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Human Rights and Democracy Violation Early Warning *Weekly Newsletter* No. 41

Attitudes in Serbia regarding the demand by one hundred NGOs for July 11 to be proclaimed as Remembrance Day of the Srebrenica genocide

Following a range of actions and pressure by NGOs on Serbian authorities for the adoption of a Declaration on Srebrenica in the People's Assembly and to proclaim July 11 a *Day of Remembrance* of the Srebrenica genocide, there has been no official response by the authorities.

Chronology:

- On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, a group of 8 nongovernmental organizations addressed June 2005 to the People's Assembly a draft Declaration on Srebrenica which demands from the state to take all measures for the protection of war crime victims' rights, especially the victims of the Srebrenica genocide, as well as to condemn the crime committed in our name. The Declaration was never included into the parliamentary agenda, but it did cause tumultuous reactions in the society and among politicians. The Declaration was backed by around 50 nongovernmental organizations from Serbia and a large number of public figures, as well as certain political parties.
- The demand for the Parliament to adopt the Declaration on Srebrenica was renewed in 2006 and 2007
- The International Court of Justice brought a verdict in the case of the lawsuit filed by Bosnia and Herzegovina vs. Serbia in 2007, which determined that Serbia was not directly responsible for the Srebrenica





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genocide, but that it was responsible for not having prevented it, as well as for failing to arrest Bosnian Serb Commander-in-Chief, Gen. **Ratko Mladić**. In regard to this, President of Serbia **Boris Tadić** stated that Serbia has an obligation to urgently adopt a Declaration on Srebrenica and that everyone who votes against it in the Assembly will be voting against Serbia's national interests. The Declaration never became an item on the National Assembly's agenda.

- On January 15, 2009 the European Parliament adopted a Resolution on Srebrenica inviting member states of the European Union and Western Balkan countries to mark July 11 as *Day of Remembrance* of the genocide committed in Srebrenica in 1995. In Serbia, the Resolution was commented by the majority of politicians, media and many public figures as proof of bias, even anti-Serb attitude by the European Union.
- Nongovernmental organizations: As of February 11, 2009, on every 11th day of the month, *Women in Black*, *Helsinki Committee for Human Rights*, *Youth Initiative for Human Rights*, *Humanitarian Law Fund* and *Center for Advanced Legal Studies* have publicly demanded a meeting with Serbian President **Boris Tadić** in order to urge him to initiate the adoption of a Declaration on Srebrenica, i.e. proclamation of the Day of Remembrance of the Srebrenica genocide.
- A response from the President's Office only came in regard to the meeting which was demanded on February 11, stating that the President, due to previously scheduled commitments, is not in the possibility to meet with the NGO representatives. After that, every following demand – there were 5 altogether – was left without response by the President.
- On every 11th day of the month, at their gatherings in the park in front of the Serbian President's headquarters, representatives of the NGOs, along with the reminder about the moral obligation of Serbia to proclaim July 11 a Day of Remembrance of the Srebrenica genocide, publicly read their demands to the President to initiate the adoption of the Declaration





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and proclamation of the Day of Remembrance. The presentation of these demands was regularly covered by the media.

- The last demand, read out on July 10, 2009 before a large number of media representatives in front of the President's headquarters, was backed by one hundred Serbian nongovernmental organizations. There was no response from the President.
- The fourteenth anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide was marked in Belgrade on July 10 and 11, 2009; it was organized exclusively by nongovernmental organizations (*Women in Black*).

Reactions by Politicians

On the day before July 11 2009, politicians made following statements in regard to the Srebrenica genocide:

- President of Serbia **Boris Tadić**: "Because of the victims of Srebrenica, but all other innocent victims as well, those who committed war crimes must be tried before the Hague Tribunal". **Mr. Tadić** added that Serbia was firmly determined and that it was doing everything to conclude the cooperation with the ICTY not only because this is "our legal obligation, but also for the sake of reconciliation between the peoples and a more prosperous life in the Balkans".
- Prime Minister **Mirko Cvetković**: "No crime committed in the past on the territory of former Yugoslavia can be forgotten".
- Chief of the parliamentary group *For European Serbia* and member of the *Democratic Party* **Nada Kolundžija** (government): "First of all – all those responsible for all crimes, including those in Srebrenica, must be brought to justice, and second – every human life is of equal value and every victim deserves equal attention and cannot be forgotten".
- Deputy President of the Serbian Progressive Party **Aleksandar Vučić**: "Crimes in Srebrenica, Bratunac and in many other places must be





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condemned, as well, regardless of the fact whether they were committed against Muslims, Serbs or members of any other people”.

- Vice President of the *Sandžak Democratic Party* (member of the ruling coalition), **Meho Omerović**: “If, rightfully, we call upon international law, defense of integrity and sovereignty when it comes to Kosovo, then we must not close our eyes before the fact that the International Court of Justice brought a verdict and determined Serbia’s responsibility in not having done anything to prevent the genocide over Muslims in Srebrenica”.
- President of the *Liberal Democratic Party*, **Čedomir Jovanović**: “I am speaking primarily about the relationship towards the policies which have led to genocide and enabled that the lives of so many people are decided on by those who today are either convicted before courts for the gravest crimes or are fugitives from justice”.
- President of *New Serbia*, **Velimir Ilić**: “Other than Srebrenica, there was also Operation ‘Storm’ and many other similar events, perhaps to a lesser extent, but some are forgotten”.
- Vice President of the *Serbian Radical Party*, **Dragan Todorović**: “After so many years, Srebrenica has not ceased to preoccupy the public, because everybody is trying to prevent the truth from being exposed when it comes to Srebrenica and to proclaim the Serbian people as responsible for the alleged genocide”.
- Deputy Chief of the *G17 plus* parliamentary group, **Vlajko Stanić**: “It is a matter of civilized behavior to condemn the crime that happened in Srebrenica and I think that on the territory of the Western Balkan national responsibility and reconciliation is necessary and that in this process all peoples who participated in this tragic past must take their part of the responsibility”.
- Spokesman of the *Socialist Party of Serbia*, **Djordje Milićević**: “Recently, there is talk about some resolutions regarding Srebrenica and





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that is why I want to emphasize that SPS is in favor of one resolution which would condemn all crimes on the territory of former Yugoslavia”.

- Leader of the *League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina*, **Nenad Čanak** (on the adoption of the Resolution): “That way, we would confirm that the Republic of Serbia is sincere in its attempts to build a society different from the one led by Milošević, to condemn crimes and show respect to the victims”.
- Chief of the minorities’ deputy group in the Serbian Parliament **Balint Pasztor**: “The events from Srebrenica are probably the saddest since World War II, not only in this region, but on the entire territory of Europe”. “Of course, today’s policies should not be based on this fact, and the policies of neither the Bosniak nor the Serbian side should be formulated on that basis by any means. There should be reconciliation between the Serbian and the Bosniak people, followed by a turn towards the future and joint life of the Serbian and Bosniak people”.
- President of the *Social Democratic Union*, **Žarko Korać**, submitted the text of the Declaration on Srebrenica to the People’s Assembly for adoption.

Epilogue

Following statements by politicians who, using the empty phrase that “all those who committed crime, without any difference, should be held responsible”, mostly advocated equalization and creation of a symmetry between the Srebrenica genocide and the Serb victims during the Bosnian war, thus avoiding to take a clear stand towards this primarily ethical issue for Serbia, the response of the government to the demands by nongovernmental organizations came in the *Press* daily (close to the ruling *Democratic Party*) on July 10, 2009, entitled “Serbs are fleeing from Srebrenica”.





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The article's subject were "more than 10,000 Serbs who left Srebrenica during the last ten years under the pressure and threats by the local Bosniak authorities" and the settling of "as many as 3,000 Bosniaks" on that territory. It also conveyed statements by the president of the Srebrenica Municipal Assembly who spoke about the existence of "constant pressures, threats and blackmails by the local Bosniak authorities, which do not even conceal that their primary goal is the definitive persecution of Serbs", as well as about a "infernal plan by Bosniak politicians to achieve in peace what squads of the Bosniak Army led by Naser Orić failed to achieve in war".

Outlook:

The Republic of Serbia – including its highest representatives, all key institutions and a vast majority of political parties – continues to hesitate to proclaim July 11 as Day of Remembrance and thus to clearly and unequivocally condemn the 1995 Srebrenica genocide. The factitious symmetry with the Serb victims in Bratunac, which is supposed to annul or relativize the horror and magnitude of the Srebrenica crime -- when in only 5 days around 8,000 Bosniaks were killed in a planned action -- will continue to acquire new forms and dimensions, to end in a brutal moral inversion: in fact, it was the Serbs who were ethnically cleansed from Srebrenica under pressure, threats and blackmails by the Bosniaks. Such falsified picture will not be of any help for Serbia in the process of democratization, nor in the process of joining the European Union.

