

Interview with eavesdropped journalist Ivica Đikić

THE OMNIPOTENCE OF SECRET SERVICES IN CREATING LIES

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When the coalition of so-called democratic parties came into power in 2000, they allowed access to the files of 126 journalists, which were diligently gathered by intelligence services throughout the previous, Tuđman's decade. The journalists skimmed through their files with disgust, and the entire story ended therewith. No one was found responsible. And then, when everyone thought that such practices were the matter of the past, there came an outburst of a fresh affair last October, when the agents of Croatian Counter-Intelligence Agency (POA) threatened and blackmailed free-lance journalist Helena Puljiz in the attempt to make her become their informer - to inform on President Mesić himself. In the sequence of events that followed, the chief of the Service, Joško Podbevšek, was compelled to offer his resignation.

Podbevšek was a successor of Franjo Turek, who resigned in March last year, and whose misdeeds are now coming to the surface. In early February, Zagreb weekly *Globus* publicised presentation details on the case of fugitive General Gotovina, and on the arrest of the Hague indictee Ivica Rajić, which was presented a year ago by then-chief of POA, Turek, in front of the political top of the state. Turek issued accusations on cooperation with foreign intelligence officers against former police director Ranko Ostojić and several police officials, as well as a group of journalists: Ivica Đikić of *Feral*, Gordan Malić of *Globus*, Željko Peratović of *Vjesnik*, Boris Pavelić of *Novi List*, and Davor Butković, Mario Kavain and Ivanka Toma of *Jutarnji List*.

This scandal remained in the news up until spring last year, when Prime Minister Sanader denied that the presentation ever happened, while President Mesić confirmed that it really happened, but it contained no proof of any eavesdropping or law violations. However, the documents that leaked into the public earlier this month reveal that, in addition to the residents of Croatia, the surveillance list also included the officials of the Hague Tribunal, State Department and British Embassy.

The allegations stated by former POA chief Franjo Turek charge the journalists of having deliberately, and in an organised and coordinated way, launched misinformation that the fugitive General Gotovina was in Croatia, with the aim of discrediting state institutions, and aggravating and slowing down the admission of Croatia into European integration processes.

The Hague indictee Ivica Rajić, who enjoyed the protection of certain intelligence circles, was arrested during the mandate of police chief Ostojić. The policemen who carried out the operation of arrest are accused of anti-state activity in Turek's report. This same accusation includes journalists, claiming that their aim is to slow down the road of Croatia to Europe, although the slightest hint of anything like that cannot be found in their texts. Furthermore – as the most important point of the entire story - Franjo Turek came to his inferences and serious accusations only after the analysis of their telephone call listings!

For this reason, Mediaonline has endeavoured to interview one of the targeted journalists, employed by *The Feral Tribune*, magazine from Split, which has been subjected to extraordinary pressures of authorities ever since it was first established. **"Who is mad in this story, and who is confused (Allusion to usually vulgar saying "Madman chasing a confused man", depicting a chaotic situation (translator's note)?" – was our first question to the proscribed journalist, Ivica Đikić.**

"I believe that very few are mad in this story, while there are many confused. I think it would be senseless to say that someone did something in this story because of his madness. That is not correct. This story is all about the fact that, after the changes in political top in late 2003, Turek wanted to keep his position of POA's chief. He reckoned that Sanader (Croatian Prime Minister) would adopt an anti-Hague position. However, when his calculations turned out to be wrong, he decided to play on the card of assembling a paranoid construction, with a couple of Croatian citizens presented as responsible for international pressures on Croatia caused by Gotovina case, i.e. the pressures of international community to make Croatia arrest the fugitive General and hand him over to the Hague Tribunal. In his case, I believe, that is the point. Many are confused, and so am I, too. I simply cannot understand how I ever got into that Turek's construction. I believe that other colleagues that got there are also confused. I think that the only persons who are not confused are President Mesić and Prime Minister Sanader, who are well aware what all this is about, but for some reason – maybe for the reason of national security – they do not want to talk about it".

- Neither Sanader nor Mesić reacted after the Turek's presentation. Sanader denied that it ever happened, while Mesić did not find anything illegal therein. Is the public of Croatia mature enough to ask them to explain their behaviour in this case?

"I think that the public has already asked that question, but the matter is no longer up to the public, or journalists, but only to Mesić and Sanader. I have no doubts that Turek proceeded according to the law in everything he did; he produced the listings of our telephone calls because he was legally entitled to do so. This part is not interesting any more – what remains interesting is

only the question whether or not Mesić and Sanader would give a statement that the document produced by Franjo Turek and POA is irrelevant, that the paranoid and senseless construction should be destroyed and no longer kept in POA archives, offering sincere apologies to people who were labelled as the enemies of the state and conspirators against Croatia, for all the things that document blamed on them. This is the only way for this story to have a positive ending, while all these investigations, the parliamentary board established to deal with this case only, searching for proofs as to whether or not POA proceeded according to the law – all this only means buying time to push the story away into the oblivion”.

- Do you believe that they only produced the listings of your calls, or you perhaps think they also eavesdropped on you?

I would like to believe that they only produced our telephone listings; however, when they did so already, I must admit I would prefer to have been eavesdropped, too. In that case, POA would know what I was talking about with Ranko Ostojić or Gordan Malić, while in the situation as it is now, when they only know that I called someone and that someone called me – they can make whatever constructions they like and give free rein to their imagination”.

- The heads of POA that had to resign, like Turek, or Joško Podbevšek who succeeded him and resigned after the blackmailing affair and the recruitment attempt of journalist Helena Puljiz, clearly show that there's something wrong within that service, primarily with their professionalism. Has the time come for a major clean-up?

The personnel structure of that service is a disaster, and that is where their main problem lies. I believe that, after the power-transfer in 2000, this service, as well as the others, should have attempted to make the same thing Ozren Žunec tried to do in the Intelligence Service of Croatia (HIS). On the first day he appeared there, he sent all the employees home. He told them: *You do not work here any more, and we shall be gradually calling back those people, we assess as suitable to continue working here.* I think that only such a principle would be able to introduce positive changes into intelligence services. To send them all home, and call back those who do their jobs properly, who are adequately educated, and who were not recruited through nepotism...”

- When Račan and Mesić failed to do so, will Sanader and Mesić manage to make a deeper cut in POA, and not only replace the first man?

“The problem with both Sander and Mesić – and even bigger was the problem with Ivica Račan and Goran Granić, who was intelligence service coordinator in the earlier mandate – is in the fact that they sort of shrink from secret services, they perceive them as something unclean,

conspirative, full of sinister types... Well, I could agree with that, too, but I am neither the President nor Prime Minister of the state. A president or a prime minister must deal with secret services, however repulsive they might find it to do so. We shall never be admitted to EU with shabby services. The problem Croatia has is not only the fugitive General Gotovina. The problem of Croatia is the situation in these services, which have not managed to find a single relevant trail of Gotovina in three and a half years. The problem is also its legal system, which is in a total chaos, and which drives journalists to prison, as happened to our colleague Ljubica Letinić... Both Račan's and these authorities have shown the lack of interest into whether or not secret services are doing their job, whether or not legal system is doing its job..."

- When Račan was prime minister, he publicly said that he usually threw POA reports to garbage bin...

"Can that be taken as a serious statement of a prime minister? I see no serious prime minister, nor a serious secret service, nor a serious state there... Not even to mention the example when, on 1 March last year, Turek presented the information to Mesić and others, which described me, among others, as a foreign spy; nevertheless, after that I met President Mesić almost regularly every week, making interviews for the book on his political biography!? Any normal state would not allow me to come at a three-kilometre distance from the president, after the secret service had labelled me as a spy of a foreign state! This only tells how unserious all that was: president of the state is not taking secret service reports into account, while the chief of secret service fails to resign after the president continues his scheduled meetings with the person he had marked as a foreign spy".

- What is that intelligence society for, than?

"Maybe these people are really doing something, but we know them only by these affairs. We have never heard that POA ever obtained information that helped seize 500 kg of cocaine, we have never heard that any of their information lead to the detention of five narco-mafia dealers ... This reveals that something is really wrong, but no one wants to interfere..."

- No-one was pronounced responsible for 126 journalists' dossiers produced at Tuđman's times...

"No, because it was all done according to the law. It was legal to eavesdrop on people on the basis of the orders issued by minister of interior. All the misdeeds done by our authorities in the last 60 years have been legal..."

- Now we are stepping on the ground of political responsibility...

“We have to talk about that, too. We shall not be able to generally solve the matter, if we focus only Turek. He is not relevant any more. What we also have to include into our discussions, are the responsibilities of law-makers and politicians who were in charge of these secret services. This is the only way for us to encourage changes into the minds of common citizens, but also into the minds of those working in secret services. There should be discussions about political responsibility... Consider the situation where the law entitles and obliges Croatian telecom or VIP to, if POA requests so, provide the listing of your telephone calls, without any explanation and without court order. This means the violation of privacy. I could have called a hot-line from my telephone, too...Such laws are freaky”

- Let us imagine that this interview of ours is also being listened. What message would you like to get across to the dear listeners, wherever they were?

“I would only tell them that they’ve been engaged in a senseless business. It is not wise to eavesdrop on the conversations of people who write texts. Whenever I learn anything relevant, I write it down. So, do not listen to my telephone, simply read my texts”.

- Is the difference between the proscribed journalists, and the intelligence officers that pronounced them spies, in the fact that the former write about things they know, and the latter about things they do not know?

“That exactly is the difference. I double-check everything I write down, and I firmly stand behind it. The problem with them is that they hear things from various squealers, through conversations in café-bars; they buy into all that their paid informers sell them – and include it into their reports. In my opinion, it is entirely sick to do so. Journalists are getting monetary and prison sentences for publicising unconfirmed, even though quite benign information. These spies can write whatever they like and include it into official state reports, without ever being called to answer for that. I find that practice nearly insane. If they send unsubstantiated and unconfirmed information to the head of the state that seven journalists work for foreign intelligence services, I believe they should answer for that”.

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