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DREISBACH: This is Tristan Dreisbach with Innovations for Successful Societies (ISS). I am speaking with Mr. (Jozo) Rados in Zagreb, Croatia. First of all I'm curious if you could just give me a little bit of information before 2000, before you started at the Ministry of Defense. What was your background and how did you end up with this job?

RADOS: *For eight years before, I was a member of the Committee for Internal Policy and National Security. It was a committee of the Croatian Parliament but lacked the possibility of dealing too much with the army because the military, the Ministry of Defense had everything in their hands, as they did in time of war from 1992 to 1995. It was period of peaceful integration of Eastern Slavonia, so it was a time when Parliament didn't have any big role regarding the Ministry of Defense or the military. I became a member of that committee because I went to military school during the time of the former Yugoslavia. I was in the military gymnasium in secondary school in Zagreb and after that, three years in the technical military academy in Zagreb but I didn't finish it. Really, I wasn't a real soldier. But it was my qualification to become a member of the Parliamentary Committee for Internal Policy and National Security.*

Maybe the reason for that was that other people did not have even such an experience or connection with the military and national security.

DREISBACH: So it was a time when civilians in general—.

RADOS: *But after eight years being a member of that special committee, specialized for police and for defense, it was somehow logical to be a candidate for post of the minister of defense, or minister of internal affairs. Finally the decision and agreement in the coalition decided I should be minister of defense.*

DREISBACH: So thinking back to 2000 when you're preparing to start this job, what were the big problems in the Defense Secretariat that you saw? What were the main challenges that you needed to confront?

RADOS: *We knew that the military was absolutely out of control of Parliament. We knew that some kind of different criminal activities were going on in the Ministry of Defense because if there is an army which was a winning army, an army which won in a war without control, it is very probable that such an army would go through different kind of deformations.*

We knew that because of some Croatian media, in that period, ~~it was~~ were relatively open and free and there was a lot of issues open to the public on different kinds of deformation of the military. Of course it was very clear what to do, to put the Ministry of Defense and the army under democratic control, to organize the whole system in accordance to more or less a standard solution, very famous solution from the European point of view. We had different kinds of experiences of the army, the political positions—old democratic countries and new democratic countries at that time because such other countries had experiences of transformation, other central European countries, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic—so it was very clear what to do, that means to put the military under democratic control, organize the Ministry of Defense and military in accordance to basic democratic rules and of course to clean the ministry from all bad things that happened there between 1995 and 2000. I think these five years were crucial for different deformations of the Croatian Army.

DREISBACH: So when you look at how you and other members of the government put together the specific defense reform agenda, you know, these are the policies you want to start implementing from day one. How did that agenda come together? You mentioned that you were looking at other examples of countries that have gone through similar things in central Europe. Was there some kind of document or anything that you could look to and say, "This is what our government is going to do in terms of defense reform"? How did you get these ideas for specific reforms that you were going to implement?

RADOS: *I thought it was more or less clear what to do because we had the current kind of experiences. Of course some positions were not so clear. It was clear that the Ministry of Defense has to be under the control of Parliament. It was clear that the minister of defense shouldn't be a military official, it had to be a politician. It was clear that the Ministry of Defense and military should be open to the public in different ways, through the media, to the citizens generally.*

DREISBACH: So more transparency?

RADOS: *Yes and that everything that was going on in the Ministry of Defense and in the military should be under stricter control of the parliamentary committee. When I was a member of that committee I never entered the Ministry of Defense.*

DREISBACH: You never went into the building?

RADOS: *No, it was impossible. When I became the minister of defense the first thing I did was to organize a meeting of the parliamentary committee on the premises of the Ministry of Defense with general chiefs of staff.*

DREISBACH: You wanted to set a precedent like, "Now we can actually access—"?

RADOS: *Yes but some members of Parliament misused that meeting and immediately revealed to the public all the information which I gave to them. It was a question of political culture and responsibility. If you are a member of that committee and the minister disclosed to you some information it is not the idea to go immediately to the media and tell them everything that is bad in the Ministry of Defense. It is information to you as a member of Parliament and that committee. It is not information for the media. But it was a process we opened. I think now it is better than it was. Maybe we had to go through such a period.*

DREISBACH: A learning period?

RADOS: Yes.

DREISBACH: From what I understand one problem in the military and the ministry is that things had been very politicized where you had one party that had been in power for basically the entire history of independent Croatia. I think President (Franjo) Tudjman had a very personal control over the military. You had certain officers and, as I understand it, members of the ministry as well who had very personal loyalties to the outgoing HDZ (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica or HDZ) government. Was it an actual problem? Did you have to face people who you had to work with in the military, the ministry who had very deep political affiliations with the outgoing government?

RADOS: *Yes, it was because in the years before, generals were on the party list on elections. Some of them were members of political parties but we declared very clearly that military officers cannot be members of political party. After that we*

put that in our law. We prepared two main laws regarding the military, the Law on Defense and the Law on Military Service. We were preparing these laws for two and a half years. After two and a half years these laws were adopted and the reforms of the military, including a reduction of the military, were prepared.

That was the time when I resigned. After making all these preparations, adopting the laws in Parliament, having public discussion and everything, I resigned after two and a half years. That is another issue to talk about. It was a period in which everything was more or less clear. I was the most responsible person for that. I had support from the government. The prime minister didn't take too much interest in the Ministry of Defense.

DREISBACH: Why was that? It seems like this was a very important institution at the time.

RADOS: *Because everything was okay from perspective of PM. For example, the Ministry of Defense had eight assistant ministers in that period. Immediately after two and a half months six of them, who were mostly generals very close to the former ruling party and President Tadjman, were dismissed. Instead of them, new civilian assistant ministers were nominated.*

DREISBACH: Was that your personal decision, your personal authority, like you could decide that those guys needed to go?

RADOS: *Yes. It was very clear, but it wasn't so difficult because some of them or maybe all of them were involved in different kinds of bad doings, it was public knowledge. The public was conscious of that because some media was not under the control of President Tadjman and there was some independent media. I did it relatively easily, but without support from the Government and the President of Republic, the newly elected, it maybe would have been impossible. But I had full support from the Government and the President of Republic.*

We opened a new chapter in our relations because standard problems in our military were happening in other countries too, the relations in between Ministry of Defense, the Chief of the general staff, and the President of Republic. But that question came later. The basic idea was to change old generals from not only all posts in the Ministry of Defense but from the posts of assistant ministers

DREISBACH: You mentioned also this decision that officers could no longer hold basically party positions and run for office. Was that something that you needed legislation to change or was that something you had the authority to sort of mandate as the minister? Could you say, "From this day on officers cannot hold these political positions anymore"?

RADOS: *I think we adopted legislation that regulated it when we changed the law. But it were basic principles that were publically declared by not only myself but by the government generally. The public mostly accepted that. So we didn't have any big problems regarding that. When we adopted new laws on defense and military service, we put these solutions into new laws. But I think in time we decided it was only our political declaration.*

DREISBACH: So in the beginning you just sort of declared it and then later you put together the legislation to make that happen?

RADOS: Yes.

DREISBACH: Besides these top positions, these deputy or assistant ministers that you had to replace, was there other work to do like deeper in the ministry in trying to depoliticize it and make it a less biased institution? Were you looking at personnel lower in the institution as well?

RADOS: *It was a question in that period because if you take revenge once you will get revenge back. So my political approach was moderate. That meant we dealt with the the highest positions in the ministry but we did not go deeper immediately, to give a chance to people who were on the third level of administration, minister, assistant ministers and after that the first people under the assistant ministers. I gave opportunity to people, to my new assistants, to control.*

“Do these people do good things or not? How do they behave?” These were questions in Croatian politics, not only in the Ministry of Defense, but especially in the Ministry of Defense. How deep to go with these changes. Still now it is a question in Croatian politics. When a new government comes how deep it should go in changing officials in a ministry - only the top level or go deeply? It is still unsolved puzzle until now. My decision was moderate, and I was criticized by some radical anti-HDZ elements that I was too mild and I did not go deep enough. But I think I was right.

Of course, after two years, half of them, in accordance to regular procedures, have been changed but not because they were closer to HDZ. People at those levels very often declare new loyalties when a new government comes in. Those people declared a loyalty to the new government. Maybe they are members of HDZ, maybe not; I don't know. These people had the ability to accommodate.

So after two years my assistants came to judge whether people were doing good things or not and they proposed to me to replace them or not. I mostly followed the proposals of my assistants. I didn't go deeper in the resources of my assistants. I didn't do that in regard to the chief of general staff. It was my procedure. That means full confidence in people who were nominated by myself. What they proposed to me I regularly did including changes in the areas of responsibility.

DREISBACH: Okay, the chief of general staff—what was the relationship between the minister of defense and the chief of general staff? Was that something the president was able to affect? Was he choosing who was appointed to the chief of general staff? Did the minister of defense have a role in that process? What was sort of the interplay between the general staff and the minister of defense?

RADOS: *It wasn't a problem. The chief of the general staff was nominated by the president of the republic. The minister was not officially involved. Now, the solution is that he is nominated by the government and appointed by the president of republic, with an obtained opinion of parliamentary committee for defense. The minister of defense doesn't have any official role in that process except as member of government.*

DREISBACH: In 2000 you had constitutional amendments—I know they had some effect on the power of the presidency and it sort of set the stage for changing a little bit of the way the political system worked in Croatia. I'm just curious, did you have any involvement in those constitutional amendments or were you focused more on legislation that was specific to the Ministry of Defense?

RADOS: *As a politician I was a relatively influential member of my party. My party was a junior partner but a very strong party in the coalition. Of course I was consulted.*

But the leading role in that had the party of the prime minister which was the stronger party. Main change was transfer of authorities from president of republic to the government and the parliament, respectively. Question of less political importance was balance of remaining authorities of president of republic. I think that those changes to the constitution too heavily militarized the position of the president of the republic. I think it was the interest of the prime minister because the minister of defense was from another party.

Our constitution pushed the president of the republic from foreign policy which was the responsibility of the prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs from his party, and gave to the president of the republic—in my understanding—too much remit on the Ministry of Defense and the military.

I think it was wrong but my position wasn't so strong to change that. I was opposed to that solution but I didn't succeed. The leader of my party was a candidate for president, in elections parallel to parliamentary elections, I was chief of his campaign and we lost that race while winning parliamentary elections. Finally these amendments were adopted to the constitution. I think it put in imbalance a position of the president of the republic regarding two main areas of his authorities, foreign affairs and defense. Again, he got too much authority on defense and too little authority on foreign affairs. Until now I think Croatia didn't acquire that balance. It was a wrong step in 2000 and I think now we have a similar situation.

DREISBACH: A really interesting question here is the role that NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) played in this whole reform process. It is interesting as an outside observer I know that there was a legitimate organic movement within the liberal coalition, like you had to change the system in general to make it more democratic and defense was part of that. But then there is also this pressure from outside, from NATO. If Croatia wants to move more to the west, NATO had certain expectations for how Croatia would reform its defense sector.

So from your perspective what was the influence that NATO had and what was your personal involvement with NATO? What kind of officials were you in contact with and what kind of consultations were you having with NATO about the defense reform process?

RADOS: *It was absolutely positive and welcomed by myself and the Ministry of Defense with strong support of Government and President of Republic. Having such a big ally as NATO on your side in making reform was positive because everything that NATO claimed was in accordance with what we wanted. Of course NATO knew better on what to do. So we didn't have any problem and the Ministry of Defense fully accepted NATO advices. It wasn't pressure; it was very good cooperation and useful for the Ministry of Defense.*

We went through that process very quickly. In 2000 Croatia signed the Partnership for Peace and very soon took other steps.

DREISBACH: There is a whole series.

RADOS: *But all the steps which are predicated in the procedure for admitting any country were conducted very quickly with relatively good results. Of course NATO and the Republic of Croatia had political will. The Ministry of Defense followed that pace of political will, which was on both sides with the real technical changes. So the influence of NATO was very useful.*

DREISBACH: Were you going to Brussels to meet with NATO officials? Were they coming to Croatia a lot? How exactly did the personal relationship with you and NATO work? Did you have a lot of personal meetings with officials?

RADOS: *As the minister of defense I was invited to all NATO ministerial meetings in Brussels. Very soon we established our team in NATO headquarters. Different delegations from NATO were coming to Croatia for different topics. I didn't control everything because it was very intensive. Different kinds of delegations went to NATO from the Ministry of Defense, from our military. There were not any problems in regard to the military.*

Although there were people who were more pro-Tudjman and pro-HDZ, we didn't have any problem with some kind of resistance of the military to NATO. It was relatively easy, some kind of political consensus.

DREISBACH: You mentioned that it took your entire mandate, basically two and a half years, to get together the defense reform legislation, the state defense law. So I'm curious, how did that process work? Who was involved in drafting that legislation and was it a contentious process? Was there a lot of disagreement between the parties or between different institutions? Just how exactly did that process of creating the legislation work?

RADOS: *We had normal democratic procedures, which means we made a draft and then opened it for public discussion regarding the new laws, the draft laws. We had different kinds of discussions inside the Ministry of Defense. I think the biggest problem we had was the problem of how to handle the roles of the main players: the president of the republic, the minister or government, who are more or less the same since the minister is a member of government, and the position of the military, of the army and chief of general staff. It was a problem. I wasn't satisfied with that solution. That is one of the reasons I decided to resign.*

The positions of the President of Republic and the position of the general staff were too strong, that was my impression, in relation to the positions of government and minister of defense. I wasn't satisfied with that.

That solution followed the basic standards, although it wasn't the best. In those years in Croatia we had marks from one to five. I said it was 2+. It is not a good idea to open big battles between minister of defense and the president of republic involving the position of the general staff.

Finally I agreed with that and we adopted that law. It was my impression at the time that it wasn't the best one but it was acceptable.

DREISBACH: In that law the president is still the commander-in-chief of the military but the minister of defense does have some kind of command authority, right? He is sort of in the chain of command? What was the compromise solution that resulted? How did the minister's powers change with that legislation?

RADOS: *It was a standard question, "Will the minister of defense be in the command chain or not?" Finally the minister of defense was. I don't know if that has changed in the meantime, but in that first solution the minister of defense was in the command chain. That means that president of republic commands the military through the minister of defense. It was the solution. But there were other questions on the role of the minister of defense, in proposing advancements, new ranks, etc.*

DREISBACH: Promotions?

RADOS: *Promotions. I think that is the logical dispute, it happened in other countries. The president of republic and the military are always some kind of allies against government and minister of defense. Another issue was the position of the military police and the position of military intelligence. Somehow authorities over those two very important parts of the Ministry of Defense or military were too strong in the hands of the military and the president of republic.*

I think, and I thought at that time too, that it was an unbalanced solution. But my impression was that it still was in some kind of general democratic framework. That is the reason I was in favor and I defended those laws in the Croatian Parliament and finally those laws were adopted. But it was 2+ for my understanding in that period.

DREISBACH: One thing I'm curious about is given the interesting political context at that time, were the conservatives consulted in the development of this legislation or was this mainly a product of the government? Was there any effort to include the conservatives in the conversation to make sure that there was a broad political base to support these reforms?

RADOS: *It was a matter of position.*

DREISBACH: The HDZ was out of power. So when your government was in power, putting this legislation together and making these sort of institutional reforms, were you consulting the HDZ in any way? Were you making any effort to get their support for the legislation or was this mainly something that was within the liberal coalition?

RADOS: *It was a procedure. That means we organized a special round table discussion involving all members of the committee. There were members of HDZ who were present of course. They had full access to our drafts. Of course the laws were adopted according to regular procedures. In Croatia that means two readings. During discussions and after, by proposing amendments, HDZ had a full possibility to be involved, to be informed.*

I don't know why, but they mostly agreed with what the government proposed in that period. They had some objectives; they had some proposals. There were some kind of tactics. You adopt some of the opposition proposals although you don't think they are the best, in order to get them involved, to get their support.

In the official process of adopting laws and the new structure of the ministry and the military, we didn't have any big problems with HDZ. But on the other hand, we had problems on the political level. The main problem in Croatia was the problem of cooperation with The Hague Tribunal.

It was the most important problem. They tried to overthrow the government two times during that period on that issue. What we did, including of course the Ministry of Defense as a very important ministry in that regard, was under scrutiny and criticism. But the criticism wasn't expressed in official process of adopting new laws. But on the political level, on the streets, in the media, the Ministry of Defense and I were under strong criticism for some kind of national betrayal because of cooperation with The Hague tribunal especially when we dismissed the secret military service because of wrongdoing. There were 400 people in that service.

In one action we changed 100 of them. We moved them from their positions and put them in different kinds of positions in the Ministry of Defense. It was the idea to divorce them, take and give them other positions outside the secret military service. Of course it was a very big problem in Croatia. They said, "It is against the national interest that the best sons of Croatia, warriors, defenders, the new anti-Croatian government, new anti-Croatian minister without national feeling, is destroying our army and putting our best sons in positions which were weak and low positions." It was a regular political fight in Croatia. But officially the parliamentary party of HDZ did not oppose the new solution and the new laws too much.

Maybe it was because of my openness to them, my cooperation with parliamentary opposition. Sometimes it is very important.

DREISBACH: But this voice of opposition was more coming from outside of Parliament? Was it coming from veterans' groups? Who was the big source of this criticism?

RADOS: *It was of course the HDZ, but also different kinds of veterans' organizations, different kinds of former members of security services, people who were dismissed, different kinds of criminals. HDZ and all these did ... Do you know about the meeting on Riva in Split?*

DREISBACH: What is it?

RADOS: *In 2000, on Split's main square, Riva, there were very big meetings of all spectrum of opposition, including members of official opposition like Mr. (Ivo) Sanader who was the leader of HDZ in that period.*

DREISBACH: And he later became prime minister?

RADOS: *Yes, and other leaders of the opposition, different kinds of veterans, different kinds of retired generals organized meetings with 100,000 people in order to very strongly attack the government for a lack of national feelings, to undo government and try to overthrow the government from the street. It was the first meeting. A second meeting was organized in Zagreb, only having maybe 10,000 people on the main square in Zagreb—Ban Jelacic Square. The title of that meeting was "Their time is up!" basically. "The bell has tolled for them."*

It was the second meeting with low support, only 10,000 people, and it was the end of their attempt to overthrow the government from the streets.

DREISBACH: So in general, other than these two sort of mass protests, there wasn't a serious threat of political opposition? There was criticism of the cooperation with the ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia). Was it mainly responding to the cooperation with The Hague or was it responding to changes within military institutions and trying to downsize the military? What was the greatest source of the protest?

RADOS: *It is not easy to judge but I think the cooperation with The Hague was the biggest source. It was difficult because it was very complicated political and moral issue. I don't think the general approach of the international community toward Croatia was fully justified. It was some kind of politics that tried to balance the responsibilities in order to more easily arrange the whole area of Western Balkans. It was the idea and it was very, very humiliating for Croatia. What they wanted from Croatia, it was really humiliating. We had to open to them everything, all our secret military documents.*

Of course we didn't have any understanding from the opposition. They strongly attacked, although they did the same before and they continued to do that after 2003, even more intensively.

We were a left government, a former communist party was the leading party. My party was liberal party. We were a modern party of citizens. But we were in a coalition with former communists and perceived us as a communist government. For example, during one session of government on St. Mark's Square, there was a meeting of some 1,000, maybe 2,000 or 3,000 protesters led by Tomislav Mercep, who was some kind of military commander during the war, later accused for criminal doings and I think sentenced for war crimes. That mass of people, shouted "red gang, red gang." It was very difficult and very dangerous because we had only two or three security officers in the government building. Different kinds of people were present at the square. Probably some of them were armed, some were drunk, some were crazy, and some were criminals.

Of course, they always used in such kind of meetings war invalids. The use of war invalids, as political instrument is still very present in Croatia. One of the main reasons of the protest was the cooperation with The Hague. We tried to explain to the public that they did the same and that Croatia is in such an international position that it needs to do it, although it was not just that it was in our national interest and the opposition subsequently continued to do that once they come back to power.

It was very clear, but uneasy to explain it to the public. You know it is an extremely emotional issue. This was not easy to explain to people who lost their hands and legs in a war, who defended their country, internationally recognized country, which was occupied, that some must be transferred to The Hague. Of course real war criminals and political opposition, used that feeling of the people who couldn't understand what is really going on. For me, it was the most difficult task I did during the mandate. It was far more difficult than the work on new laws and reforms of the Ministry of Defense.

DREISBACH: Was this something that as minister of defense did you have specific institutional responsibilities regarding the cooperation with The Hague? Was this something that was mainly a decision made by the presidency or were you actually having to say, "This official or this officer has to be removed and has to be sent"? Who had the main authority for actually prosecuting officers or extraditing them to The Hague? Was that in the Ministry of Defense or was it the Ministry of Justice or who had the chief institutional responsibility?

RADOS: *It was the government. The government had the special governmental Council for Cooperation with The Hague which consisted of the deputy prime minister as the leading person and the minister of defense, minister of justice, minister of foreign affairs, and minister of interior. A member of that committee was Mr. (Tomislav) Karamarko who was the chief of the highest coordinating body of secret services. It was the Office for National Security. He, as leader of that Office for National Security, was a member of that governmental council.*

The Ministry of Defense of course was under special pressure because some of the people who were suspected and going to different kinds of talks with investigators were members of the active military, including the chief of general staff and the main inspector, two highest military officials.

DREISBACH: Like the inspector general?

RADOS: *Yes, inspector general. It is the person who inspects the military and he is responsible not to chief of general staff but to the minister of defense. It was General (Ante) Gotovina. A lot of other generals and military officers with diverse ranks were under different kinds of investigations by The Hague.*

It was not easy because soldiers and officers knew what was going on. It was a special psychological atmosphere in the Ministry of Defense and of course the minister of defense had to know that and to try to lead the ministry even with those problems. The additional problem was that The Hague asked for different kinds of documents including the most secret documents we had. It was some kind of battle that we had with The Hague Tribunal, searching for documents they asked for, copying these documents and giving it to them, but for some special documents we only gave them possibility to see.

DREISBACH: But they couldn't have a copy?

RADOS: *No, they were satisfied with copies. But they wanted copies of all documents, even those we refused to give. Once main general prosecutor, Mrs. (Carla) Del Ponte came to Zagreb, she said to the prime minister and the deputy prime minister, "The Ministry of Defense doesn't want to give us all documents we need." Sometimes The Hague asked for documents we didn't have. What they asked from the Croatian Ministry of Defense and Croatian government was never asked before from any army, especially when we know that Croatia led a just war, we defended our country, we won that war.*

We knew that it was the general political orientation of the international community, in any contact with NATO, with the European Union (EU), with OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), cooperation with The Hague was the main claim.

DREISBACH: I read about this issue with I think it was twelve active and retired generals who wrote an open letter basically criticizing the government's policies at this time. I know that they were forced into retirement. I was curious, was that chiefly a decision of President (Stjepan) Mesic to force them into retirement or were you involved in that decision as well?

RADOS: *It was a decision of President Mesic without consulting anybody outside his office.*

DREISBACH: Really?

RADOS: Yes.

DREISBACH: Do you think you should have been consulted in that?

RADOS: *Of course. At that moment I wasn't in Zagreb, I was on liberal conference on the European defense with ministers of defense who were liberals. That means it was a party conference of my party and it was a regular job I had to do*

We discussed common European security and defense policy which was established in these years. So it was my regular job. I was at Tenerife when I publically said, "I am not satisfied with such procedures of the president of the republic. I support the decision but it is not good to make such an important decision without any consultation with the minister of defense." The president of government said the same thing, he wasn't consulted either. The president of

republic, who very often gave funny comments in public, commented my statement with following words: "Minister of defense was at Tenerife partying at a party meeting. What was he doing at Tenerife when he had to be at the Ministry of Defense? He went to Tenerife using the money of the Ministry of Defense."

Mr. Mesic was very interesting, making jokes of everything. For example, one of my very big proposals was the abolition of mandatory military service. After six months in the Ministry of Defense, having discussions and consultations with different officials and seeing what was going on, seeing what was the general strategic situation in the region and on our way to NATO, I found it was unnecessary.

DREISBACH: Because the military was already way bigger than you needed it to be?

RADOS: *Conscripts hampered the function of a very big professional army in multiple ways. First political discussion about the matter was on the state body, -Council of Defense and National Security, which consisted of president of republic, the prime minister, the main ministers, and directors of the secret services.*

I explained my proposal, why it was good for Croatia to abolish mandatory military service, conscript service. The president asked me, "But you mentioned Great Britain and Australia and the United States (US) that they did that, but which of the continental countries did that?" I said, "Belgium and the Netherlands decided to do that and France is in preparation to do that. It is the trend in the European Union and I think very soon all other countries will follow that way."

When I mentioned Belgium and the Netherlands he said "Oh, now it is clear why (Adolf) Hitler ran over them in two days." This was the president's style. Abolition of prescript service which happened few years later in Croatia, helped neighboring countries, especially Serbia, to do the same.

DREISBACH: I know that you set a goal sometime during your mandate of downsizing the military. I think it had 44,000 people or something like that; I'm not sure of the exact number, but it was clear that it had to be much smaller. Did you set a specific target during your mandate? Was there any progress made in the actual downsizing or was that something that was implemented after you left the ministry?

RADOS: *There was a special problem in the Ministry of Defense that from 44,000 people more than 4,000 of them were on a long sick leave. In Europe sick leave is much more a liberal concept than in the United States. For instance in the United States you can be on sick leave for a day or two when you're really sick. In Europe one can be much longer on sick leave, but there are also rules, laws on how long one person can be on sick leave. Four thousand soldiers were on sick leave against Croatian law. I made one administrative procedure in cooperation with my assistants. In one year we forced them all either to leave the Ministry of Defense if they were so sick or come back. Most of them decided to accept the pensions and left the Ministry of Defense.*

During the preparation of laws we prepared a third law, a special law on retirement of military policemen and similar public servants. It was the so called "6A article." That 6A law which adopted was about how to retire all the people who were not suitable for service anymore. There were complicated procedures. When that law was adopted I went to the Ministry of Defense. In accordance to that law, that 6A article, even now the members of the military and members of police and members of secret services are retired in Croatia.

Of course it was to be followed by additional money which the Ministry of Finance had to give to the Ministry of Defense, because if you send the people away you have to give them some severance package.

It was the second reason I left my position of minister of defense. My position was very weak, my party was split. I formed a new party. I was integral in that new party. Being in such position, I decided to end it. The new minister was a member of the main ruling party, the Social Democratic Party, party of the prime minister. The minister of finance immediately gave about 60 million Euros to the Ministry of Defense in order to implement that platform and downsizing.

DREISBACH: That's money you didn't have available when you were minister?

RADOS: *Probably I would have gotten that money but not so immediately and with a bigger fight for that money. But the lady who became minister of defense got immediately 60 million Euros for supporting that process. That was the reason I think my decision to leave was good.*

Of course you always have problems when you have to choose which members of the military need to leave and which don't.

DREISBACH: Which ones have to leave you mean?

RADOS: *Yes, even if you prescribed very clear rules, but you don't have strong institutions, in the implementation you will always make different kinds of mistakes. There were a lot of problems but finally, after I think two or three years, at the end of that mandate, our army was cut in half*

DREISBACH: So we talked about a number of things. Are there any other reforms you would want to highlight from your mandate? Are there any other important defense reforms that we haven't yet discussed?

RADOS: *We prepared a new structure of the Ministry of Defense and a new structure of the general staff. Instead of eight branches in the ministry we decided for four of them. We reduced the number of assistant ministers.*

DREISBACH: So you were also reducing the size of the ministry as well?

RADOS: Yes.

DREISBACH: Were you trying to streamline the way it was organized? What were the problems with the organization before you took over? Was it just sort of a complicated system?

RADOS: *Yes, whole system was too big and too complicated. Part of that was a reduction in military units. We had eight guard brigades. We decided to form four new guard brigades and to reduce the number of military areas. We had six of them and decided to have only three military areas. We established the new position of military police, too.*

A very important job was registration of all military assets.

DREISBACH: Was this like buildings?

RADOS: *Buildings, land. Documents were sent to the government, elaborated with descriptions in which state this building was in, if it was needed for the ministry or not. The government was given a proposal to make a decision on what to do with it, to solve different problems with these buildings because of unclear legal statuses. The JNA (Yugoslav People's Army or Jugoslavenska narodna armija) did what it wanted because the military was above the society, appropriating the land from citizens without clear rules. After the war semi-authoritarian regime did little in that respect, so legal status of assets was unclear.*

In the 150 documents I sent to the government, most of them were unperspective--Now I see that a lot of these buildings and lands are still in the hands of the government, although fifteen years ago it was declared that these buildings are not needed for the Ministry of Defense.

DREISBACH: Things like restructuring the Ministry of Defense and restructuring the army, like reducing the brigades, was that something that needed legislation to be put into force or was that something that you could decide or that the president could decide? Basically like restructuring the Ministry of Defense, was that something that was in the law or was that something where you could decree it?

RADOS: *No, the only three laws we adopted were the basic laws on defense, law on military service, and the law on the retirement of military staff and police. Only these three laws were adopted in a very long procedure. Official procedures in Croatian Parliament took maybe one year. Before that one year of preparation, internal and public discussion and half of the year thinking about what to do in the beginning. In May 2002, that means after two and a half years, three months before I left the ministry, these laws were adopted. No other laws were adopted during that time. Additionally two basic strategies were adopted. Strategy of national security and strategy of defense.*

DREISBACH: By Parliament?

RADOS: *Yes, these were five documents; three laws and two strategies were adopted by Parliament during that period.*

DREISBACH: Is there a defense planning office within the ministry that is doing that defense strategy work? Who is preparing the defense strategy?

RADOS: *All the strategies were prepared in the Ministry of Defense, Unit for Defense Policy, with the cooperation of other branches of MoD and other ministries.*

DREISBACH: I think an interesting question that most countries actually faced is did you have qualified civilians to basically do defense policy work in the ministry? Especially in the context in Croatia you had a lot of officers who were working in the ministry. Ideally you put civilians in as your deputy ministers. Did you have good civilian talent to choose from? Were there civilians that had expertise in defense issues and could do these jobs well in the ministry or was it difficult to find good people?

RADOS: *In the former Yugoslavia, Croatia had a Faculty for Defense and Protection, that was the name of the faculty. At that time a nongovernmental organization (NGO) was formed by former professors. But you know it is one thing to have just done university studies and it is another thing to have the real qualified people who understand what is going on, who understand the new position of the military, and the new position of the security services. There were some competent*

people in the Ministry of Defense who led that job. The military was fully involved in whole process.

DREISBACH: You had officers working for you in the ministry?

RADOS: Yes. There was good cooperation. It was good professional cooperation without any big political influence. Regarding these strategies, we didn't have big problems because these strategies were quite general. It would have been better if maybe these strategies were more concrete, as the strategy must be halfway between being general and being concrete. Regarding the law we faced problems. In the law we prescribed the distribution of powers between the government, the president and the military and it was a problem.

DREISBACH: There were about 5,000 people working in the ministry, is that correct?

RADOS: In that period?

DREISBACH: Yes, in that period?

RADOS: Maybe little less.

DREISBACH: Do you have a rough percentage of how many of those positions were filled by active duty officers? Was it half the positions or more or less that were filled by active duty military?

RADOS: We had a lot of military in the Ministry of Defense.

DREISBACH: Was it mostly officers at the time? I'm just curious because it can vary a lot between countries.

RADOS: No. There were a lot of officers but I think the majority of the staff was civilians. There are some special services. For example under the Ministry of Defense we had territorial administrative branches for dealing with the conscripts, with the different defense obligations of citizens. There were so-called offices for defense. It was part of the civilian administration under the Ministry of Defense. All people who were in that branch of the ministry were civilians.

DREISBACH: You sort of talked about this off and on. Going to 2002, what was basically the reason you left the position? I know there were a lot of things going on in government at that time. I believe one party had left the coalition. What was the reason that you left the ministry in 2002?

RADOS: One of the reasons was that I wasn't satisfied with the laws and my relationship with the president wasn't the best.

DREISBACH: It was difficult?

RADOS: I respected the president but he had a special relationship with the military and I always had to fight to be involved. The second reason was my weak political position, because my party split. I formed a new party at the time and was elected as a leader of that party. It was difficult to handle establishment of new party and at the same time to go through demanding process of implementing reforms in the Ministry of Defense.

The third thing was that I was extremely exhausted after two and a half years. Because of all these reasons my impression was that new minister from the main

ruling party, under patronage and protection of Prime minister, will better implement the reform package.

I am one of two or three ministers in Croatia in the past 25 years who left the post of minister without being forced.

DREISBACH: You went voluntarily?

RADOS: *Yes, it was my decision to go, but circumstances somehow forced me to do that.*

DREISBACH: So after you left, when you looked at the job of Zeljka Antunovic and then when the government changed after the elections, what were your general observations of the way the reforms you had planned were implemented? Were you generally happy with watching the implementation after you left the military? Did you have certain concerns that things should have been done better in some ways? Just in general, what was your sense of how things worked after you left?

RADOS: *Generally I was satisfied. I know that to have good ideas, even good documents and to implement those ideas and plans is another thing. But some things were very good, the Ministry was designed in a good way, the military was downsized. But, for example, my idea of putting very strict rules on personnel policy for promotions and advancement failed. I think that the rules I implemented during these two years were destroyed very quickly because it is a special power of the minister of defense to put in his people, officers who have special personal relationships with the minister. Personal policy is very strong instrument in the hands of any minister, and to give it up isn't easy. I tried to introduce real merit-based procedures for personnel policy, but it seems that it was too short period and I was too ambitious.*

It is the general problem how to make public administration, not just a problem of the Ministry of Defense or Croatia. After all the Ministry of Defense and military is only one small part of the public administration. How to make it more professional, more responsible, and more merit-based in public administration, are problems not only in Croatia but in all new democracies. It needs to be long period. Maybe my ambition to make it a finished process in such a short period was an illusion.

DREISBACH: When you look back is there anything you would have done differently given the chance again? Do you have any regrets? Do you feel like, "Oh, I should have done this differently or I would have implemented this policy in a different way," just in general, as you look back?

RADOS: *Maybe my mistake was that I did not cooperate enough with the chief of general staff. I wasn't sure he was on the same track as I was. The military has specific interests. They have their plans, they want money for these plans, and are not happy when the ministry wants to have control and restriction on their plans and their spending. Maybe if I tried to be closer to the military, to give them tactically more of an impression that they are more involved, it would be better. Maybe I should have sometimes told them that they were right even when they were not right. In that case it would be easier for me to deal with it.*

If they are opposing your proposal and they have the protection of the president of the republic it is a problem. It became a problem especially when the former deputy chief of staff became the main military adviser of the president of the republic. The former member of the secret services, from JNA, and chief of staff commander of the Croatian army during the war, was in a very close and friendly

relationship with the chief of the general staff. The influence of that very capable and very informed general, he was the leading person of the secret military service in the military air forces of JNA - was strong and wasn't always in favor of my work.

DREISBACH: So these personal relationships can be more complicated?

RADOS: *Yes but maybe with more personal tactics and understanding and maybe some more wisdom it would have been possible to breach these relations and make things easier, I don't know.*

DREISBACH: Is there an example of when the general staff was a real obstacle to something you were trying to do or was it just like disagreements over spending and how much money they should be getting?

RADOS: *Generally we communicated fine in the public. It is very dangerous if the public sees that the minister of defense and chief of general staff are in daily disputes and battles. It wasn't seen. But on different kinds of issues we had different views. It exhausted me and probably him too. Once he accused military secret service and Ministry in general that he was under surveillance, but security service only did regular security check. I hadn't been involved in that, had no idea about it, but such things can spoil personal relations.*

DREISBACH: Do you think that they were at all skeptical that this new liberal government had come in? Were they skeptical of what your intentions were, what you were actually trying to do there? Did you feel like there was some lack of trust when the new government came in?

RADOS: *Maybe. I don't think that the generals fully understood what kind of time that was. I came to the Ministry of Defense as a person without military experience, without being a Croatian defender. I was a Member of Parliament during the war. I was relatively young. I don't think the generals understood how I could be the main person in leading the Ministry of Defense including military police and military secret service. It was a democratic solution but all of them came from JNA or from the war without having an idea of what the positions of the minister of defense and the military are in a democratic society. A special problem I met was the balances of these two branches of Croatian officers. One branch came from war, being anti-communist, anti-JNA, anti-Yugoslav, and the second came from JNA, being communist. They went through war together. But that difference was a very big problem.*

Some of them were commanders without schools, without education, but they were war commanders, such as Mr. Gotovina.

DREISBACH: They were promoted on the battlefield?

RADOS: *Yes. And the second part of them from JNA that were educated went through war too. During the Tadjman period it seemed that Tadjman preferred these new officers but trying to hold balance. Tadjman had a strange history too. He was a JNA general and political dissident later.*

I headed the situation, the problem of how to balance and how to fill that gap between the former officers of JNA and the new officers coming from war. Their political orientations were different. Those coming from JNA were more left-oriented, closer to the Social Democratic Party, the former communist party. Some of them expected that when the new government came in power including

myself as minister of defense that we would prefer them. But I didn't want to do that.

I tried to balance these relations and finally tried to close that division because it is not a logical division. How long do you have to remain in the past? We were in a new post-war situation. We were in war. We were on the same side; we won war. It is time to orient yourself to a new time. But of course there are different kinds of interests, promotions, and different kinds of groups who organized themselves making pressure on assistant ministers, on people in the general staff who decided about personnel decisions. Standard military games about promotion and nomination in Croatia were enriched with mentioned division.

I always tried to propose a balance. Of course, I was accused by JNA officers, for not punishing so-called war officers for criminal doings after the war. And of course, I was accused, that I preferred the former Yugoslav officers of the army that attacked our country during the war. For example, two leading officers, chief of general staff and general inspector were from these two different groups.

Once I sent a proposal to Mr. Mesic on how to promote the high-ranking officers, generals, and brigadier colonels. In accordance to the law at that time the president couldn't promote officers without a proposal from the minister of defense. I proposed a balanced list. Some of them were from JNA and some of them were war officers. Of course I tried to see that all of them were good regardless to which group they belonged or whether they were from the war or not. The president chose only from the left, JNA, and promoted only them. I was upset. Everything that I was doing to make a balanced proposal and prepare the proposal for days was brushed away. He only chose JNA and promoted JNA and destroyed my idea to make balanced promotions of new generals. Later we repaired that situation.

DREISBACH: Then you were accused that you only proposed those, right? The public idea was that you said that and not that he threw those out?

RADOS: *I don't think it was President's intention. Maybe he was under strong influence of his advisor. Don't neglect the fact that he was HDZ's dissident during the nineties. My basic idea was that when we were talking about changes in the Ministry of Defense not to take revenge because when you take revenge you never know where it will end. Again, it is not question only in Ministry of defense but in Croatian society, generally, but among soldiers it is harder.*

DREISBACH: My last question; it is probably the hardest question. Thinking back to your experience, what would be your advice to someone coming into a similar position, someone trying to lead a Ministry of Defense through a period of rapid political and institutional change? If you were going to pull out some kind of general lessons learned is there anything you can think of, general advice you would give to a minister of defense going through a similar situation as you experienced in 2000 to 2002 in Croatia?

RADOS: *It is very difficult to give general advice to anybody, but maybe I have advice from a personal point of view. Don't take politically serious things so seriously.*

DREISBACH: You mean don't take political criticisms seriously or the political rivalries?

RADOS: *Both of that, but I mean generally, you have to have some kind of distance when you work extremely difficult and responsible work. But man can do only what he*

can. Don't take serious things so seriously is a paradox similar to the quote, "the war is too serious of a thing to be given only to generals". Semi-joke, semi-truth.

DREISBACH: What about balance? That seems to be a principle, not to use revenge, not to use retribution, but to try to handle reform in a balanced way so it is more sustainable for the long term.

RADOS: *Sure, but not so easy. Of course it is good to have a balance but when you live in real society, in a sharpened political atmosphere, maybe you will not prefer balance. With balanced approach you can have additional problems. If you are perceived as the right minister, it is easier to do work in accordance with the perception of yourself. It is not easy in politics to be in the middle way. You can be attacked from both sides. It is easier to be on the right or on the left where you clearly know where you are and you are attacked from one side but from the other side you have protection. When you are in the middle position, you are attacked by both. But for me that middle position is more challenging.*

It is my personal position. But I'm not sure it is wise advice for a person who eventually would be in the position I was in.

DREISBACH: Thank you so much for your time; this was a very fascinating conversation.

RADOS: *Thank you.*