

*Prethodno priopćenje*

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# Contributions to Research of the Role of Foreign workers in the Homeland War; Example of Prozor-Rama Municipality

## Abstract

Croatian foreign workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina and their role in the Homeland War is one of the rarely explored topics of the past war. The reasons for absence of such research are multiple and range from the most general to the most complex. Based on the available sources of certain micro-areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), in this case the area of Prozor-Rama municipality, the paper deals with the research method and significance of assistance provided by Croatian foreign workers to the defense of the municipal area of Prozor-Rama during the Homeland War. Given the lack of specific archival sources that would give a detailed insight into the number of foreign workers who arrived in 1992 and joined the defense of B&H, the paper describes two present ways of providing assistance. The first, much more frequent, but rarely emphasized course of assistance, describes the manner and difficulties in the process of financial assistance provided by Croatian foreign workers from the area of Prozor-Rama during the Homeland War in B&H. Others relate to description of individuals and groups of foreign workers for whom aggression and war in B&H were an incentive for immediate return and direct practical involvement in combat operations. The combination of these two types of assistance was extremely important for the local municipal system of government in B&H, which after the aggression and the blockade of the state system was largely dependent on aid arriving outside B&H.

**Keywords:** foreign workers, Prozor-Rama, help, war

## 1. Introduction

The process of democratic change that began in the second half of 1980s led to a collapse of communist regimes in Europe in the early 1990s. One of the states affected by the aforementioned process of disintegration of communism was the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). However, unlike most European communist states where the process of dissolution of communist systems and their transformation into systems of liberal democracy was carried out in the form

of civilizational norms of negotiation and mutual agreement, in the SFRY this process had several developmental stages.

The reason for this was the fact that with the death of longtime party and state leader Josip Broz Tito, the central cohesive factor that kept the multinational community together - disappeared. As a result, between the Serbian communist elite on one side and the Slovenian and Croatian communist elites on the other, a political dispute developed over the character of the common state in the future. The Serbian communist elite led by Slobodan Milošević insisted on reconstructing the previous governing model, promoting centralization as a desirable form of Yugoslavia's future structure. Since such a model of government put the Serbian communist elite in a more favorable position than other republican communist elites, with propagation of such a form of government began a period of disagreement within the relatively unified Yugoslav ruling elite. This disagreement led to open conflict, and thus, indirectly, to disintegration of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia („SKJ“) as the only allowed political party in Yugoslavia. Disintegration of the hitherto unified and ruling party took place on its XIV. Congress, held in Belgrade in January 1990 (Vjesnik, 23 January 1990, front page). Disintegration of „SKJ“ consequently paved the way for the first multi-party elections in socialist Yugoslavia. In these elections, Communists lost power in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H). Unlike these states, the Serbian and Montenegrin communists won a landslide victory in their home republics (Radelić, 2006: 590). The change of government in the three republics further deepened the gap with Serbian communist elite (which then, in addition to Serbia, also controlled Montenegro). Under these conditions, lack of agreement on the future character of the common state led to the outbreak of the Homeland War, in which the Serbian communist elite made extensive use of the Yugoslav People's Army (YNA) as its own armed force. The war started by the Serbian side lasted until December 1995, when a combination of military force and diplomacy defeated Serbian politics (Marijan, 2018: 14-15).

In accordance with the above, based on the analysis of original archives, publications and available literature, the paper will present the foreign workers' assistance provided to local Croats and Muslims (now Bosniaks) in today's municipality Prozor-Rama during the Homeland War. In that sense, research will focus on providing material and describing practical assistance clearly visible in the process of foreign workers return and their involvement in the war, i.e. defense against YNA aggression and actions of Bosnian- Herzegovinian Serb forces.

## 2. War in B&H

The war waged by the Serbian communist elite against the Republic of Croatia, with the commitment of the international community resulted in truce in late 1991. The armistice was formalized by signing the Sarajevo Agreement in the first days of January 1992. One of the most important points mentioned in the agreement was the departure of YNA forces from Croatia. This agreement point was fulfilled by transferring most of the existing YNA forces to the area of neighboring B&H (Marijan, 2018: 85). It was in those moments that B&H was experiencing a deep political crisis caused by impossibility of articulating a common position on the future of the state, which required the consent of political representatives of all three constituent peoples. This circumstance was most evident in late February and early March 1992 in the case of referendum on B&H independence. This referendum was mostly boycotted by Serbs in B&H, so only Croats and Muslims (Bosniaks) participated in it (Lučić, 2018: 219).

Although they boycotted the referendum, Serbs in B&H did not observe developments passively. Namely, the intention of their political elite was to carry out violent occupation of parts of B&H that they considered their own, relying on previously withdrawn YNA forces from Croatia. This intention soon resulted in development of armed conflicts in which militarily superior forces of

the YNA and Bosnian- Herzegovinian Serbs sought to take control of much of B&H. Despite clear disparity in military equipment, they were opposed by Croats and Muslims.

Since the beginning of the wider open armed conflict in April 1992, the Croatian side in B&H, taught by the experiences of the Homeland War in Croatia, organized two of its own military organizations; The Croatian Defense Council (HVO= CDC) and, to a lesser extent, Croatian Defense Forces (HOS = CDF). A significant number of Muslims became actively involved in such organized units of CDC and CDF, being the first military organizations (Marijan, 2006: 385). Thanks to timely organization, in certain parts of B&H, such as the cities and municipalities of Maglaj and Mostar, the CDC has been declared the only official defense structure<sup>1</sup>. Such a status of CDC, apart from exceptionally good relations between Croats and Muslims, was also a clear indicator of the incompetence of the Muslim political leadership led by the President of the Presidency of B&H, Alija Izetbegović. Namely, unlike leadership of Croat and Serb people in B&H, who clearly defined their political goals even before the outbreak of open conflicts, i.e. the war, Muslim leadership led by Izetbegović was largely unprepared for the upcoming conflicts, trying to avoid them. Accordingly, Izetbegović entrusted the CDC with defending positions not occupied by the YNA, while at the same time trying to reach an agreement with the commanders of YNA forces stationed on B&H territory to transform them into “Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina”. However, the YNA did not accept the offer, as it openly represented the Serbian side, to which such an agreement did not suit at the time. (ICTY; Phonobel, April 1992, 3).

### 3. “He came back from Germany ...”

In the new conditions of war, only help to Croat and Muslim people in B&H came from Croatia. A specific type of assistance that arrived to B&H during escalation of war in April 1992 was related to volunteers, Croats, temporary workers abroad, known as “foreign workers”. In most cases, the mentioned returnees - foreign workers<sup>2</sup>, were working Croats who were forced to change their place of residence in the domicile area of B&H with a place of residence mainly in Western European countries. The reasons for their previous departure in the direction of Western Europe can be summed up to two general reasons. The first one was of existential nature which as such contained a number of minor additional reasons which fundamentally referred to inability to materially support oneself or the family. In addition to existential, another reason that often influenced the decision to go to “temporary work abroad” was related to conflicting opinions and view in relation to proclaimed views of state policy of the SFRY (Radelić, 2006: 425). More specifically, personal animosity such an individual had towards communist Yugoslav system often prevented him from securing employment in his home environment that would very likely stop him from seeking employment in other European countries. These two often-present reasons for leaving domicile areas were closely related to the point that they complemented each other.

Although Croatian foreign workers of B&H origin have been an important part of its defense since the beginning of the Homeland War, their presence in armed formations defending B&H from the Serb side is not particularly prominent in available sources. Lack of such records can be partly explained by the fact that vast majority of able-bodied foreign workers were actually

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1 RB&H, Municipality of Maglaj, Crisis Staff of the Municipality of Maglaj, Maglaj, Decision, no. 01-98-1 / 92 of 2 June 1992; RB&H, Municipal Assembly of Mostar, Crisis Staff of the Municipality, Mostar, Decision, no. 427/92 of 29.4. 1992 Signed by members of the Mostar Crisis Staff.

2 Croatian Homeland War Memorial and Documentation Center (hereinafter: HMDCDR = CHWMDC): Croatian Army (HV=CA), 150th no. CA “R”, no. 1400, Reverse no. 2/92 of 15 April 1992 Taken over by Marko Grbeš; RB&H, Konjic Municipal Assembly, Security and Crisis Staff Council, no. 07-1-800-40 / 92 of 12 April 1992, signed by Dr. Rusmir Hadžhuseinović; Armed Forces of the Konjic Municipal Assembly, CDC and TD, Census of Training Personnel, no. 02-244 / 92 of 3 June 1992, signed by Omer Borić and Dinko Zebić.

considered permanent residents of their local areas, which classified them as conscripts as well as all other existing able-bodied residents. Therefore, the return of foreign workers to the war-torn areas of B&H was viewed by the local municipal authorities as fulfilling obligations arising from the current state of war. Contrary to such an official view, the return of foreign workers had quite the opposite effect on the local population. Namely, return of people from the relative security of foreign countries gave the population affected by the war a positive moral impetus, which had an important impact on the decision to stay in the endangered area. Such an affirmative attitude towards the arriving foreign workers was especially important in conditions when the phenomenon of deliberate evasion of military service, i.e. desertion, became frequent in areas exposed to Serbian attacks (Rama vjesnik, October 1992: 8).

Therefore, positive attitude of local population towards returning foreign workers was caused by the act of their return to their home areas in the period of unfavorable initial moments in the war, i.e. in the key period of stopping military advance of the YNA and the Serb side in B&H. The same positive response was also given to all other individuals who arrived as volunteers in the attacked areas of B&H (Markešić, July 1992, 6). Consequently, the period of return and involvement of individual foreign workers in the defense process will have a relatively important impact on their later affirmation, in terms of advancement and influence in military structures they joined (HR- HMDCDR; CDC; box 1825).

#### **4. Foreign workers in the defense of B&H; micro example of Prozor municipality (Prozor-Rama)**

Given the lack of more precise and detailed data on participation and role of foreign workers in defense efforts at B&H level, reconstruction of their impact on the defense process can, to some extent, be analyzed on examples of events in individual war-affected areas. In this particular case, we will try to show the significance of foreign workers and their influence on local circumstances on the example of nationally heterogeneous northern Herzegovinian municipality of Prozor, today Prozor-Rama (Statistical Bulletin, 1993: 85).

As a municipal area inhabited exclusively by Bosnian- Herzegovinian (B&H) Croats and Muslims, the Prozor-Rama area was in danger of war at the end of March 1992 from YNA and B&H Serb forces who occupied most of Kupres by mid-April after a heavy battle with Croatian forces (Marijan, 2000: 39-42). The Croatian side in the, then, municipality of Prozor based their home area defense from the expected Serb attacks from Kupres, like all other municipalities where there was a greater concentration of Croatian population, through political and military organization of the Croatian Community of Herceg Bosna (CCHB), CDC and somewhat CDF. Unlike these Croatian military organizations, local Muslims in Prozor were partly organized through their own Muslim military structures, the Territorial Defense of B&H (TD B&H), later the Army of B&H. However, during first conflicts with the Serb side, some local Muslims joined the CDC and CDF due to general disorganization of their own military forces (Rašić, July 1992, 6-7). Under leadership and support of the majority CDC, local Croats and Muslims gathered and managed to set up defensive positions by the end of April 1992, thus preventing the advance of the YNA and Serb forces from Kupres towards the municipality of Prozor (Rašić, May / June 1993, 10).

In those moments of initial warfare in the Prozor municipality and expectations of Serb forces penetrating the municipal center, the town of Prozor, local Croats and Muslims were burdened by having insufficient weapons and material resources which could not be procured. The mentioned problem of lack of weapons was caused by expropriation of weapons by local authorities in Prozor by the YNA according to the same pattern as was visible in Croatia in May 1990 when the, then, Croatian Armed Forces were disarmed (Vjesnik, May 1990, front page). In addition, local municipal

institutions at that time were unable to raise material and other funds for defense, which occurred due to collapse of central government institutions in Sarajevo (Lučić, 2013: 369). All this happened at the time of escalation of war in B&H, having a direct impact on local municipal government structures, which were forced to find ways to organize and finance defense (Rama vjesnik, October 1992, front page).

Accordingly, no later than April 1992, local municipal authorities in Prozor found themselves in an extremely unfavorable situation in which they largely undertook state obligations to organize defense of their municipality territory. Also, the problem of raising financial and other resources needed to equip soldiers was from the very beginning one of the major shortcomings faced by the majorly Croatian municipal government in Prozor. Finding a solution to this problem meant establishing a new financing system in which the largest share should have been provided by the working population of the municipality. Therefore, in accordance with the state of war, it was expected that collecting financial assistance for defending the municipality would be carried out outside home territory of B&H, from those European countries with a large number of foreign workers from B&H, namely areas of the Prozor-Rama.

A concrete step in the mass involvement of local foreign workers from the municipality of Prozor in the process of providing more substantial financial assistance was launched on April 1 and was further regulated in late May 1992 when the municipal government in Prozor decided on "general work and military conscription" (Rasic, May / June 1993, 10). On 22 June 1992, it was further strengthened, but also specified by the adoption of the new "Decision on General Mobilization", adopted by the local Presidency of the Municipal Assembly of Prozor as the main civilian representation of the government. The decision obliged all men between ages of 18 and 55, as well as all women between ages of 18 and 50, to make themselves available for military or civilian duty and to take up conscription. The subject of the decision, in addition to clearly differentiating groups of local municipal taxpayers, provided insight into regulations on the basis of which someone is exempt from the said decision. Among several other categories, the list included "citizens in permanent employment abroad". That conclusion of the decision referred to local workers, permanently employed abroad. According to the decision in question of 22 June 1992, all foreign workers could be released from military participation in the defense process. However, such a possibility was achievable only in case of meeting financial obligation according to which foreign workers were obliged to allocate certain monthly income for the defense of home municipality. Therefore, separate dislocated municipal committees based in Munich and Vienna have been set up by local authorities of Prozor to facilitate this type of funding. Viewed in more detail, the said mobilization decision of 22 June stipulated that foreign workers who were still working abroad, for the needs of defending their home area should deduct  $\frac{1}{4}$  of total personal income which, on the other hand, could not be less than 500 German marks<sup>3</sup>. (Rama vjesnik, July 1992, 11; Rama vjesnik, January 1993, 9). Given that the said decision did not prescribe the age limit of the foreign workers to whom it referred, it is to be assumed that the decision presupposed obligation of all those who were employed at the time. The decision made in this form obliged financial expenses even to those foreign workers whose blood relatives or more of them (sons) were actively involved in the defense process in the municipality, which was also confirmed in practice.<sup>4</sup>

However, the said decision on financial assistance of foreign workers for the needs of defending the municipality, up until December 1992, was met to a lesser extent than expected. Thus, at the

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3 As salary of CDC soldiers for most of 1992 was around 40-50 German marks, which rose to around 100 German marks in 1993, it can be concluded that the required financial benefits were a serious expense for guest workers; See in HR-HDA-HMDCDR; CDC; box 4972.

4 For example, the name of Stipe (Martina) Zadro is listed on the publicly published list of those who fulfilled all the obligations arising from the mobilization decision (Rama vjesnik, January 1993, 9). At the time of his duties, his son Martin (Stipe) Zadro was an active member of the CDC. See in: HR-HDA-HMDCDR; CDC; box 7760.

end of 1992, it was publicly announced that 447 foreign workers originating from the Prozor-Rama municipality had fulfilled their financial obligations, of which 145 had paid the full amount requested by the aforementioned mobilization decision (Rama vjesnik, January 1993, 9). Thus, according to the report, only a little over 32% of foreign workers fulfilled their obligations from the mobilization decision by the end of 1992. The reasons why the obvious majority of other foreign workers failed to fully meet the required financial benefits are explained by reduced income resulting from sick leave, reduced working hours and other unplanned events. Local representatives of CDC authorities cautiously accepted these excuses and inability to meet their obligations, asking most foreign workers for additional evidence to prove their own claims (Rama vjesnik, January 1993, 9).

The stated financial obligations, more precisely larger financial allocations, were obviously a serious burden to majority of foreign workers, which was also noticed by municipal authorities of Prozor. It was for this reason that in late 1992, Prozor municipal authorities issued an amendment to the mobilization decision. This amendment determined that foreign workers who were obliged to allocate the prescribed funds were considered to be those who were legally or permanently employed. This item was an extremely important addition as legally employed foreign workers could clearly prove their income on the basis of pay slips and thus justify the amount of money they had to allocate for the defense of the municipality. In this sense, a certain problem was posed to those foreign workers who could not bring such proof, that is, those who fulfilled their work obligations within the framework of illegal “undeclared work”. In addition to clearly defining those who were obliged to pay cash benefits, with the same amendment, municipal authorities reduced monthly cash benefits in the coming period (1993) for all those foreign workers who would fully pay the prescribed cash benefits by mid-February 1993 for the period from April 1, 1992. Also, since February 1993, all of them have been obliged to regularly pay funds in the amount of 300 German marks for those who were active in Germany and Switzerland and 2,000 Austrian schillings for those who performed their duties in Austria.

In addition, unlike original general decision on mobilization of June 1992, which did not specify obligations of female foreign workers, the amendment to the decision clearly stipulated their obligation to pay 100 German marks, which applied retroactively from 1 April 1992. According to amendment to the decision, women foreign workers were required to settle part of their 1992 financial obligations by mid-February 1993. Also, amendment to the decision also prescribed conditions of financial allocations for the needs of the municipality for those foreign workers who due to injury, illness or job loss were not able to regularly perform the prescribed obligations. Accordingly, such foreign workers with such had to set aside  $\frac{1}{4}$  from their total income for the needs of the municipality’s defense (Rama vjesnik, January 1993, 9).

According to the decision from the aforementioned amendment, the collection of funds from foreign workers was additionally regulated by a clearer specification of the prescribed obligations. The aim of such reconstruction was to prevent certain deviations, but in fact to avoid breaking the obligations, which, if we take into account the aforementioned percentage of foreign workers who fully met their obligations, was a common case. However, despite public regulations and amendments and clarification of decisions, the process of collecting funds from foreign workers was not sufficiently met to the extent that the municipal government could count on regular inflow of funds.

**Table 1.** Total funds raised for the needs of defense of Prozor (Rama) municipality, which mostly consisted of provisions from local foreign workers (Rama vjesnik, January 1993, 9)

Razdoblje 1992. godine	Prikupljena sredstva u njemačkim markama DEM	Prikupljena sredstva u austrijskim šilinzima ATS	Prikupljena sredstva u švicarskim francima CHF	Prikupljena sredstva u drugim valutama Dolari (US), Kanadski dolar (CAD), Hrvatski dinar (HRD)		
				200 US	106.000 HRD	1950 CAD
travanj	2030	-	-			
svibanj	45.850	77.000	-			
lipanj	35.500	111.250	200			
srpanj	87.720	247.550	800	200 US	106.000 HRD	1950 CAD
kolovoz	239.120	239.700	3040			
rujan	123.030	140.250	100			
listopad	124.462	206.700	100			
studeni	147.150	102.300	-			
prosinac	470.650	707.123	3300		280.000 HRD	
1.-15. siječnja 1993. godine	202.542	163.300	500			

According to the table above, collection of funds for the defense of Prozor municipality was oscillating. The largest amounts of money were collected in the period of August and December 1992 and in the first months of 1993. The reason for this can be explained by periods of summer vacations and especially holidays, Christmas and New Year, when most foreign workers take several days to return and stay in the home area. Accordingly, it can be concluded that a larger amount of funds was made through a direct payment, i.e. personal transfer of funds to municipal services. This way of fulfilling the obligations can be partly explained by the assumption that a significant number of foreign workers did not have enough confidence in organized municipal committees and individuals who collected funds on behalf of the municipality.

Confirmation of certain distrust in the established system of collecting cash benefits as well as the amount of funds from foreign workers was a problem that was present from the very beginning of practical implementation of this part of the mobilization decision. Confirmation of this was evident in a joint session of foreign workers and municipal authorities of Prozor held in Ripci during Catholic feast of the Assumption on August 15, 1992. In addition to civilian representatives of Prozor municipality, military representatives of the local CDC also took part in the meeting, informing the participants about the military situation and the need to maintain the defense process. Their presentation was attended by a large number of gathered foreign workers relatively calmly, which could not be said for the moment when the explanation of the situation in the municipality was taken over by civilian government representatives.

Unlike those of military representatives, speeches of civilian representatives of the authorities were interrupted, actually the whole session was interrupted due to dissatisfaction of the gathered foreign workers, but subsequently resumed. The reason for this stemmed from dissatisfaction of foreign workers with the amount of material resources demanded from them and the way they were collected. A local journalist who followed that discussion later described the foreign workers who took part in the discussion as "old misers".

This description referred to a part of foreign workers who had inappropriate verbal responses to local civilian authorities in an uncontrolled discussion, and who were found to have failed to

meet their obligations. Since the description of the meeting was published in a local newspaper, avoidance of cash provisions by some foreign workers was sought by comparing the difference in their financial obligations with salaries received by soldiers on the front lines of defense, which at the time amounted to 50 German marks (Rama vjesnik, September 1992, 4).

The mentioned meeting and noted disagreements between civilian representatives of authorities and foreign workers, pointed out to practical distrust regarding the handing over of the prescribed funds to municipal committees and individuals who acted for that purpose in Munich and Vienna. It seems that the obvious mistrust accelerated transition from fulfillment of financial obligations through intermediary to direct form, i.e. so that A foreign worker settled his financial obligations during his personal stay in the home municipality. Finally, despite the described shortcomings and efforts of some foreign workers to use these problems in mutual relations to avoid their obligation to provide the funds, a number of foreign workers continued to fulfill their commitments, which was clearly visible in December 1992 and January 1993. (Table 1).

On the other hand, municipal authorities of Prozor-Rama sought to find different ways to ensure full collection of monetary claims from foreign workers. For this reason, in 1993, separate certificates were introduced, which were issued to foreign workers by the military or civilian authorities only after settling whole or majority of their financial obligations. In current circumstances of the war, this confirmation was key evidence that enabled issuance of a pass to leave the municipality and go to work.

#### P R I O P Ó E N J E

S ciljem onemogućavanja malverzacije oko obveznih uplata inozemaca i njihovog prolaska kroz punktove, ako nisu izmirili svoje obveze po općinskoj odluci od 22.06.1992 godine br.01/1-17/92 priopćavamo slijedeće:

Svi inozemci koji žele napustiti našu općinu nakon Uskrsnih blagdana morat će uz potvrdu o napuštanju općine od uređa obrane imati i potvrdu iz financijske službe da su izmirili iznos od 5100DM.

Radi toga molimo sve koji su već uzeli potvrde o napuštanju općine da još jedanput svrate u financijsku službu i izmire određeni iznos kako bi dobili potvrdu o tom iznosu, a svi koji još nisu uzeli potvrdu do sada da uzmu obadvije.

U protivnom neće im biti dopušteno napuštane općine.

Document no. 1. Statement of the Municipal Authorities of April 1993



REPUBLIKA BOSNA I HERCEGOVINA  
HRVATSKA ZAJEDNICA HERCEG BOSNA  
HRVATSKO VIJEĆE OBRANE

BRIGADA "RAMA" PROZOR

Broj: 01-732/93

Proš: 12.04.1993.g.

FINANCJSKA SLUŽBA BRIGADE  
"RAMA" PROZOR

Predmet: Zapovjed

1. Svim inosnci koji pripadaju u obvezu materijalnog dađanja pored priianica a uolatu moza im se izdati i priinanica za ukuonu uplatu do dana izđavanja ( od 15.04.1992.g. 5.100 BEM).
2. Potvrda vijedi uz propusnicu o napuštanju općine.
3. Zapovjed o načinu protoka idala je V.P. MUP i osi ali svaki po svojoj liniji.
4. Rok izvñnja apovjedi odmah

**Document No. 2** Order of the Commander of the CDC Brigade in Prozor on the Issuance of Certificates (prerequisite for a pass)

The mentioned certificates and passes were not the only attempt of local municipal authorities to try to regulate insufficiently harmonized relations between foreign workers and the parent municipal authority. As early as the second half of 1992, after penetration of the Serbian side from Kupres area towards Prozor was no longer likely, new requests for "temporary work" abroad appeared in the municipality. Apart from individuals who had not been employed abroad until then, these requests were also made by returnee foreign workers who returned to the municipality during March and April 1992, in the most difficult months of the war, and decided to come back to the municipality and actively participate in the defense process. Reasons for such applications probably had, in addition to existing dangers of war, another more practical reason related to the fact that fewer returnee foreign workers who joined military organizations were often the only source of income for their families. Appropriate to such circumstances, the Prozor municipal authorities allowed some CDC soldiers to go abroad to work. However, in order to obtain the said departure pass, several conditions had to be met. First of all, all CDC soldiers who were allowed to go abroad for work were obliged to return to their home municipal area in case of service or public call in case of military need. In addition, by leaving for temporary work, former and new foreign workers were obliged, like all other workers abroad, to set aside part of their income for defense purposes (HR-HDA-HMDCDR; CDF, Box 4972).

IVKA KOVAČEVIĆ  
s. Rumboci  
Rama-Prozor

Republika Bosna i Hercegovina  
HRVATSKA ŽUPANIJA HERCEGOVINA  
OPĆINA RAMA  
ZAPOVEDNIŠTVU

Primljeno: 11.02.93	
Org. jed.	Vrijednost
01-53/93	

ZAPOVEDNIŠTVU BRIGADE " RAMA "

Predmet : Zahtjev za odsustvovanje iz brigade

Molim Vās da uvažite moj zahtje za odsustvovanje iz brigade " RAMA " u trajanju od 3 (tri) mjeseca.  
Odsustvovanje mi je potrebno zbog toga što se nalazim u teškoj materijalnoj situaciji, imam teže bolesnu majku, a ukazala mi se prilika za posao u Njemačkoj.  
Pošto su mi braća angažirana u postrojbama te oni ne mogu otići negdje raditi to Vas molim da uvažite ovaj moj zahtjev.  
Pošto sam u brigadi već 7 mjeseci po povratku bi se ponovo javila ovdje za posao, a Vas bi molila da mi to omogućite i zagarantirate mi da ću po povratku imati posao.  
Unaprijed HVALA!

PODNOŠITELJ ZAHTJEVA

Ivka Kovačević -  
Kovačević

### Document No. 3. Application for going abroad

Emergence of similar new departures abroad in 1993 was further intensified, as confirmed by the local head of the CDC's municipal financial service in Prozor when expressing a public complaint about the relatively poor filling of the budget by foreign workers. He stated that there are more than a thousand foreign workers working abroad on various grounds. Out of that total number, for the needs of the local CDC brigade, 540 obligors fulfilled their obligation, which at that time amounted to 300 German marks, and thanks to them, more than 160,000 German marks arrived at the local treasury in May (Rama vjesnik, May / June 1993, 4). In line with the above, despite obvious evasions and further ignoring to provide financial assistance to the defense process of the municipal area, the more prominent part of foreign workers still continued to fulfill their financial obligations.

For most of 1993, the area of Prozor municipality was characterized by an eruption of new conflicts that followed between Croats and Muslims (Bosniaks) (Marijan, 2018: 77). In these new circumstances, which further burdened Croatian side in military and every other sense, financial assistance from foreign workers, noticeable in the form of mandatory but also voluntary assistance, had a profound impact on the emerging additional defense process, as a relatively secure source of fixed income. In the period of this new escalation of the conflict in May 1993, a new series of decisions was made at the level of Prozor-Rama municipality concerning rights and obligations of working and retired foreign workers. According to that decision, starting 1 July 1993, all active foreign workers were still obliged to pay a previously valid monthly obligation of 300 German marks or 2,000 Austrian schillings and 100 German marks, which was the obligation for female

foreign workers. The new decision provided for a 10% increase in the monthly installment for each previous month of delay. However, unlike previous amendments, the new decision of May 1993 also prescribed the amount of monthly allocations that included close to retirement or retired foreign workers who were required to pay 15% of total pension or reduced income. In addition, the decision exempted those foreign workers whose close blood relative, more precisely his son, died as a member of the local brigade, while those foreign workers whose sons were seriously injured in the current circumstances of war and conflict were exempted from paying in the month when the accident occurred (Rama vjesnik, April 1993, 2). On the other hand, the decision reiterated the decision to continue with previously determined funds from women working abroad, which was a confirmation that this requirement has in fact been carried out.<sup>5</sup>

The enactment of a new series of decisions from May 1993, despite obvious problems with timely collection, clearly confirmed the importance of financial assistance paid by foreign workers and its impact on the existing Croatian defense process in Prozor. The process of such financing to a greater or lesser extent, with all the accompanying shortcomings of irregular allocation, will be maintained until end of active conflicts with the Muslim (Bosniak) side in B&H during the first half of 1994 (Marijan, 2018: 420).

## **5. Military contribution of foreign workers to the defense of the municipality of Prozor**

Another way of foreign workers providing assistance was direct military participation in the process of defending the municipal area of Prozor-Rama, which meant their inclusion in local military units of the CDC and CDF. This process of direct involvement in Croatian military units that existed in the area during escalation of war was largely accepted by “younger workers employed abroad” who began to arrive in the municipality of Prozor in the first half of 1992. However, a small part of them arrived to the municipality for the first time in 1991 in their short return from the territory of the Republic of Croatia. Namely, several such individuals, local foreign workers from the area of Prozor-Rama in 1991 returned to territory of Republic of Croatia where they actively participated in the process of its defense as members of the National Guard or CDF (Rama vjesnik, November 1992, 6-7).

Accordingly, in the period from the beginning of escalation of war in B&H during April 1992 to mid-1993, in the area of Prozor-Rama municipality, in the CDC and CDF units, according to the local defense office, there were about 50 foreign workers for whom it was clearly confirmed that they had left their permanent job and were directly involved in the defense process. In relation to the number of members of the local brigade of the CDC “Rama”, which in mid-1993, according to local defense office, numbered slightly more than 1,500 members, it can be seen that the number of foreign workers involved in military units was just over 3% of total number of soldiers involved in the local Croatian brigade “Rama”. (Rama vjesnik, August 1993, 6). Although the mentioned number of foreign workers in CDC soldier units at the municipal level was more or less symbolic, their presence, despite their small number, certainly had a positive moral incentive to other members of the local CDC brigade “Rama”. In fact, this was evident in the example of several of them who

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5 According to the testimony of one of local female foreign workers, certain allocations were indeed given for the needs of the municipality's defense. However, in most cases, female foreign workers were not required to pay higher cash benefits. The reason for this could be lower income of female foreign workers, but also the fact that most local female foreign workers lived in a joint family community in which the father or close relative met the prescribed obligation to allocate funds to the municipality. Part of female foreign workers set aside part of their earnings for the needs of defense, regardless of the decision. Interview with Ivus Thorwart (nee Zadro) Lindenstrasse 22, 73550, Waldstetten, Germany conducted on 16 September 2020; Interview with Danica Jeličić, Zagreb, conducted on September 29, 2020.

in the further course of war managed to impose themselves on leading military positions within existing military organizations, despite the fact that they had no military education. Namely, foreign workers' past and timely return to their homeland and expressed organizational skills, in the new war circumstances, evident through gathering and equipping people, provided some arriving foreign workers an unexpected opportunity to take over leadership of local military organizations CDC and CDF, despite their lack of military experience and education.

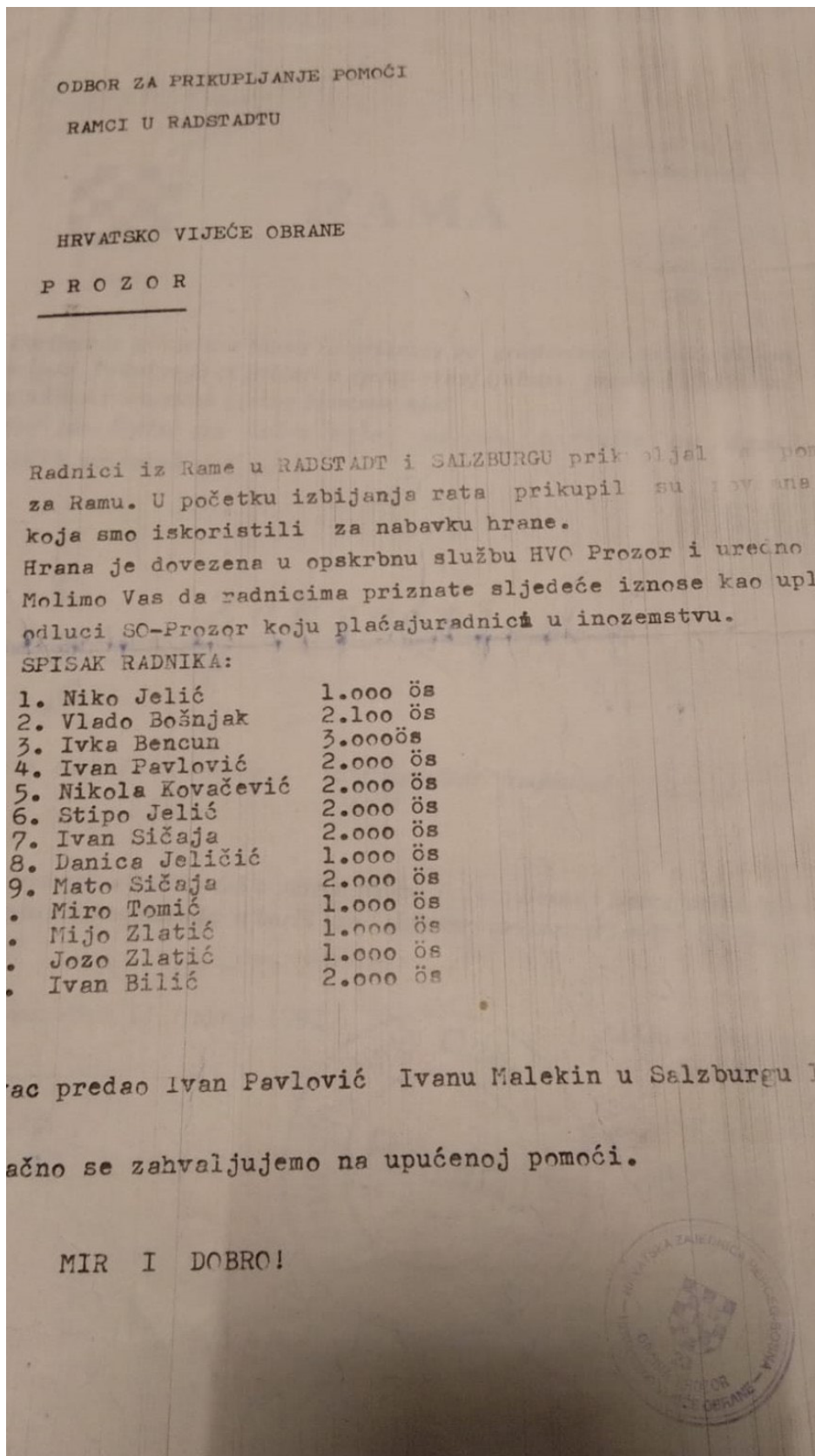
A practical example of a situation in which a previous foreign worker became the commander-in-chief of the local Croatian military forces is Marinko Beljo. The aforementioned Beljo was a generation of younger local foreign workers who began working abroad in 1980s. The beginning of YNA aggression against the Republic of Croatia and revolt of a part of the Serb population was the reason for his return to Croatia, where he joined the defense process by joining CDF units. As aggression of YNA and insurgent Serbs in Croatia decreased and war conflicts were transferred to B&H in 1992, M. Beljo became actively involved in the process of gathering local Croats, who he, after escalation of war, organized through local CDF unit in which he was elected commander. After first clashes with YNA and Serbs in the border area of Kupres and Prozor municipalities in April 1992, CDF members took over parts of defensive positions around the village of Zvirnjaca, where they spent the next few months. With deterioration of relations between Croats and Muslims and the conflict that erupted between them in the Prozor metropolitan area in late October 1992, Beljo and his CDF members played an important role in fighting in and around Prozor, eventually enabling Croatian control over urban center of Prozor (Rama vjesnik, November 1992, 6-7). Thanks to his role in this process, Beljo was soon proclaimed commander of the CDC Military Police, to which he transferred most of CDF members (HR -HMDCDR; CDC, box 1825). Four months later, in the moments of new escalation of the conflict with the Muslim side, i.e. the Muslim military organization of the Army of B&H, in February 1993, Beljo became the commander of the local brigade "Rama" within the CDC (HR-HDA-HMDCDR; CDC, box 4756) . Beljo remained in this position until his death in May 1993 (Rama vjesnik, May 1993, 14).

Thus, although in a number that was symbolic and as such did not have a decisive influence on key military events, some foreign workers returning to municipality of Prozor-Rama left an undoubted mark on local circumstances. This positive image was not too disturbed by the process of subsequent departures of some CDC foreign workers who were returning abroad, as noted by the head of local defense office in Prozor, who sent a public apology to all foreign workers for "suspicion of their patriotism" and sometimes harsh objections made to them in the previous period (Rama vjesnik, August 1993, 6).

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is obvious that the influence of foreign workers in certain parts of B&H, and especially in those areas traditionally known for people leaving for temporary work, has made a significant contribution to successful defense process. The example of Prozor-Rama municipality shows that this assistance was provided in two forms. The first form of assistance referred to significant financial assistance of foreign workers sent to local military and civilian authorities of the municipality, for which these funds were one of the main sources of income used to maintain the existing defense process, i.e. purchase of weapons and equipment, as well as payments to soldiers on front lines of defense. In addition to this type of assistance, Prozor-Rama municipality recorded personal returns of a small number of foreign workers who were directly involved in the existing defense process by becoming CDC or CDF soldiers. Given a relatively small number of such foreign workers, their combined military value cannot be interpreted as crucial assistance to the local defense system. However, despite this, some of the arriving foreign workers managed to help defend the domicile areas with their efforts and personal example, which is why some of them later became key military commanders in the municipality.

## Additional attachments



Annex 1. Collective application for recognition of fulfillment of monetary obligations of foreign workers

Quittung

Nr. 38

netto	DM		
+ % MWSt	DM		
gesamt	DM	100	

Gesamtbetrag DM in Worten: JEDNH STOTINA

von DAN IČ IĆ J E L I Ć

für RAMA

dankend erhalten

Buchungsvermerk

Datum 19.07.1992

Empfänger Unterschrift des Empfängers

Koordinacijski Odbor za pomoć RAMA

Annex 2. Usual certificate form for donated funds

**RAMA**

Povijest će govoriti o Vama raspršenim po gradovima i selima diljem svijeta. Pokoljenja će pričati o djelotvornoj ljubavi prema Vašoj Rami u teškim trenucima njenog bivstvovanja!  
Sve što činite na dobro Vašeg naroda, to činite na dobro Vaših potomaka!

**Zahvalnica**

Danica J e l i ć i ć , Podbor, A - 5550 Radstadt, Weissenhof

Vi ste pomogli s 2.000,- ÖS u obrani Rame, države Bosne i Hercegovine kao i cijelog hrvatskog naroda u borbi za slobodu, državnost i bolju budućnost svih nas.

U Münchenu, 11. travnja 1992.

Za Odbor Rame  
Jure Radoš

Koordinacijski Odbor za pomoć RAMA

Annex 3. Acknowledgment for donated funds

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## **Prilozi za istraživanje uloge gastarbajtera u Domovinskom ratu; primjer općine Prozor-Rama**

### **SAŽETAK**

Tema bosanskohercegovačkih Hrvata gastarbajtera i njihove uloge u Domovinskom ratu spada u jedno od rijetko istraživanih područja razdoblja minuloga rata. Razlozi nepostojanja takvih istraživanja višestruki su i kreću se od onih najopćenitijih do onih složenih koji su zbog nedovoljne vremenske udaljenosti od predmetnih događaja još uvijek aktivni i kao takvi ometaju istraživača u njegovu nastojanju objektivnijega uvida u prošlost. Na temelju dostupnih izvora pojedinih mikropodručja Bosne i Hercegovine (BiH), u konkretnom slučaju područja općine Prozor-Rama, rad se bavi istraživanjem načina, ali i značenja pomoći koji su hrvatskih gastarbajteri pružali obrani općinskog područja Prozora-Rame u razdoblju Domovinskoga rata. S obzirom na nepostojanje konkretnih arhivskih izvora koji bi dali detaljan uvid u brojnost gastarbajtera koji su tijekom 1992. stigli i uključili se u obranu BiH, u radu su prikazana dva prisutna načina pružanja pomoći. Prvi, mnogo češći, ali rijetko naglašavani tijekom pružanja pomoći opisuje način i poteškoće pružanja financijske pomoći koji su hrvatski gastarbajteri s područja Prozora Rame pružali tijekom razdoblja Domovinskoga rata u BiH. Drugi od njih odnosi se na opis pojedinaca i grupa gastarbajtera kojima je agresija i rat u BiH bio poticaj za hitan povratak i izravno, praktično uključivanje u borbena djelovanja. Kombinacija spomenutih dviju vrsta pomoći imala je izuzetno značenje za lokalni općinski sustav vlasti u BiH koji je nakon agresije i blokade državnoga sustava najvećim dijelom bio ovisan o pomoći koji je stizala izvan BiH.

**Ključne riječi;** gastarbajteri, BiH, Hrvati, pomoć, Prozor-Rama