

AUDIO CLIP: Transcript of meeting between President Tudjman and Elisabeth Rehn in the President's Office

04 December 1995

F. Tudjman	When did you arrive in Zagreb?
E. Rehn	Just the day before yesterday, very late in the evening after a very interesting, very useful tour around in the territory of former Yugoslavia, so I have learnt a lot. Everything is not nice what I have learned unfortunately. But I have been very well received all over and I believe that the atmosphere is getting very open now.
F. Tudjman	You had discussions with my people in Croatia already?
E. Rehn	I have had with just Interior Affairs with Social Welfare and I am very pleased that there is a possibility to meet with my former colleague Defence Minister Susak on the airport because I am leaving directly from here to, to Rome to start with and then back home.
F. Tudjman	Have you been already in Sarajevo or Belgrade?
E. Rehn	I was, I was last time now my, my tour was really going to, to Banja Luka to Pristina to Mostar and yesterday I went to East Slavonia, Sector East and that's something that I find very important that the hopefully good agreement can be fulfilled to all its parts.
F. Tudjman	Dear Madame, as you stated, unfortunately you weren't able to see nice things but you must keep in mind that the things that happened in the years during the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav communist Serb aggression, and everything that happened up until these agreements, firstly the Washington Agreement the Croatian-Muslim Agreement and now in Dayton, that this was one of the most complicated world crises and that it is important we get out of this crisis in order to be able to truly dedicate ourselves to humanitarian issues and the removal of all factors which caused people to suffer, which caused people from those areas and in general which caused such an abnormal situation. Now we are after all on the road, after the Dayton Accords and hopefully after the signing in Paris, towards the normalization of our relations which shall enable us to deal with the issues that you and your delegation are focused on in an easier fashion.
Translator	Well as I said Madame, unfortunately you have not had the opportunity to see nice things during your visit, however it should be borne in mind that what has happened in the years after the dissolution of Yugoslavia with the Yugo-communist and Serbian aggression and everything up to first of all the Washington Agreements between the Croats and the Muslims in Bosnia and now recently the Dayton Agreements does represent one of the most complicated local crises what is essential now is to leave this crisis behind to resolve it so that we can devote ourselves to humanitarian issues to the elimination of everything that has caused so much suffering for all the people in the region, to get out, out of this abnormal truly abnormal situation. Nevertheless now after the Dayton Agreements and hopefully after the signing of all the documents in Paris we will be on the way towards normalization and then we can devote ourselves fully to the issues which are your concern.
E. Rehn	Mr. President I am very much supporting your thoughts in this because I have

	<p>been all the time stating that I hope that in my work I can come more away from just bookkeeping on events that it should be more a question of conclusions, of recommendations how we can face the future and just work together for better understanding of human rights instead of just telling that those were murdered there, those were looted, those were, their houses were burnt up and they are in mass graves. We should come over this situation.</p>
F. Tudjman	<p>This is precisely the thought I wanted to express. We in Croatia also wanted to avoid everything that took place here, and after Tito we proposed, we proposed a solution of the Yugoslav crisis by peaceful means on a confederal basis. We were faced with everything that we were, therefore Croatia and then Bosnia suffered such aggression, I don't know if you visited Vukovar or not. Therefore, a third of Croatia was destroyed, 400.000 Croats, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, were forced out of their homes, and it is understandable...people were murdered, and it is understandable that in the course of the liberation of these areas, on the Croatian side it was also impossible to constrain fighting the war in gloves. Therefore, first of all the Yugo-communist Army and the Serbs committed terrible crimes in such an aggression who's purpose was the creation of a Greater Serbia and later in the liberation of these areas, also it was not possible to prevent people which had suffered, who were returning to those areas, from committing acts of revenge and stupidities such as destroying homes and so forth. Therefore it is more important now to forget all of this as soon as possible and to establish normal relations among people, among nations, rather, although it is necessary to punish individuals for war crimes, to this extent, if we were to approach this issue so broadly, this would mean a new deepening of mistrust and conflict, so it is more important that we create a new order and establish trust.</p>
Translator	<p>This is precisely the thought which I also wanted to express. We in Croatia also wanted to avoid such developments and after Tito we wanted to propose, we proposed a solution of the crisis by peaceful means on a confederal basis. However later on we were faced with everything that we suffered in Croatia and later on in Bosnia we suffered such a terrible aggression, I don't know whether you have been to Vukovar or not...</p>
E. Rehn	<p>Oh yes I was yesterday. I could see in my own eyes.</p>
Translator	<p>One third of Croatia was destroyed, more than 400.000 people expelled Croats, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, and many of them were also, lost their lives and in the process of liberation of these areas by Croatian forces of course one couldn't remain just at war, war is not conducted in gloves anywhere in the world. First of all it was the Yugoslav-Communist and the Serbian aggression which was the cause of horrendous crimes in the area. In their aggression, in their aim to create a greater Serbia. Later on during the liberation of course we couldn't fully restrain our people, there were many people there who suffered loss of human life, loss of their relatives, sacrifices, lost property and so forth, so that some of them did resort to acts of revenge and to stupid things actually such as the destruction of homes and so forth...</p>
E. Rehn	<p>So stupid.</p>
Translator	<p>What is important however is to forget all this and turn to normalization of relations among people among nations in the region. The, certain individuals of course have to be punished for the acts they have committed but if we go too broadly in this respect I think this would only deepen the distrust and possibly lead to new conflicts. I think what...</p>
F. Tudjman	<p>New hatred...</p>

Translator	New hatreds...
F. Tudjman	Renewal of hatred..
Translator	So forth, so what is important I believe we should turn our attention fully to the establishment of a new order in the region.
E. Rehn	<p>Yes I believe that its important really to, to not look too much in what has been going on, of course it's very difficult to forget when you have lost your, all what you are believing in, the love to your relatives to your home, and even your homeland but perhaps we should more look at the, not at the revenge, more at the justice and the truth because there is always a time when the truth is coming, coming true and the sooner the better. I have been specially concerned during this tour with just the questions of, of the return of refugees, with the missing people that seems to be a very difficult question because that is something that every person wants to know what happened even if you have the message that he is killed or she is killed its better than not to know. And then of course just even the mental health of the children because you have the future that's very important. So there have been many things that I have been concerned about and sometimes I have had the feeling that perhaps there is not the real understanding, well in words but perhaps not in action, and I'm now not talking about Croatia, I'm talking for the whole territory, because if we are going to implement the Agreement from Dayton there must be the respect for these rights. You know Mr. President that I'm a member of the European Parliament and for us it's extremely important that Croatia who has been in some way in the lead though, in the democratic procedure, from what is left from the former Yugoslavia that you can implement as soon as possible the normal democracy and just these human rights.</p>
F. Tudjman	<p>Be assured that the Croatian Government is absolutely focused in that sense. You see, consenting to the Dayton Accords, which means consenting to a peaceful solution in the liberation of the occupied territories of Eastern Slavonia was, was received with great dissatisfaction by a significant number of Croats, the public, why didn't we proceed to liberate Eastern Slavonia with military forces as we had done in the case of Western Slavonia, Knin, because, such a great amount of hatred and distrust have accumulated. But assessing that peace was of a greater importance and that we didn't want all the Serbs to leave, we want to establish relations based on trust, and judging from our experiences in Knin, where we didn't want all the Serbs to leave. Therefore the Croatian Government shall, in this respect truly attempt to act within the framework of a peaceful solution within the liberated territories, guaranteeing civil rights and especially solving issues regarding missing persons which is painful and which is accepted with much difficulty by those people even in cases when they know that the victim is dead, you know, we are talking about thousands of people, which are having difficulty coming to terms with this situation, and please, in the case of any form of concession, Croatia has also contributed, given concessions, on the basis of, because there can be no peace without concessions by all sides. Therefore we are faced with the dissatisfaction of people, due to the evil they have suffered which would proceed with military, combat operations, and take acts of revenge, but on a whole, in Croatia we have such a stable democratic order that we shall ensure the development of the principles in Croatia along the lines you had mentioned earlier.</p>

Translator	Rest assured that Croatian authorities, Croatian Government is absolutely committed to this respect. We have agreed to the Dayton Agreements that is to the peaceful solution concerning the liberation of the remaining occupied parts of the Republic of Croatia that is Eastern Slavonia. This has even caused certain discontent among some of the Croatian people and Croatian public because some people are saying why didn't we go solve the issue militarily as we did with Western Slavonia and with Knin and so forth. Because so much hatred and so much distrust has accumulated over the recent period. However we are fully aware of the fact that peace is more important, we certainly do not want and have not wanted all the Serbs to leave and we didn't want, we offered them the protection of human rights and so forth, in our attempts to peacefully liberate all our areas. And we have also, on a number of times, at a number of times, guaranteed all human rights to them. Then of course there is particular the issue of the painful issue of missing persons, which, which is something that many people find difficult to accept I mean even when they know that their friends, relatives, members of their families are dead, but still thousands of people who find it difficult to reconcile themselves...
E. Rehn	A little bit of <i>/indiscernible/</i> .
Translator	... and who also find it difficult to reconcile themselves with the concessions, and Croatia has also made its contribution in this regard, we have made concessions because there is no peace without concessions on all the parties involved and hence the dissatisfaction of part of the people who have suffered so much over the past period and this is why they want to see the matter solved militarily and even feel feelings of revenge. But nevertheless we have a stable democratic order and you can rest assured that we shall provide for the implementation of all the principles in our sphere of activity.
F. Tudjman	Almost 20 years ago I wrote about the need to "Scandinavize" this area in the sense of both democratization, mutual recognition and coexistence of different nations. In the top of the Croatian Government I believe there are numerous humanists according to their calling, their profession, their personal feelings. The president of Parliament is a writer, the Deputy Prime Minister is also a humanist, here is one of my first associates, also a writer, humanist and so on. In Croatia, in this democratic Government there are truly not only of a general political commitment, such people are truly supportive, regarding Croatia itself and committed towards Croatia's contribution in Bosnia and Herzegovina on a whole, towards the normalization of the Croatian-Moslem, the Croatian-Serb relations and that, as I said so that this area, instead of being a "keg of gunpowder", becomes, in accordance with Scandinavia's example as an area of peace and cooperation amongst nations.
Translator	More than 20 years ago I already wrote about the necessity to Scandinavize the area on the basis of democratization and mutual recognition and coexistence among peoples and nations. I believe that at the very top of Croatian Government there are more humanists by profession and by feeling, the Speaker of our Parliament, our Vice Premier, present here, one of my first associates is also a man of letters and a humanist so in the Croatian Democratic Government we don't have only a general political commitment to these principles but also their composition goes to show they are people who are truly committed so that Croatia, not only Croatia itself but also in Bosnia and Herzegovina can contribute to the overall normalization of the question of relations between the Croats and the Moslems, between the Croats and the Serbs so that this area does not become

	what it has been in the past as they call it a "gunpowder keg" but rather an example along the example of Scandinavian countries of peace and cooperation among peoples.
E. Rehn	Yes I am very pleased to be listening to this, there is quite a lot of Nordic mafia present here just now with Stoltenberg, and Bildt and Rehn and so on but I hope that this will really be something that is positive and not negative in, in any case because we really want to do, do our best. I think that just in this democracy process even details like that those who now are accused for, for the looting and killing and so on during operation Storm, or the Serbian side there are quite a, quite a lot of them in prison that if possible, even I, if I know it is a very difficult process because no courts are capable of being very very just short in time with cases like this when there are a huge amount of them, but it should be good if they could be dealt with quite quickly so there is the feeling that this is something where the justice is working and they will have then a fair trial of course it will be fair, but the trial is also fair when it comes quite, quite soon after committing the crimes, and something I am also concerned about this, perhaps the situation with the camps, just the Velika Kladusa region, I believe they have difficulties if there is possible to make improvements with their living, it takes time before they are returning, one by one of course but so that should be quite important.
F. Tudjman	You see, with regards to the refugees from Velika Kladusa, this is an example of how complex the situation here is, here Moslems are afraid to return among the Moslem population and in this case we have done, Croatia has done its utmost we even called upon the President and the Turkish Government to aid us with the use of their influence on the Moslem leadership and we sent a unit of Croatian police in order to facilitate their expeditive return.
Translator	Well the example of the refugees from Velika Kladusa also goes to show how complex...
E. Rehn	Yes.
Translator	...the situation is because this is a case of Moslems being afraid to come back among Moslems:...
E. Rehn	Their own.
Translator	And we the Republic of Croatia have done everything we have also asked the Turkish Government to help us so they bring their influence to bear on the Moslem leadership
F. Tudjman	Even to send a unit of police.
Translator	And also to send a unit of their police, and we have also sent a unit of the Croatian police there so that this matter can be dealt with as soon as possible.
F. Tudjman	With regards to the first issue you raised, I must say candidly, I already passed a Decree on Abolition for those who had participated in the rebellion, for Serbs who had participated in the rebellion against the Croatian Government, except for war criminals. I must admit that we are encountering resistance from a formally legal perspective and within our, including our courts, and these days I had said do not instigate court proceedings against individuals for simply having participated in the rebellion because they were forced to in a sense, but truly only those cases where an individual committed a war crime should be tried. Therefore, within Croatia, we shall truly attempt to take actions along the lines which you yourself mentioned. That we free people from jail as soon as possible because this is an important step towards the establishment and renewal of mutual trust among the Croats and the Serbs in Croatia and therefore towards the normalization of the Croat-Serb relations as a whole.

Translator	As far as your first question is concerned candidly speaking I have already issued a decision a Decree on abolition for all the Serbs who took part in the rebellion against the Croatian authorities, against the Croatian Government excepting war criminals of course. I must say that we do meet with certain resistance in formal legal terms, even from the courts, but even recently I said don't try those people who took part in the rebellion because they were forced to, just try those who are guilty of war crimes and we shall really do everything operated on such lines, and I also said, release all those people who are not guilty of war crimes, release them from prison. We believe that this is an important step towards the rebuilding of trust between the Croats and the Serbs in Croatia and of course within the scope of overall normalization of relations between Croatia and Serbia.
F. Tudjman	And we are doing this despite the fact that there are oppositional, radical and extremist elements who criticize us, why negotiate, why reconcile with those who committed aggression, but we shall persevere with regards to this.
Translator	And we shall persevere in this line although there are in the opposition ranks and radical extremist ranks, there are criticisms, why negotiate with these people, why come to terms with them since they have taken part in the aggression but nevertheless we shall persevere along the lines which I mentioned.
E. Rehn	Yes I believe its very important for all of us, as, as you know Europe has put some conditions for construction budget lines and so on and for us its very important that sooner or later there should be a former Yugoslavia who totally is a part of the European Union Council to start with and I have the feeling that you are the ones to be starting...
F. Tudjman	Just a moment.
E. Rehn	this process so my role is of course very much of a, of a Rapporteur, but I am not very very happy to only report as I told you in the beginning, I should very much like to contribute to the democratic process in the whole territory and therefore you can certainly count on me, of course I'm going to report badly things, if, bad things if there are nasty things to report on, I hope that I will be unnecessary soon, but I'm not so far unfortunately.
F. Tudjman	We need to strive to get out of the situation in which we find ourselves as soon as possible.
Translator	This is why I said considering the present situation we must tend to leave the situation as soon as possible.
E. Rehn	Yes, we have our national day the day after tomorrow, can I bring your regards Mr. President to my President?
F. Tudjman	My people they will, see you in better circumstances.
E. Rehn	I hope so.