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AMBASSADOR MIOMIR ŽUŽUL

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Ambassador Miomir Žužul served as a member of the Croatian negotiations team and was involved in the negotiations of the Washington Agreement and Dayton Peace Accords. Ambassador Žužul served as a Croatian Ambassador to the United Nations (1993-1996), Ambassador to the United States (1996-2000), and the Minister of Foreign Affairs (2003-2005).

MEMOIR

Prior to the Dayton Peace Accords, Miomir Žužul served as Croatia's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, and simultaneously acted as the special envoy of President Franjo Tuđman for the peace negotiations. In this capacity, Žužul functioned as the Croatian counterpart to U.S. ambassadors Charles Redman and Richard Holbrooke. Žužul's responsibilities included preparing and coordinating the Croatian delegation for the Dayton talks, as well as initiating preliminary negotiations. He arrived in Dayton one day ahead of the rest of Croatia's delegation and remained throughout the entire process. Alongside Žužul, three of Croatia's senior-most officials led negotiations at various levels on behalf of the country: President Tuđman, with whom lay ultimate authority, Minister of Defense Gojko Šušak, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mate Granić. With them came a large team of additional members for support. The negotiations lasted twenty-one days, after which Žužul departed Dayton with the rest of the delegation following the successful conclusion of the peace talks.

Žužul believed from the outset that the Dayton negotiations would lead to a peace agreement. While he acknowledges his generally optimistic outlook as a motivating factor, he also points to key elements that supported his expectation at the time. Drawing on the history of warfare and the patterns of conflict resolution, Žužul notes that wars typically end in one of two ways: either with the victory of one side over the other, or when the aggressor recognizes that further military action cannot achieve any additional gains. This realization, he argues, is a necessary condition for peace – a prerequisite, though not sufficient on its own. In addition, Žužul emphasizes the importance of strong international pressure – for instance, from the United States – as a decisive factor in ending hostilities.

At the time of the Dayton negotiations, the first condition had already been met. Serbian military forces had been decisively defeated in Bosnia and Herzegovina through joint operations by Croatian and Bosniak forces. The severity of this defeat

had been such that the joint forces had the capacity to advance further, potentially even taking Banja Luka. However, the United States intervened, halting further military action and initiating a diplomatic push, recognizing the moment as an opportunity to begin serious negotiations. The second condition was likewise fulfilled, as there was a strong commitment from the American administration to pursue peace – not only from Holbrooke, who played a central role in the Dayton process, but also from President Clinton and others within the administration, reinforcing the momentum toward a negotiated resolution. This was the source of Žužul's optimism upon arrival in Dayton, though he acknowledges that this feeling fluctuated over the course of the twenty-one days of negotiation, gradually shifting toward hope. Ultimately, the talks resulted in a resolution to the conflict, and looking back thirty years later, Žužul assesses their success. He views the outcome of the negotiations as a significant achievement in many respects, while also recognizing that certain aspects could have been improved – a common sentiment even in situations less complex than the one faced at Dayton.

Ambassador Žužul regards the Washington Agreement as absolutely crucial to the process that led to the Dayton negotiations. At the outset of the war, clarity had existed in the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the identity of the aggressor – yet the picture had over time become obscured. By the time of the Washington Agreement, the conflict had devolved into a situation where all three sides were engaged in fighting one another, resulting in conflict between the Bosniaks and Croats, who had initially been the real victims of aggression. For any constructive progress to be made, it was essential to resolve the internal fighting. Žužul credits American diplomatic efforts for breaking the deadlock, as European attempts to resolve the situation over a two-year period had failed to produce results. The turning point came when President Clinton appointed Ambassador Redman as his first special envoy, with whom the Croatian team was able to work on and produce the Washington Agreement. This ceasefire agreement successfully ended hostilities between the Croats and Bosniaks, restoring clarity to the political and military landscape, and enabled the two groups to act jointly and effectively in subsequent efforts.

The Washington Agreement led to the Split Agreement, a critical development in the process moving towards the Dayton Peace negotiations. It was a mutual defense agreement between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina that formally established joint military forces to counter Serbian aggression within the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These forces consisted of the Croatian Army – then the most powerful military actor – alongside the Bosnian Army and the Croatian Defense Council (HVO), which was the army of the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The joint forces achieved several key objectives. Most notably, they ended the siege of Bihać, which Žužul notes was on the verge of becoming another genocide like Srebrenica. Following this, the coalition forces decisively defeated the Serbian forces in Bosnia, and approached the outskirts of Banja Luka, the largest area under Bosnian Serb control, both then as it remains today. However, the military campaign was stopped by the intervention of the United States. Despite the halt, Žužul emphasizes that the Split Agreement was essential as it enabled effective military operations, which were a prerequisite necessary to lead to any serious negotiations. Prior to this, the Serbian forces in Bosnia – bolstered by the Yugoslav Army – believed their military strength would allow them to achieve their goals without need for negotiation. The success of

the joint operations demonstrated otherwise, highlighting that the Serbian army was not as strong as it was believed to be. Žužul adds that this shift in military dynamics later paved the way for NATO intervention, occurring after the Dayton negotiations.

Reflecting on the U.S. intervention that halted the advance on Banja Luka, Ambassador Žužul acknowledges the complexity of the issue, viewing it as a question without a definitive answer. He recalls his frequent discussions with Holbrooke, with whom he maintained a close personal friendship. Holbrooke had been the main force behind stopping the advance on Banja Luka, yet even he remained uncertain about whether it had been the right course of action. Žužul reflects that, had the intervention not occurred, the political landscape of Bosnia and Herzegovina might have evolved differently. Republika Srpska, for instance, would not exist in its current form, nor would leaders such as Milorad Dodik be in a position to spark new threats of destabilization in Bosnia. While the question of who would then control Banja Luka cannot be answered, Žužul believes that, from today's perspective, the intervention was an unfortunate decision as it ultimately hindered a significant shift in the region.

However, the decision to halt the advance on Banja Luka was driven by concerns over the potential humanitarian consequences. There was a concern that the operation would produce a mass number of refugees – tens of thousands of people fleeing through active warzones toward Serbia. While the military aspect of the operation was considered straightforward at the time, the risk to civilians, including children and families, was significant. Žužul emphasizes that these individuals would have been forced to traverse hostile territory, including regions near Srebrenica, where severe atrocities had recently occurred. In his view, the danger to non-combatants justified the caution exercised at the time. However, Žužul also reflects on the long-term implications of the decision. He suggests that had the joint advance continued, the war would have reached a more definitive conclusion, with the Serbian side clearly defeated. In that scenario, Bosnia and Herzegovina could have emerged with a more stable political structure, and the region's current challenges might have been mitigated had the conflict been allowed to reach its full resolution.

Reflecting on the Dayton negotiations, Ambassador Žužul recalls many memorable moments. During the twenty-one days of talks, however, he was physically present in the city of Dayton only twice. Most of the time was spent at the nearby air base, a deliberate choice by the organizers to limit the delegations' movements, during which time, Žužul recounts with humor, the weather was as cold and bleak as was typical of early November in Ohio. As to the negotiations themselves, Žužul highlights two key issues that dominated the early phase of the Dayton talks. The first was the resolution of the status of eastern Slavonia, a region of Croatia under occupation at the time. For the Republic of Croatia, this was a matter of primary importance, and the delegation succeeded in settling the question. However, the process took longer than expected – at least ten days – both in Dayton and on the ground in Croatia, as negotiations were conducted parallelly in the U.S. and in eastern Slavonia. Žužul remarks that this effort may have consumed more time than was necessary, as the aim was not to renegotiate but to re-confirm what had been settled in the Washington Agreement. Ten days of twenty-one were spent on the matter, with the outcome being essentially a reaffirmation of the same documents, with no substantial changes.

The second issue should have been to define the future structure and concept of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, instead of focusing on that issue, the talks were shifted – either intentionally or not – to the question of borders. Although these were internal borders by definition, the negotiations treated them as if they were major geopolitical divides, akin to borders between the Eastern and Western worlds. As a result, the remainder of the Dayton talks was consumed by negotiations and arguments over territorial boundaries: disputes over which side should give up which territories and to whom individual villages should belong. Žužul regards this shift in focus as a misstep, although, he notes, it might not have been a conscious decision. Nonetheless, two problems arose from this approach. First, it blurred the distinction between internal administrative boundaries and international borders. Second, it resulted in a loss of time, and the negotiations missed a critical opportunity to address the fundamental question of how Bosnia and Herzegovina would function as a composite state. The principle that Bosnia and Herzegovina would remain a unified country, composed of three constituent peoples, had been accepted from the outset, but it had not been meaningfully addressed during the talks. The challenge of how to integrate these three groups – Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs – across the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina was unfortunately left unresolved.

As a result, the Dayton negotiations concluded with the establishment of two federal entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, without thorough consideration of the broader implications. Žužul describes the outcome as a kind of experiment, arguing that Bosnia and Herzegovina, as shaped by Dayton, represented a structure that had never previously existed. Theoretically, it was a symmetrical construction, yet it defied other conventional models of state organization, such as federal, confederal, or unitary – each very different. Instead, Bosnia and Herzegovina combined one unitary entity, Republika Srpska, with one federal entity, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the relation between the two was never fully realized.

This unresolved relationship, Žužul explains, continues to pose challenges today. Republika Srpska operates with a high degree of autonomy and has repeatedly attempted to assert a right to secede from Bosnia and Herzegovina – a right that Žužul firmly states does not exist in any provision of the agreements, quite the opposite. Meanwhile, within the Federation, tensions persist between the two constituent peoples. Bosniaks have advocated for the creation of a civil state based on the principle of one person, one vote – a model that Žužul argues would effectively dismantle the federal structure. Croats, on the other hand, strongly oppose this proposal. Both the Dayton and Washington agreements explicitly defined the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a federation of two constituent peoples, not the territories. Žužul concludes that much of the energy in the Dayton discussions was spent debating internal arrangements within the Federation, rather than addressing the broader question of Bosnia and Herzegovina's overall structure. In his view, this was a significant omission in the Dayton process.

Croatia's relations with the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been consistent since the beginning, and are explicitly recognized in the Dayton Agreement. The agreement grants Croatia both the right and indeed the obligation to support the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Žužul's view, this provision is an important one as such support is necessary for the Croats there. He notes, however, that some

observers tend to interpret Croatia's involvement too narrowly, overlooking the broader reality in which Croatia remains a strong supporter of not just the Croats in Bosnia but of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole. The reality is, Žužul remarks, that while neighboring countries may not always enjoy harmonious relations, they must coexist. He argues that it is in the interest of Croatia and of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina – whether they be in Goražde, Banja Luka, Mostar, or Sarajevo – for Bosnia and Herzegovina to one day join NATO and the European Union. Yet this outcome, Žužul states frankly, is only possible with Croatia's support, which remains firmly in place. Indeed, Žužul expresses regret that when Croatian politicians speak on behalf of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it can lead to a perception that Croatia's support is limited to ethnic interests, when this is not the case. In his view, the entire Croatian political leadership – from the president and prime minister to the government – consistently supports Bosnia and Herzegovina's full integration into Western institutions. This position does not have to be viewed as a solely altruistic one, he notes, as it is in the interest of Croatia, but it is likewise in the interest of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this case, Žužul views the role of the Croatian government in a positive light, though public rhetoric at times fails to reflect this stance. Žužul hopes for more constructive discourse, free from the constraints of domestic political situations. Speaking from his perspective as a diplomat – and, in his own words, a relatively free individual with insight – he observes that politicians often prioritize elections and the securing of votes, which can sometimes lead to a failure to see the bigger picture.

Ambassador Žužul cautions that Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a kind of time bomb that could potentially erupt into conflict. While he maintains firm hope that such an outcome will never occur, he acknowledges that the risk persists – particularly due to the emergence of new external influences. During the Dayton negotiations, the Russian delegation had played a constructive role, led by then-Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov. However, Žužul emphasizes that the Russia of 1995 is not the same as the Russia of today – Putin's Russia. Today, it is widely understood that Milorad Dodik has been operating under the influence of Vladimir Putin. In Žužul's view, Dodik is more responsive to directives from Moscow than to those from Brussels or even Washington, which for the moment remains rather distant. In contrast, Moscow maintains close ties with Dodik, who, despite being subject to international sanctions, has travelled to Russia frequently – sometimes multiple times per month – and maintains an open line with Putin. Žužul warns that the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina may hinge on Putin's strategic intentions. If Putin seeks to further provoke Europe or challenge NATO by exerting influence near its borders, Žužul suggests that he could instruct Dodik to initiate a referendum – an act that could destabilize the region and escalate tensions.

The issue extends beyond Milorad Dodik alone. Ambassador Žužul maintains a deep concern that, in the event of a referendum, a majority of citizens in Republika Srpska would likely vote in favor of secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina. This, Žužul warns, would raise urgent and troubling questions: Who would intervene to stop such a move? Would the region face another war? And who would be involved? He points to a recent military parade in Banja Luka, noting that while Republika Srpska appeared to be organizing its military forces, they were not their own; they would only be mobilized with backing from Russia. On the opposing side, Žužul frankly describes Europe as disorganized and questions whether NATO would be willing to

intervene. In light of this uncertainty, he makes an urgent appeal for robust American engagement – not necessarily military, but political. In his view, history has shown, both in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, that meaningful progress in the region has only occurred when the United States played an active role. Regardless of which administration is in power, Žužul maintains that American involvement is a fundamental necessity.

Ambassador Žužul acknowledges the significance of the final territorial arrangement of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the Dayton negotiations – the so-called ‘51-49%’ division, by which the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina comprises fifty-one percent of the territory, while Republika Srpska comprises forty-nine percent. The reality was that a large part of the disputed territory in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the time was controlled by Croatian forces. Initially, the proposed maps reflected a 55-45% split, but this changed dramatically due to the intervention of Slobodan Milošević. Milošević had effectively excluded the Bosnian Serb delegation from Dayton and negotiated on their behalf. He rejected the 55-45% proposal, claiming that he could not persuade the Bosnian Serbs to accept such an arrangement. Instead, he insisted on the 51-49% model, which ultimately became the framework for the final agreement. The last few days of negotiations were consumed by efforts to redraw borders and allocate territory. At one point, a solution was proposed without Croatian input that involved transferring land controlled by Croats, under the assumption that Granić might be convinced to accept it, since it was understood that Tuđman would not. Žužul dismisses that assumption as naive, noting that Granić would never agree to something that Tuđman or Šušak would reject. However, in the end, the Croatian delegation conceded 4% of Croatian-controlled territory in Bosnia, which increased the Serbian share from 45% to 49%. However, Žužul stresses that the Croatian side fought hard to retain the remaining 1% of Croatian-controlled territory, which ultimately came with a temporary solution for the Brčko area and brought about a resolution to the negotiations.

A critical moment at the conclusion of the Dayton negotiations came with the direct intervention of President Clinton. Žužul notes that while Richard Holbrooke later wrote about this episode in his book, Holbrooke was not present during the key conversation; it was only Žužul himself alongside Šušak, Granić and Tuđman. On the final day before the signing, at 3 p.m., Clinton contacted Tuđman directly. Clinton had refused to call Milošević from the first and ultimately decided not to call Alija Izetbegović either, despite internal White House discussions. Clinton spoke only to Tuđman, urging him in a clear and direct manner to make the agreement happen. Žužul describes the exchange as a textbook example of effective diplomacy, highlighting his admiration of Clinton. Tuđman had always been prepared to sign the agreement, Žužul argues, particularly given that Croatia had resolved the issue of eastern Slavonia. He was prepared to take any step necessary to see things through; it is not surprising therefore, Žužul notes, that Holbrooke himself referred to Tuđman as the ‘king of Dayton’, as Tuđman was ultimately the one that gave the negotiations the final push. In contrast, Milošević had limited leverage; his primary goal was to lift sanctions on Serbia, and he was acutely aware that the war had been lost – a reality that, according to Žužul, the Bosnian Serb delegation had yet to fully grasp.

Ambassador Žužul describes the negotiations involving Izetbegović as the most difficult, citing two main reasons. Firstly, there was persistent conflict within

Izetbegović's delegation between two key figures: Haris Silajdžić, the Bosnian prime minister and former foreign minister, and Muhamed Šaćirbegović, the current foreign minister. Although both men were close to Izetbegović, they were not close to each other and frequently clashed, rendering the decision-making process difficult. Secondly, Izetbegović was slow to make decisions. Žužul maintains a great respect for Izetbegović, despite their differences in many areas, admiring his deep commitment to faith and philosophy. However, Izetbegović's hesitance in making decisions made negotiations difficult, and the internal discord between his closest advisors only complicated the process further. As the negotiations reached their final stage, all parties waited anxiously for Izetbegović's concluding remarks. In the end, Izetbegović delivered a statement that Žužul remembers as philosophical: "It is not a just peace, but it is peace – and my people need peace." This declaration marked his acceptance of the agreement and symbolized the conclusion of the Dayton process – whose primary achievement, Žužul emphasizes, was the establishment of peace.

Ambassador Žužul emphasizes the significance of the Dayton Agreement, expressing hope that it could serve as a first step toward further necessary developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He advocates for comprehensive and serious negotiations like those in Dayton among the three constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina, addressing their shared challenges, including the problem of the constitution. The matter cannot be approached from one side only. Žužul notes that certain representatives from the Bosnian side have attempted to find arguments and excuses against the decisions of some European courts. Yet Žužul points out that courts do not create laws, particularly not constitutions; their role is to interpret and apply existing legal frameworks. While the opinions of the courts should be considered, constitutional matters, Žužul argues, must be negotiated directly among the affected parties – the three constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He stresses that a new model for negotiation would not materialize on its own. The three groups are unlikely to convene voluntarily, particularly in the case of then-president of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, who had no interest in participating, believing himself to be in a position of strength owing to his perceived military backing. Žužul describes Dodik's actions as demonstrative – moving freely through Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Federation, to show that authorities were unable to arrest him despite their wish to do so. In Žužul's view, if it wishes to become involved, the United States still possesses the influence necessary to compel all parties to return to the negotiating table, as it had during the Washington and Dayton talks. He adds that the European Union would likely support such efforts.

Ambassador Žužul gives a candid assessment of the role of the European Union during the original Dayton negotiations. He notes that the EU was significantly divided at the time, with three primary representatives: Carl Bildt, who was nominally representing the European Union but whose mandate was unclear; Wolfgang Ischinger, representing Germany, who played a notably constructive role, though his position differed somewhat from Bildt's; and Jacques Chirac, representing France, whose stance reflected distinctly French interests. This divergence, Žužul explains, raised the question of who truly represented the European Union during the negotiations. In addition to these figures, British representatives were also present, further contributing to what Žužul describes as a confused situation. While EU representatives were included at the outset, their involvement became more passive as the negotiations progressed, remaining present at all times but not actively

participating in the process. Žužul observes that the current situation regarding the European Union has not changed significantly. He stresses the importance of the EU – or even NATO, which he believes to be more necessary – in supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, he points to the complexities within Brussels, where twenty-eight member states each pursue distinct national policies, creating a fragmented approach. Despite this, Žužul emphasizes the importance – both symbolic and practical – of the EU's involvement in this issue, as it offers hope and a vision for a better future for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Without that aspirational goal, he questions what incentive – what 'carrot' – could be otherwise offered to Bosnia and Herzegovina. In his view, EU membership is a powerful motivator, because one can easily see that countries which join the Union enjoy improvements in quality of life in every respect, compared to those that remain outside. Thus, it is necessary to have the EU's involvement – yet Žužul concludes that expecting the European Union to lead the negotiation process would be unrealistic.

Ambassador Žužul emphasizes the need to re-examine all aspects of Bosnia and Herzegovina's political structure. This does not necessarily mean changes are required, he explains, but that a comprehensive review and open discussion are essential. In his view, the process should begin with a broader perspective: specifically, determining the structure of the state, whether Bosnia and Herzegovina should be a confederal, federal, or unitary state. While expressing doubt about the viability of a unitary model, Žužul notes that a number of confederal and federal models had been considered in past negotiations. The model that was very often discussed was the cantonal model inspired by Switzerland, in which Bosnia and Herzegovina would be divided into cantons. He explains that, similar to Switzerland, some cantons could be ethnically homogeneous – just as Swiss cantons are predominantly French-, German-, Italian- or Romansh-speaking – yet still function effectively within a unified system. The proposal of such a model for the three entities in Bosnia – Muslim, Serb and Croat – has been met with criticism when coming from the Croatian side, being described as against Bosnia and Herzegovina. Žužul questions why such a model should be dismissed as anti-Bosnian, arguing that it remains a legitimate concept worthy of consideration. No model should be imposed, Žužul notes – indeed, he acknowledges that the current model could be kept, although he finds that it has proven to be non-functional. Yet he emphasizes that all options should be brought to the table, to be discussed and approached with an open mind.

In Žužul's view, three fundamental principles should guide future discussions. First is a desire to avoid renewed conflict, shared by all sides. Second, Bosnia and Herzegovina should pursue its aspirations to join NATO and the European Union – an objective that is achievable only as a unified state. Third, the country comprises three constituent peoples, a reality rooted not in political invention but in centuries of history; Žužul cites the long-standing presence of Serbs and Croats, estimated at around thirteen centuries, and of Bosnian Muslims who have lived in the region for approximately seven centuries. That is simply fact, Žužul maintains – a reality that people must live with. Yet this historical diversity does not preclude coexistence. On the contrary, he points to contemporary examples of multiethnic communities in cities such as Sarajevo, Travnik, and Mostar, where people continue to live together despite unresolved political challenges.

It is Ambassador Žužul's belief that Bosnia and Herzegovina has the potential to function as a prosperous state. He emphasizes that the country need not remain economically disadvantaged, owing to its rich abundance of natural resources. Among these, he highlights a variety of rare and valuable minerals as well as the country's energy capacity, which he notes is greater than that of any other region in the former Yugoslavia – Bosnia and Herzegovina possesses a significant number of hydropower plants. Žužul also points to the country's natural beauty, suggesting that once Bosnia and Herzegovina opens itself to the world, sectors such as tourism could thrive. He expresses no doubt that the national economy could become beneficial and sustainable. Given its relatively small population – a little over three million people – he believes that citizens could enjoy a high quality of life, provided the country reaches the level necessary for such development to begin.