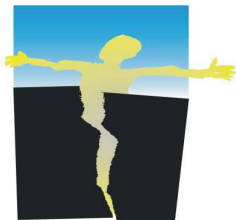


HELSINKI Bulletin



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N^o 58 • February 2010

Resolution on Srebrenica: Debate Opened, Notwithstanding

President Tadic's initiative for a parliamentary resolution on Srebrenica triggered off a debate that laid bare the proportions of Serbia's frustration manifested in its denial to face up the recent past, the Bosnian war in particular. The existence of Republika Srpska /RS/ - actually the very fact that it exists for fifteen years now - strengthened the Serb mainstream elite's belief about full attainment of warring goals being just a matter of time and more favorable international constellation.



Reactions to the initiative by proselytizers of Serb national program additionally illustrate this mainstream belief. So, Dobrica Cosic for the first time ever accuses President Tadic though almost until yesterday he used to be his

"everyday" adviser in state matters. Actually, Cosic accuses the President, the government and the parliament of "a risky, sectarian, short-sighted national and state policy" that legitimized Vojvodina's autonomy and thus "politically charted Vojvodina's separatism" and tolerated the internationalization of the "Sandzak issue" thus enabling a legitimate Ottomanization of the Balkans, i.e. of Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. And all that was done, says Cosic, shortly after Montenegro's secession and against the backdrop of the Serb problem in Montenegro and broken diplomatic relations with this "brotherly" state.¹

Cosic and his circle oppose Serbia's Europeanization, which implies characterization of the Srebrenica crime. In his view, Europeanization is "advocated by immature politicians, corrupted intellections and some media." He accuses the ruling pro-European coalition of having yielded to "jihad-fundamentalist Bosniak lying

¹ Pecat, February 12, 2010.



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propaganda about Serbs committing genocide in Bosnia and Srebrenica.” Hence, “We unconscientiously and irresponsibly equalize our war crimes and alleged ‘holocaust’ of Muslims, add and multiply our crimes and hush up Bosniak and Croat – whereby we turn our descendents into members of a genocidal nation equal to Nazi Germany,” says Cosic.²

Some expert circles have been trying to find a term that would suit the European Parliament’s resolution calling upon all European countries to commemorate July 11 as the day of the Srebrenica genocide. So, Prof. Vojin Dimitrijevic put forth a phrase boiling down to “condemnation of the gruesome crime in Srebrenica characterized as genocide by all international courts.”³ This would avoid a characterization of our own, says Dimitrijevic. However, the sum and substance of such a resolution is to come public with “one’s own” characterization. For his part, therefore, War Crimes Prosecutor Vojislav Vukcevic suggests the following wording: “The Serbian Parliament condemns the Srebrenica genocide and genuinely grieves for all victims in Srebrenica. On this occasion, it offers apologies to all members of victims’ families for Serbia’s failure in 1995 to prevent the Srebrenica genocide.”⁴



Most parliamentary parties insisted on the adoption of two resolutions –

² Pecat, February 12, 2010.

³ Blic, February 14, 2010.

⁴ Vreme, February 11, 2010.

one of which would condemn the crimes against Serbs. Vojislav Kostunica and his Democratic Party of Serbia /DSS/ opposed the European Parliament’s term ‘genocide’ the most. Other opposition parties also backed a formula whereby the term “genocide” would be avoided, advocating terms such as “the most horrible crime,” “crime” or “serious crime” instead.

Representatives of EU and US visiting Serbia in the meantime, kept insisting on condemnation of the Srebrenica crime and the arrest of Ratko Mladic. Their attitude additionally pressurized the ruling coalition for the adoption of the Srebrenica resolution.

The chairwoman of the Serbian parliament, Slavica Djukic-Dejanovic, announced that a resolution on Srebrenica would not be placed on the parliamentary agenda before its March session. Submitters of the initiative, she explained, want it to be adopted by the majority vote.

The purpose of a resolution as such, actually, is that it is adopted by the great majority of MP votes so as to demonstrate the political will for facing up the recent past. A resolution on Srebrenica would be a major step forward for Serbia, though incomplete without the arrest of Ratko Mladic.

Parliament and public opinion

Ms. Djukic-Dejanovic points out the goal is not to have a resolution adopted by a razor-thin majority. She thinks that every parliamentary caucus has its own version of the resolution. “Probably there will be an attempt to harmonize all these versions. Since we’ll have to ultimately vote for one text, it is most important that it is not adopted with 126 votes only,” says she.⁵

Parliamentary caucuses have not yet discussed a resolution on

⁵ Beta, January 30, 2010.

Srebrenica, given that no concrete text has been presented to the parliament so far. Prospects are poor for its soon placement on the parliamentary agenda.



Findings of the public opinion poll, conducted in January 2009 (on a sample of 1,000 interviewees) show that 20.6 percent of citizens of Serbia supports a parliamentary declaration condemning the crimes in Srebrenica. Further, 46.2 percent of citizens favor a unique resolution condemning all the crimes committed in ex-Yugoslavia. Adoption of two separate declarations – one on Srebrenica and the other on the crimes against Serbs – dominates the mind of 20.3 percent of citizens, whereas the same percentage holds that no resolution whatsoever on the crimes committed in 1990s wars needs to be adopted. 12.7 percent of interviewees opted for “undecided” or the answer “I am not sure whether resolutions are necessary at all.” One of the polling questions was, “What is your opinion about the crimes against Bosniaks in Srebrenica in 1995?” According to the findings, 55.2 percent of citizens of Serbia believe it is about one crime only “the proportions of which have been maliciously overblown by our enemies and the media.” 6.7 percent of interviewees negates the Srebrenica genocide as a fabrication, while 22.4 percent are undecided. Only 15.7 percent hold the Srebrenica crime one of the most serious crimes in ex-Yugoslavia in 1990s.⁶

⁶ Blic, February 2, 2010.

Tadic: Condemnation of Srebrenica is an obligation

Initiating the adoption of a Srebrenica resolution, President Tadic said he knew it would meet strong disapproval in Serbia and Republika Srpska. Nevertheless, its adoption was an obligation of the Serbian parliament, he said. “Politicians are those who need to take upon themselves the responsibility for such political decisions, as this is why citizens vote for them in elections and then, in next elections, reward or punish them for their decisions,” he added.⁷ “As times go by”, he said, “the Srebrenica resolution will gain support not only in Serbia but also in all places where Serbs live.” And he stressed in particular that the policy of acknowledgment of other people’s suffering and paying homage to other people’s victims gives Serbia international credibility for its national policy.⁸

He also argued that the adoption of a resolution on Srebrenica would make a positive ethical break with “the constant need of Balkan societies for mourning only their own victims.” “All nations readily show understanding for their own suffering and that of those close to them. It is most important, however, to demonstrate sympathy and empathy for other people’s suffering and misfortune, particularly in the region of Western Balkans where such an act stands for an ethical break with the habitual behavior in the past,” said Tadic.⁹

When faced with resistance, primarily from opposition parties, Tadic said that compassion for Srebrenica victims in no way contradicted Serbia’s right and obligation to remember its own

⁷ Tanjug, January 10, 2010.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Tanjug, January 15, 2010.



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victims and suffering to which Serbs had been exposed. Commenting the idea about two resolutions, he said, "As for the other resolution, the one on Serb victims, I would say that any nation belittling its own victims would commit an ethical misdeed. In my opinion, Serbia should adopt such a resolution as well. Since we have to show empathy for other people's hardships, I take that we need to adopt two resolutions but not on the same day."¹⁰



According to Defense Minister Dragan Sutanovac the vote on the Srebrenica resolution will demonstrate which player at the political scene "behaves and thinks as a responsible person, and which remained stuck in the times that should be bygone." "I recognize the handwriting of those who will vote against, given that their handwriting has been recognizable ever since 1990s. The same handwriting was recognizable at the times of torched embassies and Montenegro's 'defense' with folk lutes in 'Sava Center' and when tanks heading for Srebrenica were blessed." A resolution on Srebrenica, he said, was an opportunity for Serbia to take responsibility for everything done in its name and clearly manifest that it will not longer allow such crimes.¹¹

The chairwoman of the Serbian parliament, Slavica Djukic-Dejanovic, emphasizes she would personally support any resolution that condemns war crimes, including

the one on Srebrenica. "In my view, giving mention to Srebrenica is not enough. However, the decision on my vote and those of other MPs of the Socialist Party of Serbia /SPS/ will be on party bodies," she said.¹² Ivica Dacic, SPS leader, said, "Every nation needs to face up the crimes it committed. However, that implies not amnesty for other states that have not yet faced up their crimes. I would be most pleased should all states adopt such a well-balanced attitude towards crimes."¹³

Opposition parties' stands: SNS, DSS and NS

Opposition parties backed President Tadic's initiative in principle. However, they immediately suggested adoption of two resolutions, one of which would condemn the crimes against Serbs. In this, Vojislav Kostunica and his Democratic Party of Serbia /DSS/ were in the forefront.

"It's hard to imagine a bigger injustice than the one of separating innocent victims. People are morally obliged to pay homage to all innocent victims without exception," says Kostunica. It is in Serbia's interest, he says, to have all war crimes committed in Yugoslavia's modern history – and in which Serb people were the biggest victims of all – exposed and condemned. "Since Serbia suffered the most, it is only logical that it should be the first to condemn all crimes. Adoption of the declaration DSS submitted to the parliament in June 2005 would be the best solution," says Kostunica.¹⁴

His party spokesman, Andreja Mladenovic, said a declaration condemning all the crimes in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia would be acceptable to DSS unlike the one condemning just the Srebrenica crime. "We can vote for a declaration condemning all war crimes in the

¹⁰ Blic, January 11, 2010.

¹¹ Blic, February 1, 2010.

¹² Blic, January 11, 2010.

¹³ Tanjug, February 9, 2010.

¹⁴ www.B92.net, January 17, 2010.

territory of ex-Yugoslavia: a declaration against the crime in Srebrenica, but also against those in Tuzla, Bratunac, Sarajevo or in ‘Storm’ operation,” said Mladenovic. According to him, history proves that unexposed and unpunished crimes encourage criminals to repeat them – therefore, we are all duty-bound “not to allow new crimes through forgetfulness.”

Aleksandar Vucic of Serb Progressist Party /SNS/ said his party’s attitude towards a Srebrenica resolution would be positive. He emphasizes he has always been aware of the Srebrenica crime, which no living person could possibly justify. “Crimes against Serbs were committed, that’s indisputable, but not a single crime against Serbs can justify the crimes some of our compatriots committed in Srebrenica,” said Vucic.¹⁵

Serb Radical Party /SRS/ denies genocide in Srebrenica in July 1995 and announces its vote against the resolution.¹⁶ According to Aleksandar Martinovic, deputy head of SRS parliamentary caucus, the Radicals would never accept “accusations for an alleged genocide in Srebrenica against Serb people, Army of Republika Srpska or Ratko Mladic.”¹⁷

Djordje Vukadinovic, political analyst, writes, “The motive for the initiative is in foreign policy. And I hold it will only add fuel to the flame of Serbia’s political disputes and will hardly contribute to what should be its main purpose – truth and reconciliation in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia...Such initiatives, inadequately prepared and lacking a consensus, eventually bring more harm than benefits.”¹⁸

Cedomir Antic, historian, comments, “It goes without saying that all crimes committed in 1990s wars need to be condemned. However, I must ask the President

why this was not done in 2005, and I wonder whether Tadic is aware that raising the question of Serbia’s and Republika Srpska’s collective responsibility is not meant to do justice to victims but, on the contrary, to justify subsequent military operations by Republic of Croatia, and Muslims and Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina.”¹⁹

Non-governmental sector and individuals

Some non-governmental organizations²⁰ have been calling for a resolution on Srebrenica for years. Ever since European Parliament adopted its resolution, activists of these organizations have been assembling in the front of the presidency building on 11th day of every month and calling upon President Tadic to launch the initiative on a Srebrenica resolution. The pressure from the civil sector created a climate of Serbia’s moral obligation to have a say on the matter. During Vojislav Kostunica’s premiership, representatives of the conservative bloc, usually angered by such manifestations, have been staging campaigns against the most insistent NGOs.



¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Youth Initiative for Human Rights, YUCOM, Humanitarian Law Center, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Women in Black, Center for Cultural Decontamination, Civil Initiatives and Belgrade Circle.

¹⁵ Blic, January 23, 2010.

¹⁶ Beta, February 14, 2010.

¹⁷ Ibid..

¹⁸ Vreme, February 4, 2010.

On behalf of NGOs, MPs Natasa Micic /Civil Alliance of Serbia/ and Zarko Korac /Social Democratic Union/ submitted the first draft resolution to the parliament in 2005. That year the group of eight NGOs organized a round table and various manifestations to mark the 10th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. They demanded condemnation of the genocide and a clear break with the policy that brought it about. In 2005, the 10th anniversary was marked by other manifestations as well – but the tone of these manifestations was quite the opposite. Such was the one organized at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade in which law professors fully participated in denial of the crime.

It was only after the ruling of the International Court of Justice in 2007 that Serbian President Boris Tadic appealed to the parliament to adopt a declaration that would decidedly condemn the Srebrenica crime. In response, Liberal Democratic Party /LDP/ submitted its “Draft Declaration on the Obligation of State Bodies of the Republic of Serbia to Respect the Decisions by the International Court of Justice.” The party insisted that Serbia, through its legal system and actions by state bodies “clearly condemn any denial of the Srebrenica genocide.”

A number of individuals and intellectuals also requested condemnation of the crime. For instance, historian Dubravka Stojanovic says, “The societies without empathy for other people’s victims, the societies feeling no compassion for others, manifest symptoms of serious problems. Such moral entropy only leads to further deterioration and makes the future of these societies uncertain. Therefore, this is about a first-rate political issue, which must not be turned into a ‘barter policy’ of trading ‘genocide for votes’ or something like that. That would be shameful.”²¹

²¹ Blic, February 14, 2010.

Vojislav Vukcevic, war crimes prosecutor, says the resolution should be a symbol and a message for Serbia’s future and the future of “our children,” while strongly opposing those “trying to strike a balance of crimes at any cost.” He advocates a resolution on Srebrenica – a chapter in our history we have not taken stand on yet.²²

Messages from the international community

Jelko Kacin, EU rapporteur for Serbia, said that a debate on a resolution on Srebrenica was most important for Serbia as it provides an opportunity for reconsideration of half-truths. “The longer the debate, the bigger chances for the adoption of a text close to European Parliament’s resolution on Srebrenica,” said Kacin.²³ While addressing the European Parliament, he said, “This resolution is not meant for the past: by speaking about the dead, it is meant for the living and their future.”²⁴

Netherlands Ambassador Ronald van Dartel said he hoped people would be calling past events their proper names once the resolution is adopted. “Such resolution can be adopted only once...Therefore, the people who will be discussing it have a serious task. We particularly appreciate President Tadic’s explanation that Serbia adopts not the resolution because of European Union but because of itself.”²⁵

²² Vreme, February 4, 2010.

²³ Beta, February 15, 2010.

²⁴ Vreme, February 15, 2010.

²⁵ Beta, January 29, 2010.



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Denial of genocide

Denial of genocide spiraled after the ruling of the International Court of Justice (2006) and, in particular, in academic circles including a number of law professors of the Belgrade University. Stefan Karganovic, president of NGO 'Historical Project Srebrenica,' has been among the loudest promoters of the denial. NGOs such as *Obraz*, *Dveri*, *Srpski Narodni Pokret 1389* and the like, all of which are close to Kostunica's DSS, Faculty of Law, Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences and Serb Orthodox Church has been agilely promoting the thesis about a non-existent genocide.

Most articles denying the Srebrenica genocide are publicized at the website of *Nova Srpska Politicka Misao* /New Serb Political Thought/ and the *Pecat* weekly. According to Karganovic, the "only corpus delicti of crimes in Srebrenica are forensic findings from 13 exhumed mass graves with alleged corpses of the shot Muslim war prisoners from Srebrenica enclave." Only these forensic findings testify of the actual number of the killed, he says,²⁶ adding, "If Serbia takes upon itself the responsibility for Srebrenica developments, it can be sued for huge reparations."²⁷



According to Aleksandar Pavic, President Tadic's initiative came as a cold shower on the day Republika Srpska was celebrating its

anniversary and at the moment the Serb entity in "Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina is under the biggest pressure ever from the international community." "As a graduate in psychology, President Tadic should have known to what extent his statement – at that time and on that occasion – could demoralize people and leadership of Republika Srpska, which have no one to rely on except for Serbia – and for Russia, though not that much," says Pavic.²⁸

Conclusions

Notwithstanding all the resistance from general public and academic circles the debate on a Srebrenica resolution opened the question of facing the past and responsibility. The growing pressure from the international community creates the impression that the resolution has to be adopted – but in what form remains an open question.

The Serb elite has finally acknowledged that EU accession preconditions some moral gestures. It is still not ready to make such gestures, but know they are inevitable.

The debate on Srebrenica indicates the balance of powers between pro-European and anti-European stakeholders. Continuation of the debate needs to incorporate Serbia's obligation to arrest Ratko Mladic so as to imbue the resolution with true sense. A social climate – propitious not only to the adoption of a single parliamentary document but also to reconsideration of the developments in 1990s and responsibility for them – needs to be created.

The media need to play a key role in all this, given their influence on

²⁶ NSPM, February 15, 2010.

²⁷ Politika, February 16, 2010.

²⁸ Pecat, January 18, 2010.

public opinion. In this context, the media need to rely inasmuch as possible on the existing documentary serials and available documents, as well as on the rulings of ICTY and numerous documents testifying of the crucial role institutions played in planning and waging the wars in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia. Special attention needs to be paid to the institutions such as Serbian Academy of Arts and Science, Serb Orthodox Church and University, which are still shaping young people's mind by "victim model."

The international community needs to insist more resolutely on Serbia's duty to meet its moral obligations to the region and to the world. In this context, more attention needs to be paid to the society as a whole - the society exposed to anti-European propaganda for more than two decades.



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