

Media & Crime

JUSTICE PARTLY SATISFIED

THE LAND OF KORICANI ROCKS

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Instead of those responsible by law to do so, it was the media and The Hague Tribunal that were to solve the crime.

Thirteen years ago, from one rock near Knezevo, two hundred human lives ended in an abyss. Human beings, with dreams and plans for future life. Their families, probably, could not even think that in spite of incontestable evidence the crime will remain unsolved for more than a decade

Although justice has been partly satisfied (until now Darko Mrdja, member of the special police from Prijedor, was convicted for this crime), the crime was solved by the media instead of those whose lawful duty it is to do so, because the state had no interest for this. For years the truth had been in front of the noses of a not interested, scared and indolent judicial apparatus for which the victims belonging to the "others" were not a priority. Out of their own interest, which they used to label as the state interest, they did not want to bring the investigation to the end and to bring to justice those responsible for the crime. Instead, the Hague Tribunal did it.

We dared write about this horrible crime and were, at that time, the only media in Republika Srpska to do so, and one of the rare ones in the state.

However, the crime on Koricanske Stijene was only one among our tragedies. This country is, unfortunately, full of Koricanske Stijene.

To make sure that the crime does not remain unpunished, and that the society gets free from the heritage of crime, the media were forced to play one of the main roles instead of the judiciary, and they, indeed, have been doing so during the last few years.

However, times are changing. Even here. As we can see, the judiciary is on a daily bases filing a growing number of charges for war crimes, and is initiating proceedings that should lead to justice.

The bomb

The first three pages of the dailies in Republika Srpska, on Tuesday, October 26, 1999, were white with just one writing: "We demand". It was demanded to have prompt and efficient investigation, as well as the arrest of perpetrators of the assassination attempt upon the owner, director and editor-in-chief of the Nezavisne novine, Zeljko Kopanja. Weeklies and periodicals announced that they would do the same in their forthcoming issues. The demonstration was organized upon initiative of the Independent Association of Journalists of Republika Srpska (NUNRS) as a protest because till Monday, October 25 at 1.p.m, the police have not said in public what they have done in regard to the attempted murder of Zeljko Kopanja. They were joined by electronic media, which on Tuesday afternoon have temporarily stopped their program.

Kopanja was attacked on October 22, around 7.15 a.m. At the moment when he was opening the door of his car parked in front of the building No. 34 in Slobodan Jovanovic Street, the bomb hidden underneath his "Golf" was activated and it wounded, apart from Kopanja, a few other persons as well. The same day, Kopanja had to undergo a surgical intervention: both of his legs were amputated above the knees. In his newspaper Kopanja had published a series of articles regarding the crimes in Teslic, which during the war the forces of Bosnian Serbs committed against the non-Serb population. A text was published dealing with the paramilitary organization from Teslic, which was known under the name "Mice". At the beginning of war they had practically overtaken power in the city and they molested the population – for instance, the curfew lasted more than 20 hours a day! They focused first the Muslims, and when they became rare, they turned to the Serbs. Terror has reached such scope that the soldiers threatened to leave their positions, to come to the town and get even with them. The police have prevented this by arresting some of them, but the whole case was covered up. Some of them were killed later, and some

of those who survived began to call and come to the newspaper's office offering their versions of the story.

At the same time, the media exit their role as investigators and are getting transformed into observers. In a way, this is a natural process; however, despite the activated judiciary, the issue of war crimes must remain the duty and obligation of the media in regard to this society. This is a difficult, very demanding, and often also ungrateful subject, which the people find difficult to read and watch, occupied with their daily worries.

However, this society must face crime, and the media must have an active role in this process. This is the first step towards reconciliation among peoples.

Justice must be satisfied, not only because of us, but first of all because of the generations to come. Therefore, the media in this country must continue to pay great attention to war crimes, and particularly those in which the victims belong to the "minority people" in regard to the ethnic and geographic affiliation of the media. Unfortunately, apart from honorable exceptions, the situation nowadays is not a satisfactory one.

Serb media write about crimes against Serbs, the Croat media on crimes against Croats, and the Bosniak media on crimes against Bosniaks. Such a standpoint of the media leads the consumers of such information to a dangerous conclusion – well, only "we" were victims!

The media must approach war crime from the only possible side – the professional one. There are victims and there are those who committed and commanded crime. Media must not forget either the victims, or the perpetrators, regardless to which ethnic group they belong.

This we owe to the generations to come. We owe this to all victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

