



Genocide Took Place in Srebrenica

Some political leaders continue to engage in what has become an unacceptably lengthy process of translating the democratically expressed will of the people.

If the overriding priority of political leaders is to do the job they have been elected to do – to serve the citizens of this country, to create job opportunities, to fight corruption, to improve education and to ensure the security of citizens – then we will see agreements reached very quickly on government coalitions and on common platforms.

Reaching agreements on healthy compromises that take the country forward has been made significantly more difficult by the negative atmosphere that has been created during the last five years. Improving the overall atmosphere will make the job of political leaders so much easier to do.

This is why I am not only surprised, but also disturbed that some politicians have chosen precisely this period to once again make statements that poison the atmosphere and raise serious doubts about the readiness to meet their responsibilities. They would do well to look at the ordinary citizens of this country and to refrain from making statements that frighten and anger ordinary people as they struggle to survive from one day to the next.

For fifteen years the people of this country in towns and villages from North to South and from East to West have struggled to confront the horrors of the war, as they seek to rebuild their lives and the communities they have shared for decades and even centuries and which they will continue to share for many years to come. This has required reconciliation, it has required people to reach out a hand to those who stood or fought on the “other side”. For people to be able to do this the facts of what happened must be brought to light and those responsible must be brought to justice.

Every death of innocent during the conflict represents a tragedy – for loved ones, for local communities, for Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole. In this multiple tragedy the genocide at Srebrenica stands out not because of the names, ethnicity, religion or political persuasion of either the victims or the perpetrators, but because of its scale and because of its organised, calculated and systematic nature.

Judicial and forensic evidence has shown conclusively that over 8,000 men and boys were executed in and around Srebrenica in July 1995.

BiH leaders – Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and others – acknowledge this fact.

It is not a matter of accepting or rejecting the 2004 judgement by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia or the 2007 judgement by the International Court of Justice that both qualify the killings at Srebrenica as genocide.

The judgement by a court renders a legal qualification to established facts. Genocide involves killing people because they belong to a particular group. That is what happened at Srebrenica. Whoever questions what international courts have qualified as genocide puts himself outside of standards of civilisation. This is true for the negation of holocaust as well as for the negation of the crimes at Srebrenica.

Persons carried out genocide with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a particular group of people, in pursuance of a policy aimed at absorbing the Srebrenica enclave into Republika Srpska. This is why RS political leaders have a particular obligation to deal with the legacy of this crime. It is not about collective guilt. This is about bringing to justice the actual perpetrators, but it is also about acknowledging the facts and taking seriously the moral responsibility we all have to the victims and their families.

Germany and also my own country, Austria went through a painful yet necessary period after the Second World War in which citizens were obliged to confront the abominable crimes that were committed – and committed in their name – during the Nazi period. I say this not to make a comparison, but rather to emphasize the importance of confronting the reality of what happened. In doing so they will create an environment where current and future

generations can reach out a hand to each other.

Any politician who seeks tactical advantage by quibbling about the name or nature of demonstrable and abominable crimes is not only an obstacle to citizens coming to terms with an evil past but is also undermining efforts to foster a peaceful future.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was assailed by evil in the early 1990s. That evil must continue to be exposed and repudiated at every turn. By insulting any victim you insult all victims, including those of your own people.

Those who spread hatred may be shameless but that does not mean they cannot be shamed. Decent citizens of this country constitute an overwhelming majority – and that overwhelming majority wants a society that recognises crime for what it is, as well as yearns for a political and social system based on the rule of law.

The rule of law will not be advanced by people who are genocide deniers. It will be advanced by those who acknowledge what happened, repudiate the moral negligence that allowed it to happen, and commit themselves to ensuring that it will never happen again.

Two years ago the European Parliament adopted a Resolution calling on all Europeans and their governments – not just citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina but all Europeans – to mark 11 July as a day of remembrance of the genocide committed at Srebrenica.

This call was and remains inclusive, it takes a stand on all the terrible crimes committed during the war because a crime is a crime, and crime on the scale and barbarity of Srebrenica must be remembered by everyone for everyone so that it is never allowed to happen again, to anyone, anywhere.

Valentin Inzko,

on the occasion of his visit to the International Commission of Missing Persons in Tuzla and the recent Holocaust memorial day, commemorating the liberation of Auschwitz