

## Interview

The interview which was given by the director of the Institute for Research of Crimes against Humanity and International Law, University of Sarajevo, for Islamic news magazine Preporod no.13/1071, on 1 July 2016.

### OUT OF OUR SUFFERING, THERE COMES OUR RAISING

Let us begin this discussion by your own finding from the International scientific conference in Sarajevo which was held to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide when you said that genocide against Bosniaks in the last 150 years has become the brand of this country. Sincerely, is there a real danger to get used to the role of a victim which would be considered highly counter-productive?

At the beginning, I would like to thank the editorial staff of Preporod for having decided to do an interview with me in this Bayram edition. It is quite rewarding although, in my opinion, all of us speak more than we do. All of people theorize a little bit more than we use a necessary combination of theory and practice. As Tariq Ramadan would say "We have to be a connoisseur of text and context".

Now, I will provide the answer to your question.

I have to say that there is a danger of getting into the spirit of the role of victims. If you are a victim, than you are an *outsider*- a man from the side, with a shattered personal confidence. What should be known is that Bosniaks are the real victims in the legal sense of a word where it is obvious who the executor is and who the victims are. What I insist on after the genocide against Bosniaks is transferring messages that Bosniaks are not victims but victors. Bosniaks survived the terrible sequences of one and the same "tragic misunderstanding" which is known in a law as a crime of the highest rank- genocide, while in sociology it is the social phenomenon which has the intention of repetition- genocide, i.e. duration of genocide in continuity with shorter or longer breaks. In all of these crimes, in their successive repetition and the invariance of the matrix in which every two, three or four decades precisely the same terrible story repeats which includes a massacre of civilians, raping, looting, burning entire villages and every time there appears the same people: defense counsels (Bosniaks) and attackers (Serbs).

Such centuries-old persistence of some to destroy and take away what is not theirs, and of others to defend and preserve their own, undoubtedly indicates that the foundation of such drama is based on deep and genuine misunderstanding of good and evil.

The traces of such "misunderstanding" look at us wide-eyed at each step throughout Bosnia. I used an English term which is commonly used in our language "brand" which means exactly what we are talking about, and that is the stamp, stamping, leaving the trace.

About genocide and crimes against Bosniaks in recent times we spoke and wrote about hardly anything. Is there any justification for it?

Of course there isn't. We will consider the consequences after WWII in which Bosniaks suffered the most in percentages, with the exception of the Jews. Almost half a century, Bosniaks and all the others kept quiet about it. They were waiting for Vladimir Didier to speak about that. In their struggle for political, cultural and every other affirmation, Bosniaks were not sufficiently strong in political, economic and any other sense to question the genocide committed against

them in World War II on the agenda of relevant institutions or bodies. It was a strategic mistake of a generation of Bosniaks which, one should not forget it, did a lot in a rigid political system for survival and affirmation of the nation they belonged to. Not only that, it was a generation which was characterized by high notion-building awareness, generation of Bosnians who, together with Croats, Jews and Serbs participated in the anti-fascist struggle and reconstruction of the statehood of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the same country, which met the winning side at the end of WWII along with the rest of democratic world. These are the facts which were decisive when it was decided on the international recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the early 1992.

There shouldn't be lamented today and especially not tomorrow over the fact that the genocide against Bosniaks was not spoken or written about. Then socio-political conditions should be properly studied and out of such historical context the lessons should be drawn.

How much did the religious determination have its incentives in the commission of crimes?

Many theorists argue that the root of the crime against humanity and international law in Bosnia lies in the misuse and politicization of religious and ethnic identity.

Serbian nationalists and executors of genocide pointed to Muslims as the main goal. They pressed a heterogeneous group of people consisting of Muslim believers, Muslims uninterested in faith and Muslim atheists into an artificially homogenous group "Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina". Therefore, it is tempting to argue that the religious definition was artificially or violently used as the simple criterion in the definition of "Muslim" identity.

What was common for Milosevic, Karadzic, and Croatian president Tudjman is that they played on the polarization between the West and Europe on one side and Islam on the other side. All of them used widespread stereotypes about Islam. These stereotypes have been repeated countless times: "Muslim is equal to Islamic fundamentalist which spread unknown, reactionary and dangerous faith within the European Christian zone".

"Great Serbia" is one part of the zone on whose behalf it goes forward in fight for its protection and cleanliness. Partly constructing and partly radicalizing already existing polarization between stereotypes of "Modern West" and the stereotype of "traditional Islamic fundamentalism", especially those of Turkish origin, Serbian nationalist propaganda looked for a place on a right side, the side of the Western Alliance. In one stereotype of "us" against "them", the picture of current Europe was made.

How do you perceive the role of Serbian Orthodox Church regarding the aggression in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

The Serbian Orthodox Church was the second central ideological factor after Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the development of Serbian nationalism. Bosniak Muslims were considered to be „defective people who betrayed their Serbian roots“. Bosniak Muslims will be recognized as a nation and as people only when they return to the Orthodox Christianity.

The Serbian Orthodox Church emerged as one of the main instruments of pragmatic goals of Serbian state leadership. It provided support to great-Serbian program (in the past and nowadays).

Like no Christian church in Europe

since the Third Reich onwards, Serbian Orthodox Church trampled down all basic Christian principles. It stayed silent when the crimes were committed, and it even blessed their commission. Not responding to the abuse of its fundamental symbol- the Cross- Serbian Orthodox Church became the protector of those who did what they did in the name of it and in the name of orthodoxy and baptism.

The state stand beyond genocide by any standards. Aggression appeared from the side and it has its creators. Direct perpetrators will eventually face justice but what about those ideological and intellectual? (SASA)

We shouldn't live in illusions and it should be known that religious, academic and military elite in Serbia denies the old and prepares new genocide persistently and systematically.

You were present in The Hague on the occasion of passing the first-instance verdict to the war criminal, Radovan Karadzic. We were watching the trial via TV. What are your impressions from the Court?

I was distanced five to six meters from the war criminal, Radovan Karadzic. The whole hour, the time which was taken for reading the first-instance verdict, I was looking at that unusual criminal. While the judge was reading the details of all his crimes, including the facts about genocide for which he was responsible, he sat proudly as if the rationale for awarding the Nobel Prize or something similar was read by the judge. The abnormal normality by itself was more horrific than all the crimes he was charged with by the Court. Despite the fact that he was aware of the extensiveness of the crimes he was charged with, he gave the impression of a satisfied man. The man who dedicated all his life making the mess and evil on earth. Poor be the one who makes the mess and evil on earth. In this world and hereafter.

The crimes were repeated because we did not learn anything out of them. Children at schools do not learn about them even today. What one should do to include this issue into our education system?

If it doesn't work through the education system, it should be done through everyday activities. About genocide, in its own way, our literary works and works in physics, astronomy, chemistry, biology, film... should speak. If it's done in the appropriate and acceptable manner, it won't produce the saturation of the topic and it will make the topic interesting and challenging. As Alija Isakovic would say "... one should study this mentality comprehensively and comparatively..."

The Armband Day (31 May) was marked recently on the occasion of the Day of children killed in Prijedor. The local Serbian au-



thorities do not allow building of the memorial for murdered children, but they allow building of the monument in the Trnopolje detention. Isn't that a warning?

In theory it is called *blaming the victim*- or rather, the disgrace of the victim and displaying the executioner as the victim. The point is for victim to be broken morally, mentally and emotionally before they are destroyed physically. These are practical activities which were created by religious, academic and military elite negating the old and preparing a new genocide. Those who think that the elite abandoned the plans of this sort, live in illusion.

Institute with you as the head, is continuously working on collecting the evidence and facts about these problems. What is currently on?

Currently, in cooperation with the International University of Sarajevo and the Bosniak Institute, the series of scientific and cultural events were organized and are called "The month of Remembrance of the Srebrenica genocide".

The event began on 15 June 2016 by the promotion of the book "My smile is my revenge" authored by Dzeva Avdic, and will end by the promotion of the book "The dissolution of the soul", by Dr. Goran Simic, which will take place on 8 July 2016.

Of course, there are our regular activities of collecting, documenting, systematization and publication of our scientific results about the crimes committed in Bosnia in 1992-1995, which are in this period implemented through 32 current research projects.

I know that there was talk of the Museum of Genocide. Is there any information regarding this issue?

Museum of Genocide should and will be built. Until then, all the places should be adequately marked using the boards of how to get to the Salvation Tunnel and the boards at the entrances to all towns displaying the information of how many innocent people were killed in the period of 1992-1995. It should be started from Sarajevo, the city that survived the longest siege in modern history (1479 days).

And after 20 years, there are still undiscovered mass graves. Isn't this process a bit slow?

It is a question that Amor Masovic should be asked, and the Institute for Missing Persons of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The truth about the crimes we should indicate to the international community and even

the world. They behaved quite neutral towards the aggression and genocide. Are they aware of the scale of such crimes and do they feel responsible for them?

Being neutral in a situation where the stronger for no reason is beating the weaker means taking the side of the attacker. On the world stage towards the injustice that took place in Bosnia, and which was watched on the live TV transmission, everyone did what was ordered by their interests rather than by moral obligation. We should never forget: if there was no intervention of the western alliance, called NATO, defenseless people and the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, without enough weapons and ammunition, would not have been able to successfully confront the much superior enemy. Without the intervention of NATO nowadays, there would be no Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosniaks, nor Croats in this area.

Bergen times are the newspapers that regularly reported on developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992-1995. As a person who lived for some time in Norway, you have collected all what this newspaper published on Bosnia and published it in Norwegian and Bosnian language. How do you see the commitment and attitude of Norwegians to the truth about the crimes committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Norway is an arranged and organized welfare state. It is a country located in the far north of Europe, which has received around 15,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina which it did not have to. Most of them today are situated people who have their homes, jobs and everything they need for normal and comfortable life. Bosnians are the best integrated out of 196 groups from around the world who live in Norway. To the environmental scene there appears the second generation of Bosnians in Norway...

Many of us look to Norway through Thorvald Stoltenberg, who is not popular among Bosnians for his involvement in the course of the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992-1995. He is Norwegian, but with the function of the peace mediator he participated as a representative of the World Organization of the United Nations. A policy of the UN to Bosnia was the way it was and its simplest definition was given by the President Izetbegovic, who while returning from one of the hundreds of negotiations in the white world in the late autumn of 1993, said the following: "No one will jump in cold water instead of us."

If someone is interested in a detailed Norwegian approach to events in Bosnia in 1992-1995, s/he can read about it in two volumes of the book *Bosnia in Bergen times*, published by the Institute for Research of Crimes against Humanity and International Law, University of Sarajevo in Norwegian and Bosnian language.

Revision of the Bosnian-and-Herzegovina charges against Serbia and Montenegro is running short. What's your comment regarding this issue?

At the moment, I cannot speak about it.

How do you experience the anniversary of Srebrenica after Bayram?

Srebrenica is the deepest and most serious wound in a number of wounds that Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina carry on their bodies and in their souls. Srebrenica is the most painful place, and a reminder of what the Bosniaks passed as a nation. But, out of our suffering, there comes our raising. In a relatively short period of time, Bosnians have crossed the path of a deaf era to information era. Those who have the patience to read this article will read it by the sunset of Eid days, or when it dawns red. Or in the anticipation of Eid.

Let us stop ... Let's look at our Eid dining-tables, expensive cigarettes which we light, our new and clean Bayram suits, our cleaned homes, villas and cottages. Our comfortable and scented cars. Our children, grandchildren ... Very often, all these we will not see due to the curtain woven by our criticism of everything. We introduce ourselves as successful, while our state is defined as totally unsuccessful. In fact, there is a strange contradiction we must harmonize as soon as possible working on ourselves and changing primarily ourselves personally. Therefore, we will change what we are not satisfied by and what we keep on criticizing.

I'm no demagogue nor am I politically subservient to anyone, but in the end, I want to say something that is very important and is often forgotten in this life bustle and hustle. We live in peace and freedom our grandfathers, fathers, sons, brothers, sisters, mothers laid their lives for. More than one hundred thousand of them in the last war. Despite all its flaws which arise primarily from the negligence, carelessness, laziness and passivity of the large number of us, Bosnia is a land of prosperity. Bosnia is a country of hope. Bosnia is our homeland. And only in the homeland an ordinary man can live like a king!

Interviewed by Selman Selhanovic