



**WAR CRIMINALS
IN THE 2020 ELECTION
CAMPAIGN**



YOUTH INITIATIVE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS / JUNE 2020 / YIHR.RS

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INTRODUCTION

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights wishes to warn and report about the participation of war criminals in public life out of the conviction that their participation is an insult to victims, a threat to regional peace and a hindrance to democratic and European processes of the country.

An overview of the participation of war criminals in the election campaign, as well as persons associated with crimes, indicates that regardless of the party they support, the pattern is similar and their themes and values are shared: denial of crimes, delegitimization of the Hague Tribunal, opposition to Serbia's EU accession, and spreading hatred and intolerance towards peoples in the region.

Convicted war criminals in Serbia have been glorified by those in power through media and institutions. Seeing how they've played quite a large role in this electoral process, it is safe to assume that a war criminal will have a seat in Parliament for the next for another four years.

INTRODUCTION

Regular parliamentary, provincial, and local elections, initially scheduled for 24 April, due to the declaration of the state of emergency because of the COVID-19 pandemic, have been postponed for 21 June 2020. Twenty-one electoral lists applied for parliamentary election, while a part of the opposition opted to boycott the elections.

Out of the total of 21 lists, three contain convicted war criminals or persons engaged in war activities, and were searched by courts for this reason. First on the list of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) is Vojislav Šešelj, followed by Ljiljana Mihajlović as the third, Vjerica Radeta as the fifth, Petar Jojić as the eleventh and Božidar Delić as the twelfth.

On the list Aleksandar Šapić – Victory for Serbia, Svetozar Andrić is in the eight place. Momir Stojanović is the second on the list People's Block - Velimir Ilić - general Momir Stojanović. Convicted war criminal Dragan Vasiljković (Captain Dragan) did not manage to collect a sufficient number of signatures for his candidacy. High military officials convicted for war crimes committed during the 1990s support certain political candidates, although they are not officially on their lists. Thus, Vladimir Lazarević and Veselin Šljivančanin are the supporters of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), while Nikola Šainović is supporting the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS).

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

According to the legislation of the Republic of Serbia, there are no obstacles for war criminals to participate in the elections. Article 88, Para. 1, Item 3 of the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament provides that “the mandate of a member of Parliament shall end before the expiry of the term for which he/she have been elected if such person has been finally convicted by the court and sentenced to unconditional imprisonment of not less than six months.” However, the Law does not state that such a Member of Parliament may not run for the next election. Article 44 of the same Law stipulates what documentation shall be submitted for each candidate. The candidates are not required to submit data on previous convictions or whether there is an ongoing investigation or criminal proceedings against them for any criminal offence, although such documents are often necessary for the performance of public duties or for employment in the public service.

Article 387, Para. 5 of the Criminal Code provides that “whoever publicly approves, denies or substantially reduces the gravity of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed against a group of persons or a member of the group selected on the grounds of race, colour, religion, origin, statehood, nationality or ethnicity, in a manner that may lead to violence or the incitement of hatred towards such group of

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

persons or the member of that group, if such criminal offences have been established by a final judgment of the court in Serbia or the International Criminal Court, shall be punished by imprisonment of six months to five years.”

Finally, the Constitution of Serbia, in Article 52, guarantees that “every citizen of age and working ability of the Republic of Serbia shall have the right to vote and be elected”

In accordance with that, this Report seeks to demonstrate whom we can elect on 21 June, as well as where the elections are taking us, i.e. where they are bringing us back.

**CANDIDATES
CONVICTED FOR
WAR CRIMES**

VOJISLAV ŠEŠELJ

CANDIDATES CONVICTED FOR WAR CRIMES

During the 1990s, making use of the nationalist rhetoric of Greater Serbia, Šešelj was inciting the persecution and forcible transfers of Croats from Vojvodina. Especially striking is his speech in Hrtkovci in 1992, when he said that there was no place for Croats in Serbia and invited the Serbs to throw them out. By the end of that year, around 10,000 Croats left Vojvodina.¹

On 24 February 2003, Šešelj surrendered himself to the ICTY – three days after a failed attempt to assassinate Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić and two and a half weeks before the assassination of the Prime Minister on 12 March, which Šešelj announced at this farewell rally, saying that a bloody spring was awaiting Serbia. In 2018, ICTY Appeals Chamber sentenced him to the imprisonment of 10 years for inciting and carrying out persecutions and for inciting deportations and forcible transfers in Vojvodina.² Šešelj was convicted at the time when he was a member of the Serbian Assembly, but he was not stripped of his mandate, although the law is clear in that respect. In 2020, while running once again, Šešelj said that “the Radicals will go to the elections with their standard programme they have been advocating for the last 30 years.”³

VOJISLAV ŠEŠELJ

ABOUT THE WAR

About his involvement in the war, Šešelj said: “I was not in command of operations, as I don’t have that sort of military knowledge, and I wouldn’t dare to lead a unit, I was not trained; however, I was always at the front lines, where I was putting myself at great risk...”⁴

Reacting to the news that the former NATO Secretary General Javier Solana was infected with COVID, Šešelj said: “I hereby promise that I will personally buy the virus a drink if it makes that trash Javier Solana kick the bucket. It is completely normal for Serbian people to be joyful that such a monster who did all that he did to us is now suffering.”⁵

ABOUT HIS JUDGMENT AND THE ICTY

Šešelj believes that ICTY, which is an illegal court, charged him with fictional crimes, because they had nothing to convict him for, but simply wanted to destroy his party SRS or take control over it; that the proceedings were scandalous and that the public is on his side.⁶ As far as the time he had spent in prison in The Hague is concerned, the SRS leader said: “Is life better for those who didn’t go to the Hague Tribunal or for me who had spent 12 years there, fighting for Serbianity and winning?”⁷ “The conditions were quite poor in The Hague. And Slobodan Milošević, for example, he was, at the very least, killed by being denied adequate medical treatment. In my case, they waited for a year from the moment I observed blood in my stool to take me to intervention. I had 20 lymph nodes removed. Our doctors saved me. Theirs

VOJISLAV ŠEŠELJ

were planning for me to die in June 2015.”⁸ The leader of the Radicals believes that those who support extraditions to the Tribunal are traitors and that they will get death sentence.⁹

ABOUT ZORAN ĐINĐIĆ

“I was only telling the truth about Đinđić, that he was a mafia boss. And yes, maybe I knew a number of mafia people, but he was one of them. I was only playing chess with Čume and I bragged right away that I took DEM 200. I went to Šilerova Street only once, when I was dragged through some underground corridor into a room, this was my first encounter with them. I didn’t go there after that, but insisted that they come to my house.”¹⁰

KOSOVO

“If we go for the exchange of territories, then with Albania – Albania is to give us Skadar to Sveti Jovan from Medova, for us to have access to the Adriatic Sea, and we are to give them an even larger part of Kosovo than the part they give us in the north of Albania, where Shiptars are majority. We, the Radicals, support the separation of Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, because obviously they won’t be able to live together for a long time. We want 10 or 12 Serbian municipalities to unite with Central Serbia directly, and in other parts of Kosovo, let Albanians have full autonomy, the greatest in the world. I’ve even made a map. From Gračanica to Gnjilane, a corridor is to be made, and to the South and up to the North, four municipalities, and another two in Peć with

VOJISLAV ŠEŠELJ

the Patriarchate of Peć and Goraždevac. They are to have all except border crossings and an army, and they can't be UN members and they can't participate in international organisations within the UN system or in military pacts. If Great Britain can allow Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to have their football teams, why wouldn't we let them? Secondly, we demand that Russia is invited again, as a permanent member of the Security Council, and China as a permanent member, to send their troops into the KFOR."¹¹

MONTENEGRO

"Sanctions should be introduced against all public officials of Montenegro, but not against people, because what they are doing against Serbs we must not do against the citizens of Montenegro, as there are 30 percent of Serbs there. There is a process going on at the moment that we have desired for a long time, the unification, and those who have been declaring as Montenegrins for decades are massively returning to Serbianity now. And as for Milo Đukanović, I have advised him sincerely several times to run away from Montenegro as soon as possible, as he has long passed a critical point of popular dissatisfaction and rage."¹²

CROATIA

"I feel sorry whenever there is an earthquake in any country, innocent civilians suffer. Natural catastrophes should be divided from politics. I feel sorry for civilians, especially children, when they suffer."¹³ "Every Serb who goes to Croatia deserves to have his car thrown into the sea."¹⁴

**VOJISLAV
ŠEŠELJ**

ABOUT EUROPEAN UNION

“We could [go into a coalition], but only providing that the Progressives give up the European Union. Vučić must throw out EU flags from his cabinet, I don’t understand why he keeps them there when we are not an EU member.”¹⁵ “Serbia was fighting for the oldest generation, because our spirit doesn’t belong to the EU, which sacrifices them.”¹⁶

Due to the coronavirus pandemic Šešelj and SRS did not mark the anniversary of the speech in Hrtkovci on May 6¹⁷, but, as part of the election campaign, Šešelj organized the distribution of 40,000 of his books to Serbian citizens and one of the first places he visited were Hrtkovci.¹⁸

DRAGAN VASILJKOVIĆ

CANDIDATES CONVICTED FOR WAR CRIMES

In the early 1990s, Vasiljković was a commander of Kninjas, paramilitary unit that operated on the territory of the so-called Serbian Autonomous Region of Krajina. In 2006, the Republic of Croatia raised an indictment against him for crimes against civilian population and prisoners of war in 1991. Vasiljković was sentenced to imprisonment of 13.5 years for the crimes at the Fortress of Knin, where Croatian soldiers and police officers were tortured, as well as at the police station in Glina.¹⁹ He was released on 28 March 2020. Soon after, he announced his participation in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

About his involvement in politics, Vasiljković said: “I have no intention to pursue a complete spectrum of politics, because you need a party for that. I will not set up one. I am interested solely in defence, primarily in people who have been languishing in Croatian prisons, as well as in the defence of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, Montenegro and across diaspora. I have been promised by the state apparatus that these Serbs will not be left in the lurch and that protocols will be made in order to

DRAGAN VASILJKOVIĆ

be able to apply reciprocity in our response to Croats and their crimes. As a deputy in the republican Parliament, I will be the voice of Serbs who were convicted and imprisoned, without any verifiable evidence, in various prisons, only because they are Serbs. They think Serbia has forgotten them, but the truth is that Serbia has never heard of them. I promised to be their voice in the Assembly of Serbia so that it never happens again that a Serb can be arrested and sentenced to long imprisonment without verifiable evidence without Serbia knowing about that.”²⁰

ABOUT THE WAR

“I didn’t know what Krajina was all about at that time, it was Dejan Lučić who explained everything to me. I always thought this was about some problems in Ukraine. There would be no blood and no conflict. My guys were disciplined, we would not leave any mess behind.”²¹ “I was tricked into leaving Krajina under direct order of Slobodan Milošević, at the very moment when I was on my way to transform the burly men of Krajina into a military force against whom the Ustashe would break their teeth. They didn’t let me, and we all know how everything ended in 1995: with genocide and persecution of half a million of Serbs.”²²

ABOUT HIS CONVICTION AND PRISON

“I was not serving a sentence. To be sentenced, a person has to deserve it. This was Ustashe’s torture.”²³ “I told everybody the same, just like I did before the County Court: Never in my life have I committed any war crimes, including in Glina and in Knin. The

DRAGAN VASILJKOVIĆ

fact that the Ustashe embarrassed themselves in Glina, having run away in front of my guys, is their problem. My verdict served to restore the honour of their cowardly commanders.”²⁴

ABOUT ZORAN ĐINĐIĆ

“What I believe, it is undeniable that they [Milorad Ulemek Legija and Zvezdan Jovanović] wore Serbian uniforms, that at least a hundred times they risked their lives to defend Serbia, and that this is unfortunately used as an aggravating rather than mitigating circumstance for them. I think it is wrong and I am sure that every Serb would agree with that part, that 16 or 17 years later, if such mitigating circumstance of theirs was to be taken into account, I think that some restrictions on their movement could be placed.”²⁵ “I accept to be a guarantor, I’ll wager everything I have! I am certain that, if Legija and Zvezdan gave me their word, they would respect that. In case of release, they would have restrictions. It’s only fair that they spend the last part of their lives free, that at least the fact they wore Serbian uniforms and risked their lives is taken as a mitigating circumstance and not an aggravating one.”²⁶

ABOUT THE REGION

“This is not only about Đoković, we all strive for reconciliation, for turning towards the future because our memory is short. I attacked Đoković exactly because of that, have you forgotten Ivanišević’s words, who said that he would like to shoot at Serbs, not Kninjas, but Serbs, any Serb, your mother and father. Then we have a situation

DRAGAN VASILJKOVIĆ

where Vučić goes to Srebrenica to pay respect, they attack him, and he gives them a donation. These are the things which I've observed and which bother me. You can be human towards people who know how to respect you, but you can't be human towards idiots, it's futile and stupid."²⁷

"The same Ustashe recipe which is used against Serbs in Croatia is transferred to Kosovo and Montenegro. I am sure that if it weren't for Dodik in the Republic of Srpska, the same would be applied in Bosnia. The persecution of Serbs in Croatia is a source of evil. Kosovo and Montenegro are consequences."²⁸

KOSOVO

"If any one of you manages to force the smallest country in the world to withdraw the recognition of Kosovo, come to me, I'll give you a huge medal. Dačić did it 18 times, thank him for that. Hats off to him. Another one like him and Kosovo will be ours again. I've written off Kosovo, just like everybody else. He managed to return it to the negotiating table. Kosovo is not lost any longer, Kosovo is ours again."²⁹

CROATIA

"Croats are lying to us that the war is over. Ask 10 million Serbs what they think about that."³⁰

DRAGAN VASILJKOVIĆ

ABOUT EUROPEAN UNION

Captain Dragan sees Serbia in partnership with Russia and China (“It’s one and a half billion of us, Russians and Chinese”³¹) and not with the European Union, the Member States of which have banned him from entering for the next 20 years.

Still, Dragan Vasiljković has not managed to collect a sufficient number of signatures necessary for submitting his electoral list on time.

**CANDIDATES
ENGAGED IN
WAR ACTIVITIES**

On the list of the Serbian Radical Party for the coming election of members of parliament, there are four current members of parliament who are connected with war events of the 1990s.

LJILJANA MIHAJLOVIĆ

CANDIDATES ENGAGED IN WAR ACTIVITIES

In the late 1990s, Ljiljana Mihajlović was Vojislav Šešelj's secretary. In 1997, Mihajlović moved to the flat of a family of Croatian origin, the Barbalićs, in Zemun, while they were at the seaside, and signed an agreement on the purchase of the flat with the Zemun municipality. In 2013, the court ruled that the Barbalićs have no right to the flat. This was confirmed by the Court of Appeal in Belgrade in 2015.³² Ljiljana Mihajlović has reported the flat to the Anti-Corruption Agency and the Barbalićs are planning to seek justice before the European Court for Human Rights.

VJERICA RADETA AND PETAR JOJIĆ

CANDIDATES ENGAGED IN WAR ACTIVITIES

In 2012, the ICTY raised an indictment against the two candidates on the SRS list for the contempt of court, as well as intimidation of witnesses, threats and bribery in the proceedings against Vojislav Šešelj. Three years later (2015), a warrant for their arrest was issued, but in 2016, the Higher Court in Belgrade concluded that there were no grounds for their arrest and extradition since they were not charged with war crimes, but with contempt. An international arrest order for Radeta and Jojić was issued in 2016 and the decision to extradite them to the Hague was confirmed in February 2020.³³

VJERICA RADETA AND PETAR JOJIĆ

ABOUT THE PROCEEDINGS

Vjerica Radeta said: “Petar Jojić and I are protected from extradition to the Hague mechanism by the Constitution of Serbia and by the final and enforceable decision of the Higher Court in Belgrade, which decided that there were no grounds for our extradition”, and that “this is a matter already judged and it can’t be judged again.” Radeta also said that back then the two of them “responded to the summons of the Higher Court in Belgrade and everything that is going on and that will be going on in our judicial authorities, we are absolutely available and we are ready to respond to the summons of our authorities any time.”³⁴

On March 11, 2020, SRS Vice President laid flowers on Slobodan Milošević ‘s grave, and on this occasion the party released the following statement: “Treasonous DOS government extradited Slobodan Milosevic to the Hague Tribunal, not just on any date, but on the greatest Serbian festival, on Vidovdan 2001. Slobodan Milošević fought bravely at the Tribunal, where he lost his life behind the walls of Scheveningen on this day in 2006, defending Serbian national interests.”³⁵

BOŽIDAR DELIĆ

CANDIDATES ENGAGED IN WAR ACTIVITIES

The twelfth on the list of the Serbian Radical Party is Božidar Delić, a party member since 2006, with an interruption between 2008 and 2011, when he was a member of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). In 1999, Delić became a general of the Yugoslav Army and in the same year he was a commander of 549th motorised brigade in Kosovo. The zone of responsibility of the 549th motorised brigade comprised the municipalities of Prizren, Đakovica, Orahovac and Suva Reka. The Humanitarian Law centre (HLC) states that “in the period from 24 March to 10 June 1999, members of the Serbian forces killed 2174 Albanian civilians”, and that 459 of them were found in the mass graves in Batajnica and Perućac, while 375 are still recorded as missing.³⁶

In 2008, the HLC filed a criminal complaint to the Prosecutor’s Office for War Crimes against Delić and ten other members of the 549th motorised brigade and Serbian Interior Ministry for a war crime against civilian population, that is, the murder of several dozens of Kosovo Albanians in the village of Trnje, Suva Reka municipality.³⁷ In 2013, the HLC filed another criminal complaint against Delić relating to the crime

BOŽIDAR DELIĆ

in Landovica, Prizren municipality, because of “the order of non-selective attack on civilian population, which resulted in the death of civilians, grievous bodily harm and severe harm on people’s health, that is, the attack without the selection of targets which hits civilian population, the murder of civilians and arbitrary destruction of civilian property under Article 142 of the Criminal Law of FRY.”³⁸ The crime in the village of Trnje was prosecuted, but Delić was not among the suspects, merely appearing as a witness. The prosecution of the crime in Landovica is still awaited.³⁹

ABOUT THE WAR

During the state of emergency, Delić talked about the beginning of the NATO intervention: “A day earlier in Prishtina we got our assignments and when the first two rockets hit the barracks in Prizren, we knew that the war was beginning and that there was no return. The moral of the Army was at an exceptional level because we knew who and what we were defending.”⁴⁰

After the state of emergency, he also talked about Paštrik, a topic he used to often comment publicly, by presenting himself and his soldiers as heroes who bravely defended themselves from the attacks of the “terrorists” and won in spite of huge losses: “I remember even today the face of each killed soldier. According to all military parameters, compared to the force which stood in front to us, our losses were minimal. This is what science says, but I don’t share that view. Every loss of ours was too large for me as a commander. This was my opinion then and it hasn’t changed today.”⁴¹

SVETOZAR ANDRIĆ

CANDIDATES ENGAGED IN WAR ACTIVITIES

Former major of the Republic of Srpska Army and the brigade commander of the Independent Autonomous Region of Birač, Svetozar Andrić, found his place on the electoral list of the Serbian Patriot Union (SPAS), led by Aleksandar Šapić. In 2006, Nataša Kandić, founder of the Humanitarian Law Centre sent a letter to Vladimir Vukčević, War Crime Prosecutor, requesting an investigation against Andrić and former Deputy minister of the Interior of the Republic of Srpska, Tomo Kovač.⁴² In 2018, the HLC also filed a criminal complaint against Svetozar Andrić. Namely, in May 1992, Andrić ordered the moving out of the Muslim population from the municipalities of Zvornik and Vlasenica, and 10,000 persons left subsequently. On May 31 the same year, Andrić set up the Sušica camp, in which prisoners were held in inhumane and unhygienic conditions, frequently beaten and raped. Around 160 persons were killed in Sušica. In July 1995, Radovan Karadzic appointed Andrić Head of the Drina Corps of the Republic of Srpska Army, which operated on the territory of Srebrenica.⁴³ Svetozar Andrić is the Deputy Mayor of the Novi Beograd Municipality, while the HLC's indictment is still in the pre-investigation stage.⁴⁴

MOMIR STOJANOVIĆ

CANDIDATES ENGAGED IN WAR ACTIVITIES

Momir Stojanović is on the list People's Block - Velimir Ilić - General Momir Stojanović. During the war in Kosovo, Stojanović was head of the Security department of the Pristhina Corps of the Yugoslav Army. After the war, Stojanović was Head of the Operation Department of the Command of the Pristhina Corps of the Third Army of the Army of Serbia and Montenegro, Head of the Security Directorate of the Army of Serbia and Montenegro and then the director of newly-established Military Intelligence Agency. He was also the president of the Parliamentary Committee for the control of intelligence services and member of the Parliamentary Committee for Kosovo and Metohija.

In 2015, Interpol issued a red notice for Stojanović, wanting him for crimes committed in the Operation River, which was conducted in the municipality of Đakovica, villages Meja and Korenica, on 27 and 28 April 1999. According to HLC data, members of the

MOMIR STOJANOVIĆ

Yugoslav Army and Serbian Police killed around 350 civilians and expelled several thousand persons to Albania. In the mass grave in Batajnica, remains of 309 persons killed in this operation were found. Stojanović participated in the planning of the Operation River; further, he was the superior of the 52th battalion of the Military Police, which was involved in the crimes, and failed to punish them.⁴⁵ Stojanović is not on the Interpol list any longer and has never been questioned before the institutions in Serbia.⁴⁶ He has been in politics since 2007 as a member of several parties – the Serbian Radical Party, the Socialist Party of Serbia and the Serbian Progressive Party.

Regarding the invalids of war and families of killed soldiers, Stojanović says that they should be entitled to “national pension in the amount of average salary in Serbia.”⁴⁷

KOSOVO

“We are against any division, demarcation or recognition of Kosovo and Metohija, since it is the source of our spirituality and national existence. This issue can be solved only in accordance with UN Resolution 1244. Unfortunately, some influential circles in the EU support President Vučić’s staying in power, counting on his recognition of Kosovo’s independence.”⁴⁸

**WAR CRIMINALS
AS SUPPORTERS
OF ELECTORAL
LISTS**

VLADIMIR LAZAREVIĆ

WAR CRIMINALS AS SUPPORTERS OF ELECTORAL LISTS

During the war in Kosovo, Vladimir Lazarević was a commander of the Pristhina Corps and the Third Army of the Yugoslav Army. In 2009, the ICTY Trial Chamber sentenced him to the imprisonment of 14 years for deportation and forced transfer of Kosovo Albanians, which is considered a crime against humanity. In 2015, he was granted early release.⁴⁹ Lazarević is the supporter of the Serbian Progressive Party.

**VLADIMIR
LAZAREVIĆ**

ABOUT THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT

“Only a few years ago, the defenders of the fatherland were not allowed to say that they were defending the freedom of Serbia with their lives. Thank you to all citizens of Serbia, the whole state leadership, the Serbian Army, Ministry of Defence, the Government and the President of Serbia for not being ashamed of their heroes, who, 21 years ago, defended the freedom of our country, of our Serbia, with their lives, for allowing our soldiers to still be able to mourn their dead comrades, for finally being able to ‘admit’ without fear that they were defending their Serbia and feel that their sacrifice was not in vain.”⁵⁰

ABOUT THE TRIBUNAL

“I am very sorry for what is happening to him [Ratko Mladić] and I sincerely hope that he will pull through. For ten years, I was through that hell, that systematic killing of all of us, from inadequate medical treatment, more than six surgeries, some of which failed. In the end, they cancelled one, hoping that it would be fatal for me. This is a real Hague scaffold we have been through – and some are still going through it. That’s why I am worried about Mladić’s condition.”

“Sometimes we would discuss a bit the proceedings conducted against us and often the situation in our country. We were happy for any progress made.”⁵¹

VLADIMIR LAZAREVIĆ

ABOUT THE WAR

“My wish is that the dead are not forgotten and that the living ones are respected and that the crime committed against us at that time is never erased from the memory of our people. Those who can forgive, let them forgive, but it must not be forgotten.”

“At the moment when the bombing began, there was no fear, nor did I see it on the faces of my comrades. For us from the Pristina Corps, year 1998 was also a year of war, because we were defending the state border from the terrorists from Albania and Macedonia. We didn't get scared, we were only determined to defend our country at any cost.”⁵²

VESELIN ŠLJIVANČANIN

WAR CRIMINALS AS SUPPORTERS OF ELECTORAL LISTS

During the war in Croatia, Major of the Yugoslav People's Army Veselin Šljivančanin was a security officer of the First Guards Motorised Brigade and the Operation Group South. The Hague Tribunal convicted him for torturing prisoners of war at the Ovčara farm near Vukovar. Although he was responsible for the safety of prisoners, he failed to prevent their harassment. In 2009, the Appeal Chamber sentenced him to imprisonment of 17 years, but after the reconsideration of the case, his sentence was reduced to ten years. In 2011, he was granted early release.⁵³

Veselin Šljivančanin supports the Serbian Progressive Party, the party that organized the promotions of his book "In the Service of the Fatherland" in Nakovo, Vrbas, Prigrevica and Bačka Palanka during the first weeks of June. On that occasion, Šljivančanin has stated: "Know that I am here because of Mr. Vucic, because of the Serbian Progressive Party, because they are also patriots and people who love their homeland and that they will do everything they can to make the homeland of Serbia better."⁵⁴

VESELIN ŠLJIVANČANIN

ABOUT THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT

“I am a retired officer, I should not praise myself. The most important thing for me is when I am praised by my soldiers. I have survived many difficult situations in my life, and when I was at my lowest point, thousands of citizens of Belgrade came, including Aleksandar I Andrej Vučić... We, the soldiers who had to go, but wouldn't go because we liked the warfare, were supported by him in all situations, since he had come to power, we don't have to be ashamed. He contributed to the truth about Košare, Paštrik, the bombing... He has done a lot for Serbia. From the very beginning, I support Vučić and the SNS, I don't request any position or place, I want to help if there is anything I can do.”⁵⁵

ABOUT HIS CONVICTION

“I was prosecuted before the international court, and I was lucky enough to be allowed to tell the real truth to the court. I have not been convicted for war crimes. Members of the Yugoslav People's Army did not take out any wounded soldiers, no wounded person was ever killed in Ovčara, all is there in the judgments. There was also a trial before the court in Belgrade where people proved what was going on. It is not true that the soldiers of the Yugoslav People's Army killed the wounded, all the wounded were taken to the hospital, none of my soldiers or commanders committed any crimes.”⁵⁶

VESELIN ŠLJIVANČANIN

ABOUT HIS BOOKS

“So far, in addition to the book “In the Service of the Fatherland”, I have published three more books, with the goal of telling the truth, and not, as some say, spreading hatred. I spread love through my books, in order for people to love each other, to understand that we fought and died in vain, and I call everyone in this region to embrace peace.” ⁵⁷

“I have no one to justify myself to, all I aim is to show what I have done and remove the mark of shame from my unit, my people, and myself.”⁵⁸

ABOUT THE REGION

“We must venture forward, making friends of all, but asking them to respect us too.” ⁵⁹

MONTENEGRO

“Serbia has no intention to meddle with the politics of Montenegro, but it has to take care of its people.” ⁶⁰

NIKOLA ŠAINOVIĆ

WAR CRIMINALS AS SUPPORTERS OF ELECTORAL LISTS

During the war in Kosovo, Šainović was the Deputy Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the head of the joint command for Kosovo. In 2009, the ICTY Trial Chamber sentenced him to the imprisonment of 22 years for crimes against humanity and violation of laws and customs of war. In 2013, the Appeal Chamber sentenced him to the imprisonment of 18 years for deportation, forcible transfer and persecution as crimes against humanity and murder as a crime against humanity and violation of laws and customs of war in Kosovo. In 2015, he was granted early release. Šainović is a supporter of the Socialist Party of Serbia.

NIKOLA ŠAINOVIĆ

ABOUT THE WAR

Commemorating the anniversary of death of Slobodan Milošević, Šainović said: “This year, it’s been 25 years from the Dayton Agreement and 21 years from the Resolution 1244, which are the bases of fight of Serbian people for freedom and for preserving Kosovo and Metohija. Slobodan Milošević dedicated his whole life to these fights.” ⁶¹

“Serbs in Croatia faced the Holocaust. And when the Serbs were expelled from the Croatian constitution, it is when that instrument of collective guilt appeared. I saw from the beginning of the disintegration of Yugoslavia that one set of rights apply to other nations, and another set of rights apply to Serbs. The politics of ‘stick and carrot’ was being applied since the 1990s, whenever we accepted something, something new was imposed.” ⁶²

ABOUT KOSOVO

“The Americans are underestimating the Albanians, they are not the people who could be easily returned to proper tracks. They are the Frankenstein of the Balkans, like Bin Laden. The Devil, however, will always be the Devil. They want to remove the war structure in Kosovo, but what they got is a radicalised Albin Kurti and I think the next move for the Americans will be to return to Rugova’s party in order to calm down the situation. Still, this will be impossible, because there are radicalised structures left over after the KLA.” ⁶³

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

War criminals' statements about the wars of the 1990s, judgments rendered against them, the assassination of Prime Minister Đinđić, and attitudes towards the region and the European Union are consistent to what they were promoting during the 1990s. Those who were responsible for the conflicts, the flourishing of nationalism and wars still do not advocate for reconciliation in the region and accession to the European Union.

In spite of the final and enforceable judgments, the actors of war events deny their participation in wars, shifting the blame on others and presenting themselves as heroes. The participation of war criminals in political life in Serbia helps preserving the narrative of not having participating in wars but only defending itself; it also leads to the normalisation of war criminals. The responsibility for crimes is a topic discussed only in small circles and thus many, and especially young people, know nothing about the war other than what they can find out through the pro-nationalist media. Having in mind that the past has never been challenged and that the whole state leadership supported the wars of the 1990s, the presence of war criminals in the election campaigns and the absence of laws that would prevent this does not come as a surprise.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The prevalence of war criminals in the public space, in media and state agencies is not only an obstacle for the development of a democratic society and respect for human rights, but also an insult to the victims and survivors. In order to avoid the possibility of having war criminals, who glorify wars and deny victims and their experience, on the electoral lists and all other public positions again, it is necessary to open up a public discussion about the 90s wars and the individuals and institutions that participated. The public debate should be followed by:

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Vetting process - a process of checking persons taking up office
- Lustration - distancing from state services
- Institutional reform - military, police and security services

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