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Declaration of the People's Assembly of the Republic of Serbia on Srebrenica

With 127 votes to 21 (out of the total of 250) the People's Assembly (Parliament) of the Republic of Serbia adopted March 31, 2010 the *Declaration on the Condemnation of the Crime in Srebrenica*¹. It is in this way that the supreme legislative body in Serbia made the first step in what could mark the beginning of a long process of confrontation with the legacy of the 1990s and grave crimes and other forms of violation of elementary human, civil and social rights not only of citizens of ex-Yugoslav Republics but indeed of Serbia herself, too.

Years long have numerous human rights organizations advocated for Serbian Parliament to pass a document which would contain a clear-cut distancing from the monstrous crime committed in our name, express sympathy for the victims and their families, and designate July 11 as the Remembrance Day to commemorate Srebrenica and the genocide committed there. Serbia's supreme authorities have consistently ignored this initiative. Moreover, a NGO draft Declaration to that effect, tabled on their behalf by two MPs in 2005 was never put on the Parliament's agenda.

The fact that the present *Declaration* is debated almost fifteen years after the Srebrenica genocide clearly indicates that it was adopted for reasons of political opportunism (outside pressure; the necessity to „substantiate“ Serbia's bid for EU membership candidate status; as well as an attempt to present Serbia in a different light on the eve of the International Court of Justice advisory opinion on Kosovo declaration of independence's legality, pending later this year) rather than out of Serbian political and intellectual elites' sincere intent to face the recent past and draw lessons from it and prevent it from repeating itself.

The twelve-hour debate in Parliament reflected Serbia's schizophrenic condition: while a sizeable portion of the country's political spectrum advocates – at least at a declarative level – the

¹ The small Bosnian town of Srebrenica, UN-protected safe haven for Bosniak refugees, was stormed by the Bosnian Serb Army under the command of Serb General Ratko Mladić in July 1995. Some 8,000 men and boys were separated from their families and executed in what represents the most ferocious crime committed in Europe after WW 2.



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adoption of European values and demonstrates some readiness to make accelerated steps towards EU membership, increasingly aggressive forces which do not accept the failure of the Milošević project are still refusing to put up with the consequences of its defeat. It is only within this context that one can view the „performance“ of high-ranking representatives of former Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), who used the parliamentary lectern to call the Srebrenica genocide a "Serb Army's brilliant military operation".

Notwithstanding its numerous shortcomings – first and foremost the absence of the term "genocide" in its wording, as well as the Parliament's failure to clearly distance itself from crimes committed in the name of alleged Serb national interests - an objective and levelheaded analysis of the circumstances within which the *Declaration* was debated and adopted can not ignore the step forward it represents:

- The *Declaration* marks the beginning of a public debate which will inevitably expand and gradually cover a wide spectrum of topics relating to recent past, and thus lead to a comprehensive confrontation with the disastrous policies featured during the 1990s and their grave consequences still burdening Serbia and much of her neighborhood;
- The adoption of the Declaration signifies the admission that the crime was committed, whereas the reference to the 2007 International Court of Justice's ruling in the *Bosnia and Herzegovina vs. Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* case represents an indirect avowal that it was genocide what Srebrenica crime was about.

The sobering process in Serbian society - especially in „patriotic“ intellectual circles, in the media and the education system - will be hampered by the still dominant rhetoric of a world conspiracy against the Serbs, whereby the Serb nation is represented as the main, often the sole victim of the 1990s Balkan wars. The parliamentary debate on March 30 was thus perverted into a disgusting – often indeed monstrous – glorifying of crimes committed, tug of war over the number of victims, and celebration of notorious war criminals such as Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić as Serb heroes.

Outlook:

Despite its numerous deficiencies and the circumstances of its adoption, the parliamentary *Declaration on Srebrenica* has its rationale. Only if it will represent the first step on the long road of confrontation with Serbia's past. Without it, there will be no Serbia's European future. It would be a disaster if Serbia's political class – whereby the gravest responsibility is shouldered by President Tadić's Democratic Party and its coalition partners – were to close the case as „solved“ and thus gamble away the opportunity just opened.