

“SREBRENICA: FROM DENIAL TO CONFESSION” IN SREBRENICA

Within the memorial marking the 10th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, the Society for Jeopardized Peoples, in tandem with “Mothers of Srebrenica,” organized the launch of the Helsinki Committee’s book “Srebrenica: From Denial To Confession” on June 27, 2005. The book was presented by Adburahman Malkic, head of the Srebrenica municipality, Prof. Mirko Pejanovic, president of the Serbian Civil Council – the Movement for Bosnia-Herzegovina’s Equality, Prof. Sacir Filandra, president of the “Renewal” Bosniak Cultural Community, Dr. Janja Bec, lecturer at the postgraduate course in genocide at the Sarajevo-Bologna Faculty of Law, Sonja Biserko, chairperson of the Helsinki Committee, Hatidza Mehmedovic, president of the “Mothers of Srebrenica” organization, and Fadila Memisevic, president of the Society for Jeopardized Peoples.

Here is what Prof. Mirko Pejanovic said on this occasion.

“The Srebrenica crime of July 1995, resulting in expulsion of Bosniak population and killing of around 8,000 residents of Srebrenica, is considered the biggest Holocaust in Europe since the WWII. The very crime and its consequences burden the conscience of all humane and democratic people in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in her neighborhood and in all countries of Europe and the world of democracy.

Ten years after the Srebrenica crime, much that has to do with the truth and justice the bereaved children and mothers are begging for, all well-intentioned citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina are begging for, has been neither revealed nor punished. For the sake of the truth, justice and shared future of citizens and peoples (Bosniak, Serb and Croat) of the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina there are some questions related to the Srebrenica crime that cannot be ignored. First and foremost, that’s the question of THE TRUTH about the Srebrenica crime. Then, there is the question of JUSTICE in terms of punishment and legal measures taken against the crime’s masterminds and actors. Further, there is the question of ethnics and politics. Actually, this is about Bosnia-Herzegovina society and its governmental institutions’ attitude towards democratic, social, psychological and other consequences affecting the population of the Srebrenica municipality. Given that Bosnia-Herzegovina is a multiethnic and multicultural society, the return of Bosniak population to Srebrenica and economic and social rehabilitation presuppose the restoration of interethnic trust.

Many institutions, associations and individuals in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as in Serbia-Montenegro and the international community are engaged in planning of activities aimed at acknowledgment of the truth about the Srebrenica crime. In this endeavor the HELSINKI COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA and its Chairperson Ms. SONJA BISERKO’s human perseverance take a special place. The book published by the Helsinki Committee, “SREBRENICA: FROM DENIAL TO CONFESSION” testifies of this. The very title of the book indicates the progress we have made when it came to the Srebrenica crime.

The very title of the book raises the following question: Are we still at the beginning of the road or have we managed to move towards the acknowledgment of the Srebrenica crime? The truth about this crime breaks through the clouds with much difficulty, particularly in Republika Srpska and Serbia. Remnants of the warring, political, military, police and media structure existing during the 1992-95 war in the form of the Pale regime in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Milosevic’s regime in Serbia are still the stumbling block in the truth’s way.

The two regimes operated jointly on the same ideological matrix. The ideology of Milosevic's and Karadzic's regime was aimed at creating an ethnically clean Serbian territory by the use of force and at having this territory under the jurisdiction of Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The goal as such in the ethnically intermixed region of Bosnia-Herzegovina implied a crime against civilians and thus led to a massive crime. The crime was committed through expulsion of Bosniak and Croatian civilians from their century long homesteads, and through killing of civilians on various locations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The massive killing of Bosniaks in Srebrenica is only the last and the biggest link in the chain of the crimes against Bosniaks in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The whole truth about the Srebrenica crime will be revealed only once Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic are brought before The Hague Tribunal – the former as its political mastermind, and the latter as its military executioner. One should always bear in mind Karadzic's statements in the Bosnian Parliament in 1992 that denied Bosniak nation as such and hinted its extinction. All the texts carried in the book "SREBRENICA: FROM DENIAL TO CONFESSION" testify of the crime that was committed and of the then political and military leaders' – Karadzic and Mladic's - responsibility for it. Tadeusz Mazowiecki's letter to Radovan Karadzic of July 24, 1995, shows that he was aware of the fact that several thousands people were missing once civilians had been expelled from Srebrenica and that those people were, as Mazowiecki put it, "either killed or captured" (p. 109). Further, in the letter to the President of the UN Committee for Human Rights of July 27, Mazowiecki wrote, "SPEAKING ABOUT PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS LACKS CREDIBILITY WHEN FACED WITH THE LACK OF CONSEQUENCE AND COURAGE MANIFESTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND ITS LEADERS." It is common knowledge that in the same letter Tadeusz Mazowiecki publicized that he resigned the office of the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights because the United Nations did nothing to prevent the Srebrenica genocide.

Over the past ten years justice has not come to Srebrenica and its residents. Will it ever come at all?

The documents presented in the book "SREBRENICA: FROM DENIAL TO CONFESSION" indicate that justice will be attained only once Karadzic and Mladic are brought before The Hague Tribunal. All verdicts that were passed or will be passed to the perpetrators of the Srebrenica crime cannot substitute - in people's perception of and sense for justice - the testimonies and statements of Karadzic's and Mladic's trials for the Srebrenica crime. Only then the roles and responsibilities of all institutions and persons involved in the crime against Srebrenica's civilians will be brought to light.

People of Srebrenica bereft of their fathers, husbands and providers cannot be the only ones to bear the consequences of the Srebrenica crime on their shoulders. The attitude towards social and economic life of the returnees to Srebrenica also mirrors the responsibility for justice. The very town, its economy, as well as other settlements in the Srebrenica municipality are devastated.

The article in the book titled "Mothers of Srebrenica Once Again Abandoned and Forgotten" fully reflects the tragedy of the returnees. Let me quote just one paragraph saying, "The whole world has once again left on their own, forgotten and abandoned the survived victims of the most monstrous crime committed in the late 20th century who had returned to their homes. They cannot leave on their meager pensions or jobless."

From ethic standpoint, the renewed life for the Srebrenica returnees implies system solutions involving Republika Srpska, the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bosnia-Herzegovina's institutions. These solutions should secure a special status for the Srebrenica municipality in terms of employment prospects, educations, healthcare and social care, as well as rebuilt communal infrastructure. Citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina feel solidarity and will lend support to a law on a special status and reconstruction of the Srebrenica municipality. Thus avenues for life in Srebrenica would be open to the bereaved families, and their emigration would be prevented.

The texts carried in the book "SREBRENICA: FROM DENIAL TO CONFESSION" raise several questions. One of them is RESPONSIBILITY FOR WAR CRIME. Does this responsibility imply collective responsibility of the entire Serbian people? Though political warlords kept declaring they acted on behalf of people, every crime, no matter where committed, has its individual perpetrators and relates to individual responsibility. Unless individualized, responsibility can be neither established nor punished. On the very day it was established 1994 while the war was still on, the Serbian Civil Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina condemned the criminals coming from the ranks of the Serbian people. No one can be authorized to commit a crime against other people on behalf of the people he belongs to. At the same time, the Serbian Civil Council requested that all indictees for war crimes, regardless of their ethnic origin, should be brought to justice.

Whenever, throughout history, leaders lead their nations towards civilizational destruction, the nations themselves should come to their senses.

Therefore, democratic and pro-European forces capable of breaking with the mythomaniac policy of the past, the policy of ethnic hatred, and of condemning and punishing the criminals from the ranks of their own people should strengthen in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Serbia alike. This is the only way for us to regain the trust of Bosniak and Croat peoples in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and that of the European Union. This is the only way for us to contribute to the reestablishment of interethnic trust. And only interethnic trust can secure peaceful life for all peoples in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

I congratulate Ms. Sonja Biserko on this publishing enterprise, and wish this book would help raise awareness about the Srebrenica crime.