

*The following is an English translation of Marco Casagrande interview in the monthly supplement Kuukausiliite of Helsingin Sanomat (Finland's largest daily news paper) in 1997. Hiding behind his pen name Luca Moconesi, Marco Casagrande was promoting "Mostarin tien liftarit", his autobiography from Bosnian war.*

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## **AN ARCHITECT AND A MERCENARY**

*There are around 30 wars being fought around the world. Thousands of mercenaries take part in them. One of them is a Finnish veteran of the Bosnian war, 25-year old "Luca Moconesi", who is at the moment in Israel as a "tourist". Before his current career he was studying architecture in Helsinki.*

### **HS: Why didn't you become an architect after all?**

MC: I went to army in between my studies. There I experienced almost a spiritual enlightenment that I was born to do it.

### **The Finnish army wasn't enough?**

- No, I needed action. The feeling of extremity, absurdity, incomprehensibility. Have you seen the movie Apocalypse: Now? It's just like that.

### **How do you get to become a mercenary?**

- There are big recruiting offices, but you don't know about them if you are not in the circles. In 1993 I was with my Croatian girlfriend on holiday on the island of Korcula off the coast of Croatia, and met some wounded mercenaries there. I asked them for some address, but they didn't trust me. I decided to show what I am capable of, to cross a mined area to a radar station. It got me some respect. One of them then escorted me to the headquarters.

### **How do you choose your employer?**

- It was self-evident that in the war in Bosnia it was the Croatians already because of the girlfriend. Before I make a decision, I find out how long is the contract, what are the salary and equipment like, what kind of missions, what kind of casualty figures and what kind of back-up – so that you don't anger any major intelligence service or state.

**How is the employment situation in this trade?**

- For good men it's very good.

**What is jolliest part in this profession?**

- That you can do things that don't even cross a mind of an ordinary person.

**Such as?**

- To attack on your own will a bunker that is firing at you, and the death misses you with centimeter. It is an unbelievable, superhuman feeling.

**What is most unpleasant in your work?**

- Those moments when you feel you can't have any influence on your own fate.

**How much do you get paid?**

- You don't get retirement allowance out of this, and the risks are high. So the salary is very high. For example 50 000\* per month, or you can get a house. Or sometimes when you capture a city, then that city is yours. (\*This probably means Finnish marks. 50000 marks was around USD 9500 in 1997)

**How did you get your salary in Bosnia?**

- I don't comment.

**Are there fringe benefits?**

- There's better equipment than in the armies. The employing organization is normally not a state, but a company that is paid by the state, and that pays us. You've got medical helicopters and hospitals. You've got the best logistics.

**What company hired you?**

- I won't say. There are many of these. All the intelligence services for example need us.

**How many people have you killed?**

- I won't comment.

**Did you participate in raping?**

- No.

**Do you make a difference between civilians and soldiers?**

- According to the possibilities. If you assault a house and hear movement, you throw in a grenade but can't tell if there happens to be some poor grandma in there.

**What if there happens to be?**

- Well that's a pity.

**Is Israel your second workplace?**

- I am here as a tourist.

**So are you working in Israel but you can't talk about it?**

- I won't comment.

**Which war would you like to go to?**

- Zaire would be really interesting, good business. It's a war organized by the western countries, stable salary, lots of pals. They have written me that there are 600 – 700 mercenaries, good gear, all have combat experience... And on the opposing side you've rebels that haven't been trained that well.

**Why don't you go there then?**

- I have committed myself to being a tourist now.

**How do you spend your free time?**

- When we got back from a battle, we were not let out for a leave right away, which was very wise. We were in a "safe house" for a week, fooled around among ourselves. Right after the war in Bosnia things felt totally impossible, I took a ferry back home and there were some tough guys, some bikers, ha ha. They told me, move out of the way, son. I lived in Skatta (= a neighborhood in Helsinki), I was quite lost. For two weeks I just washed dishes, managed to be without fighting a war for a year.

By Kati Juurus

Pseudonym Luca Moconesi's book about his experiences in the war in Bosnia comes out in March.