Croatian Spring and Croatian Political Emigration], 139–207.

<sup>797</sup> HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 1, šifra [Code] 10.10, broj [Number] 9, Ujedinjeni Hrvati SR Njemačke [United Croats of FR Germany], 71–74.

Even before the verdict was pronounced, the Committee and Deželić were the target of attacks by Yugoslav representatives who attended the trial and who constantly tried to limit the Committee's activities by protesting in front of the court and in various ministries of the FRG government, as well as by filing complaints with the police. Perčić would not admit in court from whom he had received the order to organize the attack in Mehlem, and the Yugoslav representatives took advantage of this by making a statement to the West German magazine *Die Welt* claiming that the secret organizers of the attack were Committee leaders – Deželić, Jelić and Ilinić.<sup>798</sup> The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote in a similar tone about Deželić. This magazine generally wrote extremely critical about the Mehlem attackers and all Croatian political emigrants to the FRG. In one article, Deželić was called the “bad teacher” of the Mehlem attackers. Moreover, Deželić's apartment was marked as a kind of headquarters, where all the “evil” comes from.<sup>799</sup>

At the end of this part of the paper, two more sources will be cited that suggest a connection between the attack on the Deželić family and the attack in Mehlem. The first is a letter from the aforementioned CRB leader Geza Pašti, addressed to the émigré Petar Hinić. The letter was used as evidence in the investigation of Hinić, an émigré in Stuttgart, in the trial of Pašti, Šimundić and Kovačić on charges of secret association, i.e. attempting to establish branches of the CRB in the FRG. In the letter, Pašti expressed the opinion that the attempted murder of the Deželić family was revenge for the attack in Mehlem.<sup>800</sup> As for the second source, it is the testimony of the former émigré Gojko Borić to the author of this paper. Borić was a member of the editorial board of the aforementioned *Nova Hrvatska*, but also a staff member of the radio station Deutsche Welle, so in this capacity he followed the first two and the last week of the trial in Bonn. He believes that Deželić's murder was organized because of his role in defending the Mehlem attackers.<sup>801</sup>

### Testimony of the alleged Deželić assassin

In 1967, the magazine *Obrana* published the testimony of Mirko Džida, an émigré born in 1938 in Čitluk near Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which he described in detail how he was blackmailed and recruited by the Yugoslav security service and trained in Sarajevo to carry out the assassination of Deželić, then one of the aforementioned founders of the

<sup>798</sup> *Danica*, April 8, 1964, 2.

<sup>799</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>800</sup> HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosjei [Personal Files], 300757 Deželić Berislav, 56 c. *Danica*, June 17, 1964, 1.

<sup>801</sup> E-mail of Gojko Borić to the author. April 28, 2021.

SRUU – Dane Šarac and Fr. Rafael Medić. The latter was the founder of Croatian Crusader Brotherhood, most of the Mehlem attackers were members of this organization, Medić was present at the attack and was convicted at the trial in Bonn. Džida went on to describe how difficulties arose when he left for the FRG, so that another group of assassins carried out the failed assassination attempt on Deželić. Therefore, he continued his training with the aim of killing Deželić. Džida arrived in the FRG in mid-1966, but according to his own statement, his conscience did not allow him to commit murder, so in the second half of August of the same year he applied for political asylum in the Zindorf camp.<sup>802</sup> Džida's claims cannot be verified for the time being, as access to Yugoslav Security Service documents in Bosnia and Herzegovina is severely restricted.

### **The assassination of Vlado Murat**

The aforementioned Vlado Murat, born in 1937, was one of the Mehlem attackers who received higher prison sentences; he was sentenced to three and a half years in prison.<sup>803</sup> The Council for the Identification of Post-War Victims of the Communist System Abroad, which operated from 1992 to 1999 within the Commission for the Identification of War and Post-War Victims the Republic of Croatia, established that Murat was murdered in 1967 in the FRG by the Yugoslav Security Service.<sup>804</sup> Murat's assassination also supports the claim that communist Yugoslavia wanted to deal with the most prominent Mehlem attackers on its own.

### **Assassinations and abductions of Croatian émigrés not connected with violent anti-Yugoslav actions**

The Yugoslav communist regime dealt in the most brutal manner abroad not only with those Croat émigrés who clearly advocated the use of violence in anti-Yugoslav actions, some of which turned words into deeds, but also with those it considered dangerous for other forms of activity. Miljenko Dabo-Peranić was a Croatian émigré living in Paris, where he edited the magazine *La Croatie* in the mid-1960 s. He collaborated with Luburić and participated very

<sup>802</sup> *Obrana*, no. 75-76, 1967, 2.

<sup>803</sup> HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 1, šifra [Code] 10.3, broj [Number] 2, predmet [Item] 1, Spisak pripadnika HKB – učesnika u napadu na predstavništvo SFRJ u Mehlemu 29.11 1962., s generalijama i visinom kazne [List of the members of the CCB – participants in the attack on the SFRY mission in Mehlem on November 29, 1962, with generals and amount of the sentence], 2.

<sup>804</sup> Vukušić, *Tajni rat Udbe protiv hrvatskoga iseljništva* [Udba's secret war against Croatian emigrants], 219.



actively with him in elaborating the idea of reconciliation and cooperation between Croatian nationalists and communists with the aim of creating an independent Croatian state. In the documents of the Yugoslav Security Service, there is no information about his activities that would indicate that he was actively working on the preparation and implementation of violent actions against Yugoslavia; quite the contrary – these documents suggest that he was fully devoted to intellectual work. Nevertheless, on January 10, 1965, a department of the Yugoslav Security Service in the city of Rijeka made a proposal to assassinate him as a steadfast opponent of Yugoslavia.<sup>805</sup> Ivo Rojnica was a former Ustasha official who fled to Argentina after the World War II and became a prominent and wealthy industrialist there, financing a number of cultural actions and projects of Croatian political emigration.<sup>806</sup> At the end of December 1964, the Split branch of the Yugoslav Security Service suggested that the confiscated passport be returned to his mother so that she could meet her son in Trieste, during which Rojnica was to be kidnapped or assassinated.<sup>807</sup>

But all did not remain in the planning. In September 1967, the Yugoslav Security Service kidnapped the priest Krunoslav Draganović, one of the most prominent Croatian émigrés in Western Europe. Draganović excelled especially in the period immediately after the end of the World War II, when he helped thousands of Croatian political refugees arriving in Italy in various ways. Belgrade was very well informed about Draganović's activities and the fact that he was not, for example, a supporter of attacks on Yugoslav diplomatic missions, as his close associate was an informant of the Yugoslav Security Service, said Miroslav Varoš, who even manipulated Draganović to some extent.<sup>808</sup>

Particularly irritating for the Yugoslav communist regime were the activities of the Croatian émigré organization Honorary Bleiburg Platoon (HBP), which since the mid-1950s regularly commemorated the massacres of captured ISC soldiers and Croatian civilians at the end of the war by the Yugoslav Army. Moreover, it is possible that Draganović's work in investigating the aforementioned massacres and collecting a large number of survivors' testimonies was one of the reasons for his abduction. To return to the HBP: the Yugoslav Security Service tried to prevent its activities through various means of pressure, and the most brutal evidence of these efforts was the assassination of HBP secretary Niko Martinović in 1975, about three months before the 30th anniversary of the "Bleiburg Tragedy". According to the available evidence, Martinović was not killed because he planned and carried out violent actions against

<sup>805</sup> HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosje [Personal File] 120657 Dabo-Peranić Miljenko, 141–143.

<sup>806</sup> Rojnica, *Susreti i doživljaji* [Meetings and adventures], vol. 1–3.

<sup>807</sup> HR-HDA-1561, Osobni dosje [Personal File] 084663 Rojnica Ivan, 54.

<sup>808</sup> See in detail about Draganović in: Akmadža, *Krunoslav Draganović: iskazi komunističkim istražiteljima* [Krunoslav Draganović: testimonies to communist investigators].

Yugoslavia, but because the latter wanted to prevent the commemoration in Bleiburg in some way.<sup>809</sup>

The Yugoslav Security Service also abducted a Croatian émigré, the half-blind, sickly poet and philosopher Vjenceslav Čižek, who was granted political asylum in the FRG and lured and abducted in Italy in mid-1977. He was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment in Yugoslavia and was released in 1988 after pleas and protests to the Yugoslav authorities by numerous Western politicians and intellectuals. Although the Belgrade regime very clumsily tried to link Čižek to incitement to anti-Yugoslav violence, Yugoslav Security Service documents on Čižek's activities indicate that he was abducted because of his propaganda activities and his high-quality texts, which successfully deconstructed a number of myths of Yugoslav communism. Yugoslavia was particularly uncomfortable with his activities during the Conference on European Security and Cooperation, held in Belgrade in 1977. Yugoslavia was one of the signatories to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, which required signatories to respect human rights, and Čižek, who had been a political refugee since 1972, was one of the many living proofs that these rights had been violated in Yugoslavia. By abducting Čižek, the Yugoslav communist regime prevented further embarrassment on the world political stage (signatories to the Act were both the USA and USSR).<sup>810</sup>

## Conclusion

The Yugoslav communist regime used, among other methods, assassination and kidnapping in its fight against the Croatian political emigration to the West. Belgrade's official explanation was that such events were consequences of clashes between émigrés, while the prevailing public opinion was that only those émigrés who worked on planning and carrying out violent actions against Yugoslavia were killed, and this attitude still prevails among the Croatian public. Communist Yugoslavia, however, used the most radical methods of confrontation with those Croatian political emigrants who were not involved in planning and carrying out violent anti-Yugoslav actions, but who, in the opinion of the Belgrade authorities, caused political damage and also in the field of propaganda.

One of the émigrés who did not participate in any activities against Yugoslavia that included a violent component, and who was unsuccessfully assassinated by the Yugoslav Security

<sup>809</sup> Vukušić, *Tajni rat Udbe protiv hrvatskoga iseljništva* [*Udba's secret war against Croatian emigrants*], 318. For more information on the HBP and the activities of the Yugoslav security and diplomatic services against that organization, see: Vukušić, *Čuvari bleiburške uspomene* [*Guardians of the Bleiburg Memory*].

<sup>810</sup> HR-HDA-1561, šifra [Code] 4, šifra [Code] 4.1, broj [Number] 229, Neprijateljska delatnost Čižek Vjenceslava [Enemy activity of Čižek Vjenceslav].

Service in 1965, was Berislav Đuro Deželić. In addition to him, his wife and pregnant daughter were also seriously injured. Deželić's most prominent involvement as a émigré in the FRG was as the head of the Committee that led the organization of the defense of Croatian émigrés who found themselves on trial in Bonn for the attack on the Yugoslav mission in the town of Mehlem. On that occasion, part of the building in which the representative office was located was demolished and set on fire, and a Yugoslav official was killed in a firefight. This event, the investigation and the trial had a considerable impact in the West German, Yugoslav and European public, then the impact on the relations between the FRG and Yugoslavia and on the Croatian political emigration.

The aforementioned events, although condemned by a large part of the media in the FRG and Europe, were nevertheless quite a blow to the prestige of Yugoslavia, i.e. it showed that the regime failed to resolve the so-called national question in this multinational state, with which its interwar version wrestled unsuccessfully. Moreover, the regime failed to discredit the Mehlem attackers as Ustasha and fascists, as it did with the émigrés who were in some way associated to the ISC regime, since they were young men and most of them were children during the World War II. It was another defeat for the Yugoslav communist regime, because those who were exposed to a highly ideologized school and media system, which obviously did not influence a part of Croatian youth, rose up against the regime in the most radical way. The demonization of Deželić as Ustasha was also unsuccessful, as Deželić had been a supporter of the CPP since the mid-1920 s and did not actively support the ISC regime during the World War II. Also during the trial, both the defendants and other émigrés, and especially the Committee led by Deželić, spoke about the numerous crimes committed by the Yugoslav communists at the end of the war against members of the Croatian people, as well as on various forms of ideological and political repression of opponents of the regime, emphasizing the latter as a constant and fundamental feature of communist Yugoslavia, which was portrayed to the world as the leader of pacifism at the head of the Non-Aligned Movement and a state that developed a humane variant of socialism, unlike, for example, the USSR.

The collection of financial aid for the defense of the Mehlem attackers in the trial was carried out on several continents, and had the character of a temporary integrative factor in the divided and partially conflicted Croatian political emigration. The defense Committee included representatives of various Croatian émigré organizations, and numerous prominent émigrés from Europe and the North and South America visited Deželić and the Mehlem attackers in the pre-trial prison. This happened at a time when the trend of division in Croatian political emigration was temporarily halted, that is, when opposing trends prevailed. In 1962, a part of the political emigration was united in the form of an umbrella organization called Croatian National Council. Its leadership worked hard to win over the CLM, the largest émigré organization, and the CPP, which after Maček's death no longer advocated Croatia remaining in the

Yugoslav state after the fall of communism. One of the main goals of the Yugoslav Security Service was to break any kind of unity among Croatian political emigrants, which is why the events described above caused some concern among the Yugoslav authorities.

The attack in Mehlem and a certain homogenization of the émigrés led to more determined anti-Yugoslav activities by a part of the political emigration. Thus, protests in front of Yugoslav embassies and consulates on the most important Yugoslav national holiday, Day of the Republic (29 November), the date of the Mehlem attack, became a tradition to express the attitude of a part of the Croatian people that this date is not a national holiday for them, but the date of the foundation of the state that oppresses and persecutes them. The Mehlem attack also marked the beginning of the use of violence by a part of the Croatian political emigration in anti-Yugoslav activities. Although attacks on Yugoslav diplomatic missions and attempts to carry out diversions in Yugoslavia and even to incite an uprising did not seriously shake the Belgrade regime, they nevertheless complicated Yugoslavia's struggle with Croatian political emigration. The Yugoslav regime had to start paying even more attention to defending its external borders, securing diplomatic missions and monitoring the more radical part of Croatian political emigration, in which it had to invest considerable human and material resources.

Although the Mehlem attackers were sentenced to imprisonment, Belgrade was not satisfied with the size of the sentences, nor did it succeed in obtaining a ban on the political and propaganda activities of Croatian émigrés in the FRG. Due to its totalitarian character and the fact that a part of the Croatian population, both at home and abroad, advocated the creation of an independent and democratic Croatian state, the Yugoslav communist regime suppressed any form of discontent in the country and tried to render the most prominent protagonists of anti-Yugoslav and anti-communist activities abroad incapable of acting. Belgrade was obviously dissatisfied with the overall attitude of the FRG authorities towards the Mehlem attackers and Croatian political emigration in general, and it can be assumed that it was also concerned because of the aforementioned processes – homogenization and radicalization – in Croatian political emigration triggered by the events in Mehlem and Bonn. By organizing the assassination of Deželić, and in the context of the impossibility of taking revenge on the most prominent Mehlem attackers who were in German custody, communist Yugoslavia tried to kill several birds with one stone. First, to send a message that it would respond to any attack with the same action. Second, to eliminate a person whose name was identified with events that caused some damage to its international reputation. And thirdly, to eliminate the person who was one of the integrative factors of Croatian political emigration of temporary character. The fact that Deželić was in no way involved in planning or carrying out violent anti-Yugoslav actions was irrelevant to the Belgrade regime.

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## SAŽETAK

### **Neuspjeli pokušaj atentata jugoslavenske službe sigurnosti na obitelj Deželić u SR Njemačkoj 1965.**

**Sažetak:** U članku se analizira neuspjeli pokušaj atentata jugoslavenske komunističke službe sigurnosti na hrvatskog emigranta Berislava Đuru Deželića i njegovu obitelj u Saveznoj Republici Njemačkoj 1965. godine. Neslužbeni stav jugoslavenskog komunističkog režima bio je da su stradali (u inozemstvu) samo oni politički protivnici koji su bili angažirani u nasilnim anti Jugoslavenskim akcijama. Na temelju dokumenata jugoslavenske službe sigurnosti dokazuje se da Deželić nije bio uključen u takve aktivnosti, već da ga je jugoslavenski režim pokušao ubiti zbog isključivo nenasilnog političkog rada.

**Ključne riječi:** Hrvatski emigranti, Berislav Đuro Deželić, komunistička Jugoslavija, politički atentat, Savezna Republika Njemačka