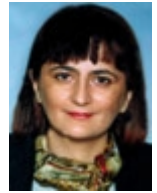


Face to face

ON THE OCCASSION OF THE TRIAL AGAINST THE "ZVORNIK GROUP"

A DEMANDING PROCESS

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Crimes over Bosniaks in the territory of the Zvornik municipality belong by cruelty to the worst crimes committed during the wars in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Witnesses of war events in this town say that members of the "Yellow Wasps" after they expelled all Bosniak families and their property, started to harass Serb citizens in this town.



Inhabitants of Zvornik tell how the "Yellow Wasps" ruled over this municipality since the beginning of war events in April 1992 up to August of the same year. They were "the lords of the town, of the road through Zvornik and of the border crossing towards Serbia".

"They installed the reign of terror and we all were frightened. We were not allowed to open our windows after the first dusk and look what is going on. Entire Zvornik was a big prison ruled by a squad of bandits", says one inhabitant of Zvornik who doesn't want us to reveal his name.

The group "Yellow Wasps" was established on April 12, 1992, in Zvornik as a special unit of Serb volunteers under the command

of Vojin and Dusko Vuckovic from Umka.

Gold, German Marks, and cars VW-Golf

Witnesses of war events in this town say that members of the "Yellow Wasps" after they expelled all Bosniak families and their property, started to harass Serb citizens in this town.

It culminated when they started to pull over ministers in the then Government of Republic Srpska who were frequently traveling from Belgrade to Pale via Zvornik, because of which it was decided that they should be arrested.

Special police forces sent from Pale arrested some seventy members of "Yellow Wasps" in August 1992 under suspicion they had plundered both the Bosniak and Serb population. They were taken to a prison in Bijeljina, and afterwards expelled to Serbia. The police took from them 27 kilos of plundered gold, 600 thousand of German Marks and 50 cars VW-Golf.

Only against one of them – Dusko Vuckovic with the nickname Repic – the Police of Republic Srpska filed criminal charges, but there was never a court epilogue.

It is interesting that the arrest of the "Yellow Wasps" was operationally prepared by the then first person of the Zvornik office of state security of the Republic Srpska which was in its formative stage, Goran Zugic, who was killed in Podgorica at the end of May 2000 and whose murder was never solved.

"Zugic left Zvornik because members of the "Yellow Wasps" threatened to kill him. That he must urgently leave and get out of sight he heard from Rajko Dukic, President of Milici municipality, who was informed about these threats. After that Zugic went to Montenegro wherefrom he descended and he first became chief of police in Hercegnovi, and afterwards in Podgorica. At the moment when he was killed he was counselor for security matters to the President of Montenegro Milo Djukanovic", says a source who was close to police structures in those times. He adds that the "Zvornik case" is a very interesting and demanding trial, particularly if one knows that in 1992 in this town were also Zeljko Raznatovic Arkan

and Milorad Ulemek Legija, who was captured near Zvornik together with the commander of the "Yellow Wasps" Vojin Vuckovic by Muslim soldiers, but they were later exchanged.

Crime over crimes

The trial against those accused of crimes committed in Zvornik in 1992 started at the end of November last year before the War Crimes Chamber of the District Court in Belgrade.

Representatives of the Association who represent Bosniaks killed in Zvornik 1992 a few months after the trial started expressed dissatisfaction with the indictment raised for the crime in Zvornik, both for its content and the number and names of those who stand trial for this crime.

The indictment raised by the War Crimes Prosecutor's Office of Serbia on August 12, 2005, charges with war crime against civilian population in Zvornik the war-time President of the Zvornik municipality Branko Grujic, commander of the Territorial Defense of Zvornik Marko Pavlovic whose real name is Branko Popovic, from Sombor, and members of the paramilitary formation "Yellow Wasps": Dusko Vuckovic known as Repic from Umka, Dragan Slavkovic from Kraljevo, Sinisa Filipovic from Ruma, Ivan Korac and Dragutin Dragicevic.

They are accused of having expelled by force from beginning of May 1992 until mid-July Muslim civilians from the villages Kozluk and Skocic in the Zvornik municipality to Hungary and for having killed at least 19 civilians in the House of Culture in Celopek, the farming unit Ekonomija and in the settlement Ciglana.

For forceful relocation of 2,822 Muslim civilians to Hungary were accused Grujic, the then President of the Zvornik municipality, and Popovic, the then commander of the headquarters of territorial defense in Zvornik. For the murder of Muslim civilians in Celopek, Ekonomija and in Ciglana, apart from Grujic and Popovic, charged were also members of the formation "Yellow Wasps", within the Territorial Defense of Zvornik, and namely Vuckovic, Slavkovic, Korac, Filipovic and Dragicevic. According to the indictment, 163 civilians of Muslim nationality were detained in the House of Culture whom the members of "Yellow Wasps" tortured. To some of them they carved crosses on their foreheads with their knives, some of them were crippled and forced to unnatural sexual activity. For its cruelty, this crime is classified among the worst crimes committed during the war in the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

"It is a big shame that the accused ones are charged only for a small part of what they had really committed in Zvornik. The complete municipality of Zvornik was deported. For the Bosniak population was planned ethnic cleansing. Some 1,300 people were killed, around 460 people were killed later in Srebrenica, where they found refuge in 1992. Hence, as far as Zvornik is concerned, some 1,700 people were killed", says the President of the Association of the missing and killed Bosniaks of Zvornik, Ahmet Grahic, in his comment to the indictment. He thinks that the Zvornik case should include also events in Bijeli Potok, Kamenica and Karakaj. "At that time no military unit was formed, and killed were mainly civilians who were kept under siege a month or two, and eventually they were deported, separated or killed. Out of the total number of those killed, 20%- 30% were children", says Grahic.

Trial in Sabac

In November 1993 the Serbian police arrested the brothers Vuckovic in Sabac, on the basis of the first indictment for war crime against civilians that was raised in Serbia. Dusko Vuckovic was immediately released from detention, because he was declared mentally unaccountable.

By decision of the Supreme Court in 1998 Vojin Vuckovic was sentenced to ten years in prison for war crime against civilians and for rape, and to four months because of illegal possession of weapons. The Supreme Court established that there is no reason to believe that his brother Dusko killed 17 and wounded 20 Bosniaks in the House of Culture in Celopek and that he raped Husnija Coric, so he was freed of charges.

During the trial in Sabac Vojin Vuckovic declared that at the formation of the group were present the commander of the Territorial Defense of Zvornik, Marko Pavlovic, as well as the leader of the Serb Democratic Party for Zvornik, Branislav Grujic.

Marko Pavlovic himself declared later that his real name was Branko Popovic, that he was from Sombor (Vojvodina) and that the "secret police brought" him to Zvornik. He was never summoned as witness in the trial against the Vuckovic brothers, under the argumentation that his real identity could not be established.

Bijeli Potok

The worst tragedy took place in Bijeli Potok.

“Bosniaks from seven local communities from Zvornik were brought to Bijeli Potok on June 1st. When men were deported from Bijeli Potok, members of their families were also deported on the same day, though not straightforward to Hungary but towards Tuzla, to the village Memici. Deportation with the route over Serbia and Hungary occurred only 27 days after that”, explains Grahic.

“They were squeezed into trucks, men were separated from women, parents from the children. All of those fit for military service were taken to the Centre of Secondary Education in Karakaj. They were taken by Drina trans busses from Zvornik to Pilica, from where they were brought back to Karakaj, to some old slaughterhouse near the river Drina, where they were killed. This is latest information on this massacre, which the indictment does not mention”, says Grahic.

He stresses that the families of those killed and missing ask also for an illustrative presentation of the deportation of Zvornik Bosniaks to Klisa on May 31, 1992, and later to Bijeli Potok, where trucks for oar transportation were waiting for them. He says that the indictment should include names of all key persons of the Zvornik municipality who at that time were heading the administration and led politics.

“Many more people should stand trial for crimes committed in Zvornik. Those responsible must be brought to justice, because nobody can convince us that the key persons of the Zvornik municipality and the Crisis Headquarters did not know about the complete process of expulsion and execution”, says Grahic.

He announces that the representatives of the Association, although they do not have doubts regarding the fairness of the court trial, will attentively follow the proceedings and in case they notice irregularities during the trial, they will seek for their rights in front of higher international instances.

Hakija Smailovic, secretary of the Association of families of detained and missing persons from the municipality of Zvornik is also stressing that many more people are responsible for the crime in Zvornik than is the number of those standing trial in Belgrade today. He says that the Cantonal Prosecution in Tuzla has delivered details related to some of the crimes committed in Zvornik, but he does not know whether they are about events in Bijeli Potok, Kamenica and Karakaj.

However, his version of the crime in Bijeli Potok differs from Grahic’s, because he claims that the men separated from their families in Bijeli Potok were shot dead in Pilica, and not at the old slaughterhouse near Drina. He says that from graves which were found until now 601 bodies were exhumed, out of which 300 were identified.

“This identifications speak enough about the scope of the committed crime. These are arguments and evidence which testify to all developments in Zvornik. The Cantonal Prosecution in Tuzla was working on collecting data and witnesses. We do all in our powers to have as many witnesses as possible addressing the Cantonal Prosecution and have them give their statements in order to expand the indictment”, says Smailovic.

And while the representatives of Bosniak associations do not hide their dissatisfaction with the indictment and are asking for their extension, the Serb political public, like the non-governmental organizations and associations in the Republic Srpska, do not deal with this question in the same manner.

Lazar Prodanovic, elected to the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska for the Association of Independent Social-Democrats, says that everyone who is responsible for crimes committed over civilians must take his share of responsibility and he says he is believing that those listed in the indictment are included upon earlier established elements of responsibility.

“It is up to the Prosecutor’s Office to establish during the proceedings whether or not all those responsible for events in Zvornik in 1992 are included in the indictment”, says he and adds that he trusts the Prosecutor’s Office.

WAR CRIME PROSECUTOR TALKED WITH FAMILIES OF THOSE DAMAGED IN ZVORNIK

Nobody will be pardoned

War Crimes Prosecutor Vladimir Vukcevic received, during the brake of the trial against the »Zvornik group«, the families of victims of war crimes committed in the territory of the Zvornik municipality in

1992.

Representatives of the families said to the Prosecutor that crimes committed over the Bosniak population in Zvornik in 1992 are of a greater scope than encompassed by the indictment against Branko Grujic and the others. »Our indictments are not selective and no person is going to be pardoned«, stressed Prosecutor Vukcevic and added that in the Zvornik case, thanks exactly to the families of the victims which are also witnesses of the events, there will be additional investigation. »We are taking up one part by another, and when we get a new information we shall certainly deal with it«, stressed the War Crimes Prosecutor. Representatives of the families of those damaged expressed their gratitude to the Prosecutor and offered their full cooperation and assistance. They assessed positively the establishment of direct cooperation between the War Crimes Prosecutor's Office of Serbia and the Prosecution of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Proceedings also in Bosnia-Herzegovina?

What in this case did remain unclear is the fact that the indictment was raised against seven, and that investigations included nine or ten suspects.

Namely, during the investigation and the first arrests of the suspects, the investigatory judge for the War Crimes Chamber of the District Court in Belgrade Miroslav Alimpic, who led the investigation related to the war crime in Zvornik, said that in this case there were ten suspects, out of which six are in detention in Serbia, whilst the other four are citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina and are in its territory. "The police of Serbia cannot arrest them, but it is negotiating with the authorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina on ways to solve this issue. Negotiations are going on and we shall see how this is going to be solved. There are two possibilities – that they themselves surrender in Serbia and that they stand trial in Serbia, or that the part related to citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina be left to the prosecutor in Bosnia-Herzegovina", said Alimpic. He added that it is possible to have proceedings both in Serbia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Afterwards only the war-time president of the Zvornik municipality was arrested, and no information was given in regard to the investigation against additional two or three persons.

Nezavisne novine from Banja Luka announced then that one of the suspects is also Dragan Spasojevic from Zvornik, who is charged with this crime as the war-time Chief of Police in Zvornik. It was said that because of this the Ministry of Police in Serbia was looking for Spasojevic in his flat in Novi Sad, which he energetically denied.