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KILLING THE TRUTH

GENOCIDE DENIAL
AND HISTORICAL
REVISIONISM IN
SERBIA AS
STATE-SPONSORED
VIOLENCE:
TRAJECTORIES,
CHALLENGES AND
OPPORTUNITIES



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The former Yugoslav states continue to grapple with the legacy of the 1990s conflicts, marked by severe atrocities and deep societal divisions. Despite efforts at transitional justice – aimed at truth-telling, victim support, and institutional reform – these processes are undermined by widespread denial of war crimes and glorification of convicted war criminals. Political elites in countries like Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia engage in historical revisionism, often celebrating perpetrators as national heroes and promoting one-sided narratives that hinder reconciliation and perpetuate ethnic tensions. This form of revisionism represents a political effort to challenge the international status quo by disputing the established consensus on the 1990s conflicts as determined by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), domestic courts, and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). It is materially and reputationally costly and it serves not only to contest existing power and resource structures but also to reshape post-war narratives, collective memories, and national identities in ways that can fuel further conflict.

Historical revisionism in Serbia in recent years includes denial of individual war crimes (most notably war crime in Račak), denial of the genocide in Srebrenica, and glorification of a number of convicted war criminals who have a prominent place in the public sphere (such as Vladimir Lazarević or Vojislav Šešelj), while in public discourse the dominant narrative about the 1990s is that Serbia fought defensive wars and that its officers and soldiers were unjustly convicted, perpetuating the myth of Serbia's collective victimhood in international society. State-sponsored historical revisionism is intrinsically linked with other forms of ongoing state-sponsored violence, including physical, gender, economic, and environmental.

In this paper, we trace how and why state-sponsored revisionism in Serbia has intensified in recent years. This intensification of historical revisionism in Serbia stems from a shrinking space for civil society to influence public discourse, growing authoritarian tendencies, and a need to defend the deep-rooted national narrative of victimhood in light of perceived losses abroad. Since 2015, the Serbian government has increasingly celebrated convicted war criminals and suppressed civil society efforts to confront the crimes of the 1990s, reflecting a broader erosion of democratic freedoms. This revisionism is also fueled by Serbia's enduring self-perception as a victim of foreign powers and regional injustice – especially regarding Kosovo and rulings of the international courts – leading to a reluctance to acknowledge Serbia's wartime responsibility. As a result, denial, minimization and trivialization of atrocities like the Srebrenica genocide have intensified, with public recognition and awareness significantly declining over the past decade, especially among young people.

To effectively suppress such practices and prevent them from becoming even more aggressive and resulting in more damage to the security and wellbeing of Serbian society, cooperation of various actors is necessary: institutions, civil society organizations, the media, and the educational system. Given that the problem is multi-layered and multi-dimensional, it requires multiple directions of action.

INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL REVISIONISM AND GENOCIDE DENIAL AS STATE-SPONSORED VIOLENCE

Legacies of the violent 1990s still loom over the former Yugoslav states, as the period marked by armed conflicts, widespread crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide left serious socioeconomic and political consequences for the affected states and their societies.¹ After the various conflicts were concluded, former Yugoslav states underwent a range of transitional justice processes, many administered by the international community, in order to address the past and overcome the divisions caused by conflicts. This justice is not only judicial and retributive, but is, above all, restorative and preventive.² Beyond court proceedings at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and domestic courts, it includes establishing and acknowledging responsibility for human rights violations, caring for victims, and implementing comprehensive institutional and legal reforms that will guarantee the non-repetition of crimes.³ One of the most important components of any transitional justice process is the establishment and acknowledgment of the truth about the crimes committed.⁴ However, denial of court-established facts and the refusal to accept responsibility for the crimes are everyday occurrences in the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

State officials in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia, among others, have engaged in what we call 'historical revisionist' behaviors, including genocide denial, glorifying convicted war criminals and celebrating them as heroes, rewriting history textbooks, and minimizing and trivializing other groups' victims to magnify one's own victimhood. To illustrate, in public speech among the political elites in both Republika Srpska and in Serbia, convicted war criminal Ratko Mladić is frequently hailed as a Serbian hero without whom 'Serb sacrifice' and 'suffering' in the war would have been even greater.⁵ In Croatia, in 2019, when Slobodan Praljak was found guilty of war crimes by the ICTY and subsequently drank poison, killing himself in the courtroom, the then-President of Croatia, Kolinda Grabar Kitarović posted an 'in memoriam' photo commemorating the war criminal on her Facebook account.⁶ In Posušje, in

1 'Posleratna pravda i trajni mir u bivšoj Jugoslaviji', Commissioner of Human Rights, <https://rm.coe.int/posleratna-pravda-i-trajni-mir-u-bivsoj-jugoslaviji-tematski-izvestaj-/1680a7c5cc>

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 Ibid

5 Snežana Mitrović, 'Reakcije iz RS: Ratko Mladić je bio i ostao ratni heroj' (NI BiH, 9 June 2021), <https://ninfo.ba/vijesti/reakcije-iz-rs-ratko-mladic-je-bio-i-ostao-ratni-heroj/>

6 'Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović komentirala objavu fotografije Slobodana Praljka' (NI, 3 December 2019), <https://ninfo.hr/Vijesti/a464854/Kolinda-Grabar-Kitarovic-komentirala-objavu-fotografije-Slobodana-Praljka.html>

southwest Bosnia and Herzegovina, one might find themselves in the Janko Bobetko Street, commemorating a Croatian general who was indicted by the ICTY but died before extradition, while in the city of Bihać, on Bosnia and Herzegovina's North-eastern border with Croatia, a street carries the name of Rasim Delić, convicted by the ICTY.⁷

This paper focuses on the trajectory of such revisionist practices, including genocide denial, in Serbia as the most significant actor in the wars in the former Yugoslavia – in terms of the number of armed conflicts it participated in, and the scale of crimes committed by forces under its direct or indirect control.⁸ Therefore, the lack of political will in Serbia to initiate a societal dialogue about its role in the wars and atrocities is one of the key reasons for the slow reconciliation process in the region.⁹

Actions such as genocide denial and trivialization of war crimes qualify as revisionist behaviours because they are a part of a political agenda that seeks to challenge the existing status quo in the international order out of dissatisfaction with the existing pattern of structures and distributions of resources, material or ideational, in ways that involve conflict/war or are prone to cause it. The historical status quo, that is a consensus about circumstances and dynamics of the conflict of the 1990s, including classification of crimes and attribution of responsibility, was primarily achieved through the judgments of the ICTY, and secondarily, domestic courts and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Those judgments have been used politically to fortify emerging narratives about the war of the 1990s and to shape post-war collective memories and identities. When political actors deny legal qualifications of these crimes, for instance the Srebrenica genocide, they dispute the authority and validity of international legal institutions and as such pose a challenge to the rules-based international order. Most notably, Serbian political leaders have not publicly acknowledged mass atrocities in July 1995 in Srebrenica as genocide and have instead actively sought to minimize and trivialize it by calling it 'a terrible massacre'¹⁰ or 'a hideous crime'.¹¹

With such conduct and attitude towards war crimes and convicted war criminals, Serbia deviates from numerous international norms, standards, and obligations. Denying crimes and glorifying individuals convicted of such crimes can constitute discrimination against the victims, which is contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits discrimination. For example, in 2021 and 2022, victims' families filed two lawsuits against Serbia for compensation for non-pecuniary damage due to violations of

7 Nejra Džaferović, 'Ulice i trgovi u BiH nose imena ratnih zločinaca' (BIRN, 19 May 2020)

<https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/19/bosnian-streets-and-squares-named-after-war-criminals/>

8 'Tranziciona pravda u Srbiji u periodu od 2013. do 2015. godine', Fond za humanitarno pravo, https://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/izvestaj_o_TP_2013-2015.pdf

9 Ibid

10 'Aleksandar Vučić u intervjuu za BBC ponovo negirao genocid u Srebrenici pa branio Milorada Dodika' (NI, 25 November 2024), <https://n1info.ba/vijesti/aleksandar-vucic-u-intervjuu-za-bbc-ponovo-negirao-genocid-u-srebrenici-pa-branio-milorada-dodika/>

11 'Serbian PM: Srebrenica 'a terrible crime', not genocide' (DW, 15 November 2018),

<https://www.dw.com/en/serbian-pm-ana-brnabic-srebrenica-a-terrible-crime-not-genocide/a-46307925>

the rights of the person, personal and family life, the right to life and the prohibition of discrimination in relation to the right to life due to the way in which authorities and other institutions in Serbia treat convicted war criminals.¹² Additionally, Serbia's behavior is at odds with the Rome Statute, to which it is a signatory, which emphasizes that the most serious crimes must not go unpunished. Like all members of the United Nations, Serbia has an obligation to comply with the decisions of the ICJ,¹³ which in 2007 found mass atrocities committed in Srebrenica in July 1995 to constitute genocide and ordered Serbia to fully comply with its obligations stated in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and to cooperate with the ICTY.¹⁴ In 2016, the National Assembly of Serbia adopted amendments to the Criminal Code that made the denial of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide punishable. However, crimes established by judgments of the ICTY and the ICJ were excluded from this prohibition, thereby providing legal protection to those who actively deny, trivialize and minimize these crimes.¹⁵

Historical revisionism, particularly genocide denial, is reputationally and materially costly for the state of Serbia and society in Serbia. These practices damage Serbia's international reputation and image, portraying it as a country that does not respect international norms and standards and hinders the prospects for a long-lasting peace, potentially destabilizing the region. At the same time, this behavior undermines its relations with neighboring countries, which can negatively affect cooperation in other areas, such as the economy. Furthermore, revisionism and denial of crimes require the use of significant resources, which can be costly. Most recently, Serbia engaged in months-long diplomatic campaign against the adoption of the Resolution on the Genocide in Srebrenica at the United Nations General Assembly at a cost unknown to the public. According to research by the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (NUNS), pro-regime media outlets – which daily provide space for the denial of crimes and the glorification of war crimes – received contracts worth 108 million dinars (more than 900.000 euros) in 2023 through public procurement,¹⁶ which is yet another example of how much historical revisionism costs the citizens of Serbia.

12 'Materijalne reparacije u parničnim postupcima za naknadu štete – praksa sudova u Srbiji u periodu od 2021-2022. godine', Fond za humanitarno pravo, In the first case, it concerns the daughter of a person who was killed on the Ovčara farm, for which Veselin Šljivančanin was convicted, <https://www.hlc-rdc.org/publikacije/materijalne-reparacije-u-parnicnim-postupcima-za-naknadu-stete-praksa-sudova-u-srbiji-u-periodu-od-2021-2022-godine/>

13 Charter of the United Nations (1945) <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>

14 International Court of Justice (2007) Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro).

Judgements of 26 February 2007, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/91/091-20070226-JUD-01-00-EN.pdf>

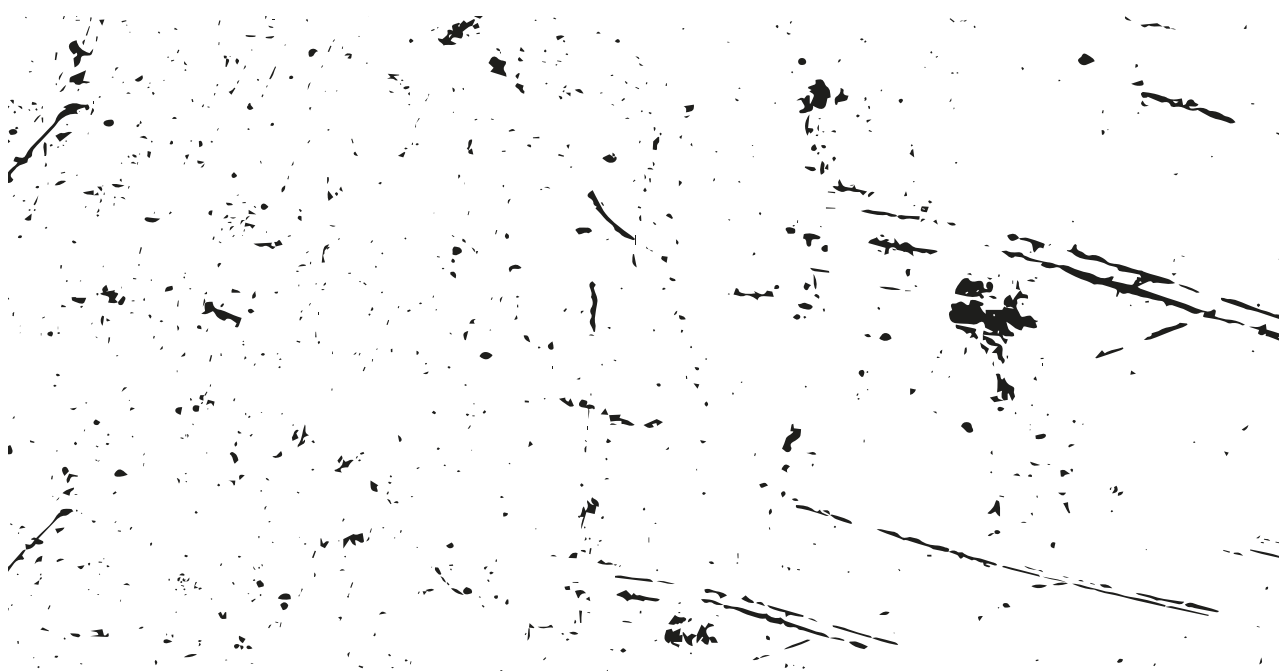
15 Krivični zakonik, član 387,

<https://www.mpravde.gov.rs/files/Zakonik%20o%20krivicnom%20postupku.pdf>

16 'Više od 100 miliona dinara javnog novca za medije koji krše Kodeks', NUNS, <https://nuns.rs/preko-100-miliona-dinara-javnog-novca-za-medije-koji-krse-kodeks/>

Crucially, we deem state-sponsored historical revisionism and genocide denial to be intrinsically linked with other forms of ongoing state-sponsored violence, including physical, gender-based, economic, and environmental. These widespread practices of denying crimes are an integral part of the behavior of the authorities and a culture of public speech prevalent among Serbia's ruling political elites, who promote and apply violence, suppress any form of critical thinking in all possible ways, and maintain close ties with various criminal groups. To illustrate with an example, in Pioneers Park in Belgrade city center – which was occupied by pro-government organized groups as a counterbalance to the mass protests in Serbia that began in November 2024 – convicted war criminals Vladimir Lazarević and Dragan Vasiljković were also present, along with former members of the Special Operations Unit (JSO), known, among other crimes, for having carried out the assassination of Serbia's Prime Minister, Zoran Đinđić.¹⁷ It is therefore evident that denial of atrocities and glorification of war criminals are intrinsically linked to deteriorating status of human rights in Serbia, including most notably freedom of the media and freedom of peaceful assembly.

The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the intensifying state-sponsored practices of revisionism and denial and explore how they developed and the factors that shaped them. Following a brief note on the methodology underpinning our research, we 1) provide an overview of the rise of historical revisionism and genocide denial in Serbia since 2004, highlighting when the practices intensified and how they changed to more aggressive forms of revisionism that shapes Serbia's domestic and foreign policies; 2) explain the key factors facilitating this trajectory 3) map the most prominent efforts by the civil society and international actors to combat these harmful practices and finally, 4) provide a list of recommendations to relevant stakeholders.



17 'Haški osuđenik Lazarević u Pionirskom parku: U toku dugo planirani napad na našu zemlju' (NI, 13 March 2025), <https://n1info.rs/vesti/haski-osudjenik-lazarevic-u-pionirskom-parku-u-toku-dugo-planirani-napad-na-nasu-zemlju/>

METHODOLOGY

To identify and examine the trajectory of state-sponsored historical revisionism in Serbia we conducted desk research and focus group discussions with civil society activists in Belgrade in April 2024. The purpose of the desk research was to gather information about state-sponsored practices which constitute historical revisionism since 2004, including both public statements by individual politicians, as well as events where convicted war criminals were promoted, and any relevant legal and policy developments. This information was collected through a review of official documents issued by respective government agencies, official statements and interviews given by political actors, as well as news reports (by setting, for instance, Google News alerts for certain keywords in Serbian and English). The focus group discussion included a total of five activists based in Belgrade who reflected on the past 20 years of state-sponsored revisionism in Serbia and their individual and collective responses – or a lack thereof – to these behaviors. These conversations, together with civil society organizations reports, informed our understanding of the past and ongoing activism which seeks to challenge Serbia's revisionism.

Bringing everything together, we adopted interpretative process tracing as the tool of analysis to reconstruct the key decisions and choices undertaken by political actors to produce the current state of highly aggressive historical revisionism present in the country. Our focus has been on meaning, attitudes and perceptions of actors involved in these processes – both those who perform revisionism and those trying to combat it – to gain an understanding of the trajectory of revisionism and its dynamics, such as low points, high points, change of character or intensification, and particularly the changing role of civil society in it as the most prominent group of actors who can hold revisionist governments accountable and create and promote counter narratives. We observe state-sponsored revisionism and denial through the prism of state-society relations and argue that intensification of revisionist practices has necessitated suppression of civil society's capacity to debate the past and engage the public in reflections about it, characteristic for developing authoritarian regimes. At the same time, we also took into consideration Serbia's foreign policy and its image and status in the international society when tracing the said dynamics of the trajectory of state-sponsored revisionism in Serbia.

THE TRAJECTORY OF SERBIA'S HISTORICAL REVISIONISM 2004-2024

After the fall of Slobodan Milošević in 2000, Serbia began a difficult process of cooperation with the ICTY, marked by numerous obstacles and delays. As early as 2002, a law was passed on Serbia's (then the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's) cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, but there was no political will to implement it. Serbia significantly lagged in fulfilling its obligations toward the ICTY, primarily in terms of arresting and extraditing indictees, which, among other things, hindered Serbia's European integration. In 2006, for example, the EU suspended negotiations with Serbia due to its failure to extradite Ratko Mladić, despite Serbia's promises to do so.¹⁸

In 2004, after the first Srebrenica genocide judgment in the Prosecutor vs. Krstić case at the ICTY, key critical voices in Serbia declared that the Srebrenica genocide became an 'established fact over which there could be no more debate'.¹⁹ In the same year, due to the efforts of the High Representative Paddy Ashdown, a fact-finding commission was set up in Republika Srpska to investigate the events in and around Srebrenica between 10 and 19 July 1995. It was stated in the report that the formation of the Commission and its work are a manifest to the 'maturity of Serbian people and Republika Srpska', facing oneself, history and others.²⁰ The initial hopeful sentiment was supported by further recognition and apology by the Republika Srpska Prime Minister Čavić, although without using the word 'genocide'.²¹ Opinion polls showed that the acceptance of Srebrenica as a crime peaked in 2005 and 2006.²² While leadership of Serbia did not publicly recognize Srebrenica as genocide, President Tadić advocated for criminal prosecutions of responsible individuals and showed dedication to commemorating Srebrenica.²³

In its decision in the 2007 Bosnia and Herzegovina vs. Serbia case, the ICJ found Serbia not responsible for committing genocide in Srebrenica in 1995. However, in the same judgement, Serbia was found responsible for not preventing the genocide it was aware of, as per its duties enshrined in the 1948 Genocide Convention. This judgement opened new space for manipulation of facts in Serbian newspapers as Serbia was celebrated as 'not guilty' and therefore not involved in the Srebrenica genocide. Different politicians gave public statements interpreting the ICJ's judgment as a declaration that Serbian people are not 'genocidal'.²⁴ In 2010, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia adopted Declaration on Srebrenica which condemned the atrocities committed in Srebrenica in 1995, gave its full support for war crimes trials at

18 'Istorijat odnosa Srbije i EU', *Ministarstvo za evropske integracije Republike Srbije*
<https://www.mei.gov.rs/srp/srbija-i-eu/istorijat-odnosa-srbije-i-eu/>

19 Nenad Lj. Stefanović, 'Genocid, napismeno' (Vreme, 21 April 2004). Available at
<https://www.vreme.com/vreme/genocid-napismeno/>

20 Republika Srpska Commission for Srebrenica (2004) Final Report and Addendum to the Report of the 11th June 2004 on the Events In and Around Srebrenica Between 10th and 19th July 1995 – 15th October 2004.

21 'Bosnian Serb President Expresses Regret For Massacre'. (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 23 June 2004). Available at <https://www.rferl.org/a/1053471.html>

22 Marko Milanović (2016) The Impact of the ICTY on the Former Yugoslavia: An Anticipatory Postmortem. *The American Journal of International Law* 110(2): 233–259.

23 Isidora Stakić, 'Srebrenica: 27 godina u javnom diskursu Srebrenice' (Peščanik, 11 July 2022). Available at <https://pescanik.net/srebrenica-27-godina-u-javnom-diskursu-srbije/>

24 Ibid.

the ICTY, and called for reconciliation in the region yet it fell short of calling the crimes 'genocide' as per the ICJ and ICTY judgements.²⁵

However, Serbia's approach to war crimes and convicted war criminals took on a new dimension with the Serbian Progressive Party's rise to power in 2012. Given that the founders of the Serbian Progressive Party were former high-ranking members of the Serbian Radical Party – an ultranationalist, right-wing, populist party known for its chauvinism and war-mongering in the 1990s – this new dimension was characterized by the same narrative that dominated Serbia during the 1990s: that Serbia fought defensive wars and that its officers and soldiers were unjustly convicted, along with denials of the legal classification of crimes, and sometimes even denials that the crimes occurred at all. This discourse is promoted by all levels of authority – mayors, members of parliament, ministers, judges and prosecutors, the president of the Republic – as well as by the media, university professors, and (opposition) political parties.

Year by year, these practices became more frequent, more obvious, and more problematic. One of the first serious red flags was the return of Vladimir Lazarević, former commander of the Priština Corps, who was convicted by the ICTY and sentenced to 15 years in prison for war crimes and crimes against humanity against the Albanian population in Kosovo. After qualifying for early release, he returned to Serbia, accompanied by the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Justice, aboard a government plane, and was welcomed by numerous high-ranking state and military officials. One of the ministers declared that it was a great honor to bring General Lazarević back to Serbia, while another stated that with this gesture, Serbia showed that it had not forgotten those who defended it.²⁶ Vladimir Lazarević has since made increasingly frequent appearances at various state events, ceremonies, and commemorations, often in the company of the highest state officials, who frequently refer to him as a hero.

This convicted war criminal is not the only one who has been glorified by government representatives and institutions and given a prominent place in the public sphere for years. For instance, Nebojša Pavković, former commander of the Third Army of the Yugoslav Army, convicted of crimes against humanity against the Albanian population during the war in Kosovo, gave a lecture via video link from prison in Finland at a public

25 'Declaration Of the National Assembly Of The Republic Of Serbia Condemning The Crime In Srebrenica, 20/2010-3', National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/eng/pdf/2010/deklaracija%20o%20srebrenici%20ENG.pdf>

26 'General Lazarević stigao iz Haga', Ministarstvo Odbrane Republike Srbije <https://www.mod.gov.rs/lat/9085/general-lazarevic-stigao-iz-haga-9085>

class held in an elementary school in Serbia in April 2023.²⁷ Vojislav Šešelj, convicted of crimes against humanity against Croats in Vojvodina, has been a regular participant in the Belgrade Book Fair for years – an event attended by tens and hundreds of thousands of people every year – where he promotes his revisionist books.²⁸ Many convicted war criminals also appear in the public sphere as military experts and analysts, commenting on events from the 1990s and armed conflicts in other countries on nationally broadcast television programs, often denying the crimes for which they were convicted in the process. Between 2020 and 2024, no fewer than twelve convicted war criminals were publicly glorified by various institutions in Serbia – Vladimir Lazarević, Nebojša Pavković, Nikola Šainović, Dragoljub Ojdanić, Ratko Mladić, Zdravko Tolimir, Radovan Karadžić, Vojislav Šešelj, Vinko Pandurević, Pero Petrašević, Veselin Šljivančanin, and Dragan Vasiljković.

In Serbia, the denial of numerous war crimes has become a normalized practice often performed as a ritual. For example, every January 15th, without exception, state representatives deny the war crime committed in Račak, Kosovo in 1999, when Serbian forces killed at least 45 Albanians, including a woman and a child. This crime is always presented in isolation from other events during the armed conflict in Kosovo, accompanied by a denial of the facts surrounding the crime and the status and number of victims. A notable example of such repeated denial is a statement made in 2021 by then-Minister of the Interior Aleksandar Vulin, who referred to the Račak crime as "a great lie and a terrible forgery", adding that "powerful countries are angry at Serbs who are not afraid to speak the truth".²⁹ Also, every March 24th, when the beginning of the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 is commemorated, government officials completely ignore the crimes committed by Serbian forces in Kosovo, while simultaneously exaggerating the number of victims of the bombing.

As a kind of culmination of the practice of denying crimes – and at the same time a paradigmatic example – prior to the adoption of the 2024 UN General Assembly Resolution on the Srebrenica Genocide, which proclaimed July 11th as the International Day of Reflection and Remembrance of the Genocide in Srebrenica and condemned all denial of the genocide and glorification of its perpetrators – the Serbian authorities organized an intense campaign aimed at preventing the Resolution's adoption.³⁰

27 Branimir Đurović and Marko Milosavljević, 'State of Denial – Serbia 2023: War Criminals' Lessons in Patriotism' (2024) <https://yih.rs/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Stanje-poricanja-ENG-2023.pdf>

28 Zoran Glavonjić, Dženana Halimović, 'Na Sajmu knjiga u Beogradu fotelja za Šešelja i tribina za Mladićeve branitelje' (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 26 October 2023)

<https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/sajam-knjiga-beograd-srbija-%C5%A1e%C5%A1elj-mladi%C4%87-republika-srpska-kritika-pisac/32655248.html>

29 'EU i SAD osudile Vulinove izjave o Račku' (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 10 December 2021) <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/vulin-racak-masakr-albanci/31602952.html>

30 Branimir Đurović and Marko Milosavljević, 'Stanje poricanja – Srbija 2024: Laganje o zločinima pod zastavom' (2025) <https://yih.rs/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/250522-YIHR-Stanje-poricanja-2024-BHS.pdf>

This campaign lasted for several months and even continued after the Resolution was adopted on 23 May 2024.

The campaign involved both Serbia's diplomatic efforts to convince other countries to vote against the Resolution, as well as negative rhetoric about the Resolution and denial that genocide occurred in Srebrenica. The dominant narrative presented throughout the campaign was that the Resolution's aim was to label Serbs as a "genocidal people",³¹ to abolish the Republic of Srpska, and to force Serbia to pay war reparations, despite the text of the draft resolution not explicitly mentioning 'Serbia' or 'Serbs' at all. Part of the narrative also involved recalling the suffering of Serbs during World War II and portraying the campaign against the Resolution as the struggle of a small freedom-loving country against powerful states. After the UN General Assembly vote, Aleksandar Vučić even declared victory, despite the Resolution being adopted, and later that year decorated permanent representatives of Russia, UAE, and Hungary to the UN because they voted against the Resolution.³²

The Army and Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Serbia also play a notable role in the practice of denying war crimes and glorifying war criminals, particularly through their publishing activities (such as releasing books, biographies, and testimonies of convicted war criminals like Vladimir Lazarević, Nebojša Pavković, and Dragoljub Ojdanić) and the production of documentary-dramatic films on the topic of armed conflicts during the 1990s, which deny facts about crimes established in court.³³ For example, in June 2024, the film "Heroic 549th Motorized Brigade", produced by the military-film center "Zastava film", was promoted in the University of Belgrade's building, celebrating the brigade in whose area of responsibility several thousand Albanian civilians were killed during the war in Kosovo.³⁴

Revisionism and denial are also present in the work of judicial institutions, which delay proceedings, inadequately prosecute crimes, reject regional cooperation, and issue minimal sentences. One of the most illustrative examples is the case of Novak Đukić, who was convicted in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2014 for the Tuzla Gate massacre – when a shell fired from positions of the Army of Republika Srpska killed 71 people on

31 In May 2025, an appeals court in Belgrade ruled against one pro-regime tabloid that the use of this expression constitutes hate speech, <https://yih.rs/bhs/drugostepenom-presudom-potvrdeno-da-je-portal-alo-povredio-zabranu-govora-mrznje/>. 6 June 2025

32 'Vučić dodelio odlikovanja u Njujorku: Ordenje dobili predstavnici UAE, Rusije i Mađarske pri UN (FOTO) (VIDEO)' (*Blic*, 27 Septembar 2024) <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/vucic-odlikovao-predstavnici-uae-rusije-i-madjarske/enpwkyl>

33 Jovana Kolarić, 'State of Denial – Serbia 2022: Time of Silent Pride' (2023) <https://yih.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Stanje-poricanja-ENG.pdf>

34 'Održana premijera filma Herojska 549. Motorizovana brigada' (*Politika*, 11 June 2024) <https://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/618609/odrzana-premijera-dokumentarnog-filma-herojska-549-motorizovana-brigada>

May 25, 1995 – and who then fled to Serbia, where he lives at large, while proceedings to recognize the Bosnian Court’s verdict in Serbia have been ongoing for ten years.

Moreover, history textbooks for primary and secondary schools are dominated by bias and selectivity. Many events from the wars of the 1990s are covered superficially, and references to the responsibility of Serbian forces for crimes are largely avoided. Serbia and the Serbian people are mostly portrayed as the sole or primary victims of the wars. These textbooks complement the narrative that the government has been promoting for years and serve to educate and raise younger generations as opponents of reconciliation, keeping them entrenched in a nationalist discourse.³⁵

Through these examples, it is evident that genocide denial and historical revisionism are deeply embedded in Serbia’s institutions and have spilled over into culture, arts, education, and even public health. In 2021, evidence emerged that a large number of printed copies of the publication “Srebrenica – the official lie of an era”³⁶ was found in the temporary COVID-19 hospital in Belgrade’s Štark Arena to be distributed to the Covid-infected patients. The state of genocide denial and revisionism in Serbia thus portrays a complex picture of all-encompassing revisionism that goes beyond outright negation of qualification or factual information about specific crimes to include a range of costly state-sponsored initiatives and campaigns that shape domestic and foreign policies of Serbia as a state and the everyday lives of its citizens.

WHY HAS SERBIA’S REVISIONISM INTENSIFIED?

To understand how and why Serbia’s revisionism intensified in recent years, we propose that it is crucial to consider the regime’s relationships with Serbia’s civil society as well as its perceptions about Serbia’s collective identity and position in the world.

First, we identify a shrinking ideational space to debate the past visible in the relationship between the state and civil society in Serbia, whereby many civil society activists do not seem to or feel like they have much impact on the government’s actions. This is characteristic of developing authoritarian regimes. In the civil society sector, there is a sense that the 2000s and early 2010s were a time when civil society could lead numerous memory, and justice-related initiatives with the intention to extend the space to learn, reflect and debate the crimes of the 1990s and that the work had at least some influence on both public opinion and the government. For instance, one activist said, ‘Between 2000 and 2010, NGOs had an important role in society, they were

35 ‘Ratovi devedesetih u udžbenicima istorije u Srbiji’, Inicijativa mladih za ljudska prava (2023) <https://yih.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Analiza-Ratovi-devedesetih-u-udzbencima-istorije-u-Srbiji.pdf>

36 Una Sabljaković, “Trovačka literature za obolele” (Vreme, 31 March 2021) <https://vreme.com/vreme/trovaacka-literatura-za-oblele/>

recognized and valued. They had influence and presence in the media, and their voice could be heard. Even when they [the government] did not agree with us, our voice could be heard, and then people could react to it'.³⁷

The decisive period during which Serbia's revisionist practice began to change in character and intensified can be traced back to 2015 and 2016. As previously mentioned, in 2015, convicted war criminal Vladimir Lazarević was brought back to Serbia on a government plane after serving two-thirds of his sentence issued by the ICTY, and soon after Serbia's Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Internal Affairs began to sponsor a significant number of convicted war criminals' books and public performances at different fora. This included public tribunes and book promotion events such as the annual Belgrade Book Fair, which is visited by thousands of schoolchildren from all over the country.

When civil society actors started identifying the emerging patterns and reacting to them, they faced harsh and often physical resistance, demonstrating a sharp decline in the availability of a space to debate the past in Serbian society. For instance, at a protest against a public lecture of Veselin Šljivančanin, who the ICTY found guilty on one count of aiding and abetting torture, in Beška, activists of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) Serbia were physically attacked and later prosecuted and sentenced for violating public order.³⁸ During the summer of 2021, a mural of Ratko Mladić appeared on a building in the center of Belgrade. As the authorities refused to remove it, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights invited citizens to join them in the action of removing the mural, but the Ministry of Interior banned that gathering.³⁹ In 2024, the cultural festival "Mirëdita, dobar dan", which had been organized by YIHR, NGO Integra and Civic Initiative since 2014 with the view bringing together artists, human rights and peace activists, and opinion makers from Kosovo and Serbia, was banned by the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs for "safety concerns". This closure of ideational space to debate and influence the public was reflected in conversations with civil society activists in Belgrade, who stated that they felt 'entirely marginalized' and 'experiencing serious targeting of activists, serious threats to their security'. Such marginalization of the civil society sector and shrinking of ideational space to debate, go hand in hand with deterioration of other basic human rights in Serbia, such as freedom of the media, freedom of expression, and freedom of peaceful assembly.⁴¹

37 Focus group, Belgrade, Serbia, 2 April 2024.

38 'Support activists fined for protesting against convicted war criminal', Youth Initiative for Human Rights <https://yih.rs/en/support-activists-fined-for-protesting-against-a-convicted-war-criminal/>

39 "Vulin potvrdio zabranu prekrećavanja murala Ratku Mladiću u Beogradu" (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 5 November 2021) <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/vulin-srbija-mural-ratko-mladic/31548113.html>

40 Focus group, Belgrade, Serbia, 2 April 2024.

41 'Serbia/Kosovo - Events of 2024', Human Rights Watch <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/serbia/kosovo#:~:text=Refugees%2C%20Asylum%20Seekers%2C%20and%20Migrants,-The%20asylum%20system&text=Between%20January%20and%20August%2C%20Serbia,asylum%20applications%20to%20be%20lodged.>

Second, Serbia has for a long time aspired to secure a collective self-identity of a victimized people in international society. Scholars have proposed that Serbia's self-identity is fundamentally one of victimized people, whereby Serbia has traditionally had to defend itself from great foreign powers⁴² while Serbian people have also been the victim of its neighbors. In this narrative template, the wars of the 1990s are popularly justified as an attempt to 'avenge' some of the historical losses and achieve historical justice.⁴³ Despite violent campaign of the Serbian government in Kosovo, the victimhood myth persisted and was buttressed by the NATO bombing of Serbia and Kosovo in 1999, which was not authorized by the United Nations Security Council, and therefore could more easily be presented by the political elites as illegal, illegitimate, and ultimately unjust. Adding to that, another crucial element for Serbia's sense of its place in the world has been Kosovo, due to which Serbia's foreign policy in the 21st century has often been described as a balancing act between joining the European Union without losing its attachment to Kosovo.⁴⁴

What has changed in more recent years, however, is that political actors are less amenable to influences and pressures from both home and abroad on the collective identity and, as such, are reluctant to change their position towards the wars of the 1990s in any way to meet international consensus, particularly on Srebrenica. As previously mentioned, such international consensus stems primarily from the judgments of the ICTY, as an ad hoc tribunal established by the United Nations Security Council, as well as by the ICJ. In response to these key judgements, parliaments of numerous states have adopted their own national resolutions and declarations on Srebrenica, recognizing it as a genocide.⁴⁵

While Serbia's self-identity might have been more amenable to external pressures in the early years of democracy, key events such as the loss of Kosovo and high-profile ICTY acquittals of individuals such as Naser Orić, Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markač, were abused by Serbia's political elites as perceived evidence of Serbia's status as an "eternal victim". Related to this is also the fact that some of these acquittals were presented as evidence of collective innocence of entire ethnic groups who seemingly engaged in the wars of 1990s without any crimes; for instance, upon return to Croatia, Markač himself stated 'We have our Croatian homeland, and we freed it without any

42 Jelena Subotić (2016) Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change. *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12(4):610–627, p. 617.

43 Ibid, p. 619.

44 Filip Ejodus (2020) Crisis and Ontological Insecurity. Serbia's Anxiety over Kosovo's Secession. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan; Marko Kovačević (2019) Understanding the marginality constellations of small states: Serbia, Croatia, and the crisis of EU–Russia relations. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 27:4, 409–423.

45 'Srebrenica Genocide: Three resolutions of European Parliament in 10 years?', European Western Balkans <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2015/06/15/srebrenica-genocide-three-resolutions-of-european-parliament-in-10-years/>

stains'.⁴⁶ The Serbian government reacted to the acquittals of Gotovina and Markač by minimizing its cooperation with the ICTY to a 'technical level'.⁴⁷ Adding to this is the crucial signing of the Brussels Agreement in 2013 and the subsequent process of normalization of relations with Kosovo which Serbia's political elites often rationalized as yet another act of injustice caused by the meddling of great powers into Serbia's affairs.⁴⁸ These events provided Serbia's political leadership with additional basis to insist on a continuous historical narrative of Serbian people as eternal victims in the hands of great powers, and with reasoning for more aggressive revisionism and denial as the means to achieve that goal.

It is also important to point out that the government skillfully uses these topics, seeking to exploit the post-war trauma, which was also recognized by Dunja Mijatović, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, claiming that it had become a strategy for staying in power.⁴⁹ The Commissioner came to this conclusion after reviewing a report by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights on the participation of convicted war criminals in the election campaign, which shows that dominant nationalist narratives, denial of judicially established facts and rhetoric that reinforces divisions in the region represent a series of populist methods for obtaining as many votes as possible in elections.⁵⁰

As a result, the hegemonic revisionist version of the past that the regime has put forward has gained significant dominance among the Serbian public. In 2009, according to an opinion poll, 54% of those who had heard about the killings of Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica believed it was a genocide, while 31% denied it.⁵¹ In 2017, according to a different poll, only 12% of the surveyed citizens recognized the Srebrenica massacre as a genocide, while 40% argued they did not know whether or not it was a

46 Enis Zebić, 'Oslobođeni generali se vratili kući, slavlje širom Hrvatske' (*Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 16 November 2012) Available at <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/oslobodjeni-general-se-vratili-kuci-slavlje-sirom-hrvatske/24772701.html>

47 "Vlada Srbije svela saradnju sa Hagom na tehnički nivo" (*Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 16 November 2012). Available at: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/24773258.html>

48 Faris Kočan (2019) *Collective Memory and an Interpretative Approach: The Struggle over Kosovo's Independence as an Ideational Background for Contemporary Serbia's Foreign Policy Choices*. *Croatian Political Science Review* 56(3-4): 200-217.

49 'Izveštaj Saveta Evrope: Negiranje ratnih zločina u bivšoj Jugoslaviji strategija političara za ostanak na vlasti', Humanitarian Law Centre <https://www.hlc-rdc.org/informisanje/aktuelno-o-tranzicionoj-pravdi/izvestaj-saveta-evrope-negiranje-ratnih-zlocina-u-bivsoj-jugoslaviji-strategija-politicara-za-ostanak-na-vlast/>

50 'Odnos prema ratnim zločincima u izbornoj kampanji 2022. godine', Youth Initiative for Human Rights <https://yihl.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Odnos-prema-ratnim-zlocinima-u-izornoj-kampanji-2022-1.pdf>

51 'Stavovi prema ratnim zločinima i Haškom tribunalu', Belgrade Center for Human Rights <https://bgcentar.rs/bgcentar/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Javno-mnenje-u-Srbiji-i-stavovi-prema-Me%C4%91unarodnom-krivi%C4%8Dnom-tribunalu-za-biv%C5%A1u-Jugoslaviju-u-Hagu-ICTY-2009-detajne-tabele.pdf>

genocide.⁵² In 2023, only 42.4% of surveyed young people in Serbia heard about the massacre of Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica.⁵³ Among those, only 38% recognized Srebrenica as a genocide, while 28% denied it. At the same time, in 2021, 50% of surveyed citizens thought that Serbia 'lost' Kosovo because it is the victim of great powers.⁵⁴

WHAT CAN BE DONE? REACTIONS AND ACTIVISM AGAINST REVISIONISM AND DENIAL

Year after year, the European Commission points out these problems in its report on Serbia's progress. Thus, in the report for 2021,⁵⁵ the European Commission warned that Serbia continued to publicly challenge the judgments of the Hague Tribunal, drawing attention to the need for Serbia to fully cooperate with the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) and to accept and implement its decisions and judgments. Also, the need for Serbia to show its commitment to prosecuting war crimes was highlighted. The report for 2022⁵⁶ stated that numerous political parties and politicians, including ministers, continued to support convicted war criminals who spread hate speech in public space, as well as that some politicians, without consequences, denied the genocide in Srebrenica.⁵⁷ For 2023, it was warned that the pace at which Serbia prosecutes war crimes has significantly slowed down and worsened,⁵⁸ while the report for 2024 drew attention to the fact that Serbia continued to avoid indicting high-ranking suspects. However, there is very little insistence of reviving a more holistic approach to transitional justice, particularly those non-judicial transitional justice processes which were never materialized, both in Serbia and the former Yugoslav region overall, such as truth or fact-finding commissions, and devising and adopting a comprehensive transitional justice strategy.

52 Srećko Mihailović (2017) *Obaveštenost građana Srbije o ratovima '90-ih godina, ratnim zločinima i suđenjima optuženima za ratne zločine*. Belgrade: Demostat.

53 Rodoljub Jovanović (2023) *Stavovi mladih u Srbiji o ratovima devedesetih*. Belgrade: Inicijativa mladih za ljudska prava https://yih.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/231110-YIHR-Istrazivacki-izvestaj_Stavovi-mladih-u-Srbiji-o-ratovima-devedesetih_web-verzija.pdf

54 CDDRI (2021) *Stavovi građana Srbije o Kosovu* <https://cddri.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CDDRI-RESEARCH-KOSOVO-2021-FINAL02.pdf>

55 'Serbia 2021 report', European Commission <https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-10/Serbia-Report-2021.pdf>

56 'Serbia 2022 report', European Commission <https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Serbia%20Report%202022.pdf>

57 'Serbia 2022 report', European Commission <https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Serbia%20Report%202022.pdf>

58 'Serbia 2024 report', European Commission https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/3c8c2d7f-bff7-44eb-b868-414730cc5902_en?filename=Serbia%20Report%202024.pdf

The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Dunja Mijatović, recognized the revisionist and denialist practices as problematic in her report resulting from her visit to Serbia in March 2023, and called on Serbia to oppose the widespread denial and relativization of war crimes and genocide and the glorification of war criminals, as well as to stop giving public space to war criminals and war crimes suspects. The Commissioner drew attention to the role of pro-government media that shape public discourse, promoting the nationalist narrative. On the other hand, the Commissioner recognized the key role of civil society organizations in dealing with the past. Therefore, she called on the authorities in Serbia to support and cooperate with these organizations, as well as to develop and support initiatives that honor the victims, allowing the voice of the victims to be heard, so that the victims, and not the war criminals, would play a key role in building memory.⁵⁹

Due to interference with the work of the court, the IRMCT often reports Serbia to the UN Security Council. Thus, in June 2024, the president of the IRMCT, Graciela Gati Santana, said that Serbia's refusal to cooperate in the case concerning Vjerica Radeta and Petar Jojić represented an obstacle for the IRMCT to perform its function and hindered its ability to try the accused. In 2012, Vjerica Radeta and Petar Jojić were charged with contempt of court for contacting witnesses, forcing them to change their statements and give false answers.⁶⁰ The IRMCT issued a warrant for their arrest, but Serbia has refused to extradite them ever since.

At the end of 2022, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparations and Guarantees of Non-Recurrence, Fabian Salvioli, was in Serbia and on that occasion, among other things, he stated that he was shocked by the number of murals and graffiti dedicated to war criminals that the government refuses to remove.

Various civil society organizations in Serbia are actively working on fact-finding and making the truth about the wars of the 1990s known and available to the wider public.⁶¹ For more than 20 years, the Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) has been documenting

59 Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Dunja Mijatović, 'Report following her visit to Serbia from 13 to 17 March 2023' <https://rm.coe.int/report-on-serbia-by-dunja-mijatovic-commissioner-for-human-rights-of-t/1680ac88cc>

60 'Predsednica suda u Hagu prijavila Srbiju Savetu bezbednosti UN zbog neizručenja Jojića i Radete' (NI, 11 June 2024) <https://n1info.rs/vesti/predsednica-suda-u-hagu-prijavila-srbiju-savetu-bezbednosti-un-zbog-neizrucenja-jojica-i-radete/>

61 Special Rapporteur on the Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-Recurrence, Fabian Salvioli, 'Preliminary Observations from the Official Visit to Serbia and Kosovo' (22 November to 2 December 2022)' <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/truth/statements/2022-12-02/2021202-eom-statement-serbia-kosovo-sr-truth.pdf>

war crimes and human rights violations committed in the context of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, and its archive consists of tens of thousands of documents, audio-visual records and photographs, including recordings and evidence from trials at the ICTY and the IRMCT. Also, the HLC organizes educational programs, spreading knowledge about the recent past and strategies for addressing its legacy.

The Women in Black organization has been organizing various anti-war performances and protests for more than 30 years and calling for accountability for the crimes committed. One of a series of such actions was a performance in November 2018 on the occasion of the anniversary of the siege of Vukovar and the crimes committed there by the Yugoslav People's Army and Serbian paramilitary forces. Furthermore, many civil society organizations in Serbia organize joint activities to promote the truth and facts about the crimes committed. For example, a couple of years ago, on July 11, several organizations organized the lighting of candles near the Serbian Presidency building in memory of the victims of the genocide in Srebrenica.⁶²

For more than two decades, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights has been insisting on accepting the facts of crimes and responsibility for them. In more recent years, and as a result of the intensified and widespread denial and revisionism, YIHR adopted new and creative methods. Since 2022, as a reaction to the increasing revisionism in Serbia, YIHR has been publishing an annual report "State of Denial", which maps and monitors the denial of war crimes by Serbian officials and warns against increasingly frequent revisionist practices in Serbia. In response to the Ministry of Interior de facto protection of the Ratko Mladić mural, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, together with the citizens, mapped more than 300 murals and graffiti that glorify Ratko Mladić and submitted an application to the municipal services for their removal.⁶³ These practices involve the public in activism against revisionism and denial and as such highlight that such activism is not only in the interest of all but is also a responsibility of all due to the extremely harmful ramifications revisionism carries on the long-term future of peace and stability.

However, due to their activities and actions, civil society actors are often characterized in the media and by government representatives as traitors, foreign agents, haters of their own people, anti-Serbs, etc. For example, in a television appearance in 2024, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić accused the YIHR of wanting Serbs to hate their

62 "U Beogradu paljenje sveća za žrtve genocida u Srebrenici" (*Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 11 July 2023) <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srebrenica-godisnjica-svece/32499142.html>

63 "Inicijativa podnela prijave za uklanjanje više od 300 murala i grafita posvećenih Ratku Mladiću", YIHR <https://yih.rs/bhs/inicijativa-podnela-prijave-za-uklanjanje-vise-od-300-murala-i-grafita-posvecenih-ratku-mladicu/>

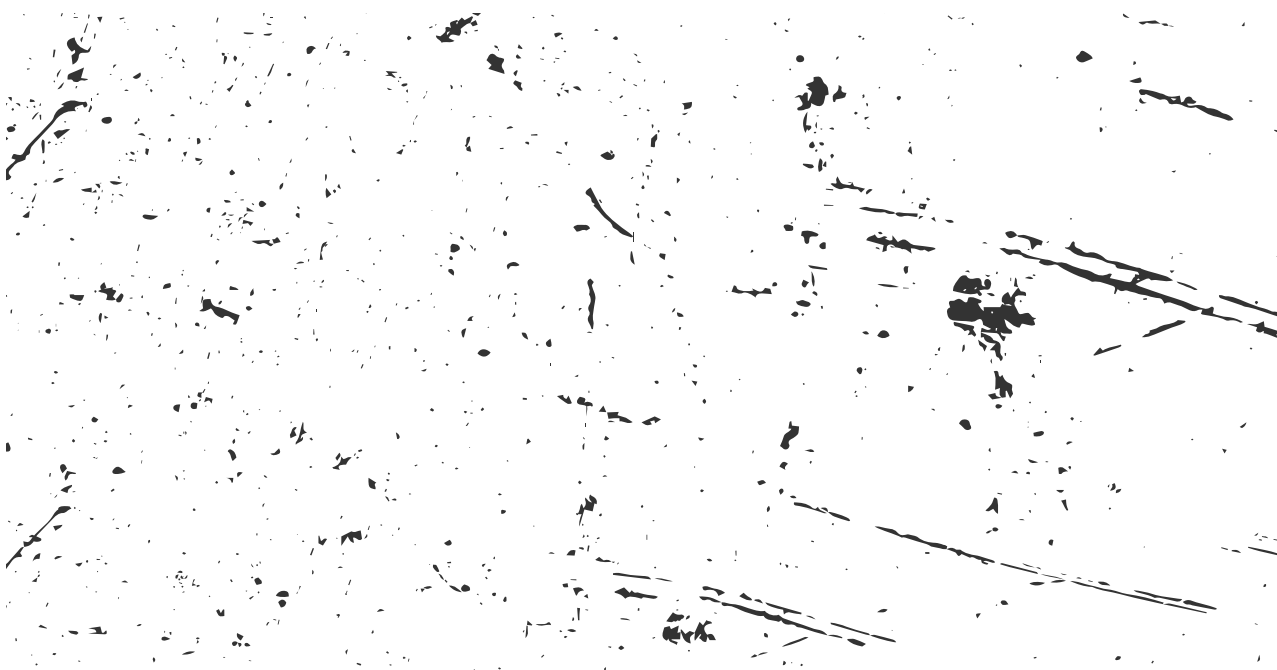
own country.⁶⁴ One pro-regime tabloid commented on this television appearance, claiming that YIHR works against the interests of Serbia, and that it hates everything connected to Serbs and Serbia.

Such narratives reach many citizens who accept them unreservedly, which turns citizens against these organizations, and which represents another in a series of obstacles for their work in a country that year by year sinks more and more into authoritarianism.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Revisionism, denial of genocide and other atrocities, and glorification of war criminals have become everyday in Serbia. Although these practices were present in the period before 2012, since the change of government and the establishment of the regime of the Serbian Progressive Party, these practices are becoming more frequent every year. We note a rapid increase in the volume and a shift to more aggressive and costly forms of revisionism after 2015, which are visible through the shrinking space to debate the past and deteriorating relations between the state and civil society, and were exacerbated by significant perceived 'losses' Serbia has suffered internationally both in relation to Kosovo and judicial cases concerning Serbian victims which resulted in acquittals of those accused.

To effectively suppress such practices and prevent them from becoming even more aggressive and resulting in more damage to the security and wellbeing of Serbian society, cooperation of various actors is necessary: institutions, civil society organizations, the media, and the educational system. Given that the problem is multi-layered and multi-dimensional, it requires multiple directions of action.



64 Andrija Vasić, 'Hoće da mrzimo svoju zemlju: Vučić upro prstom u one koji priznaju Kosovo u srcu Beograda, staju na stranu Albanaca, a namerno ćute o teror nad Srbima' (Alo, 27 August 2024) <https://www.alo.rs/vesti/politika/947874/vucic-o-zabrani-ulaska-vulina-u-hrvatsku/vest>

Recommendations for the state institutions:

- Serbia should respect the legal qualification of the crimes committed in Srebrenica as genocide, as per the judgements of international courts, and accept and implement the UN General Assembly Resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica and begin commemorating July 11 in an adequate manner, with full respect for the victims and their families.
- In accordance with the UN GA Resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica, Serbia needs to adjust its educational programs in order to act preventively to reduce the denial of war crimes, especially the genocide in Srebrenica, and historical revisionism.
- Serbia needs to amend the Criminal Code in order to make the denial of all crimes established in the judgments of the ICTY and the ICJ and glorification of convicted war criminals a criminal offense.
- Institutions should respect freedom of speech and freedom of assembly and provide a safe and stimulating environment in which civil society organizations can fulfill their function and role and spread knowledge and awareness about the events of the 90s, based on judicially determined facts.

Recommendations for international stakeholders:

- European Commission should recognize historical revisionism and genocide denial in Serbia as intrinsic strategies for spreading violence and intimidation towards Serbian citizens and key obstacles to long-term stability in the region. It should insist that Serbia adopts a comprehensive transitional justice strategy and reinvigorate an interest in non-judicial fact-finding processes, which have had the least success of all transitional justice processes in the former Yugoslavia.
- International donors and funding bodies should reinvigorate their interest in transitional justice matters in Serbia and seek to support civil society projects and initiatives that engage the wider public in conversations about the past and equip citizens with tools to recognize and combat widespread denial and revisionism as forms of state-sponsored violence.

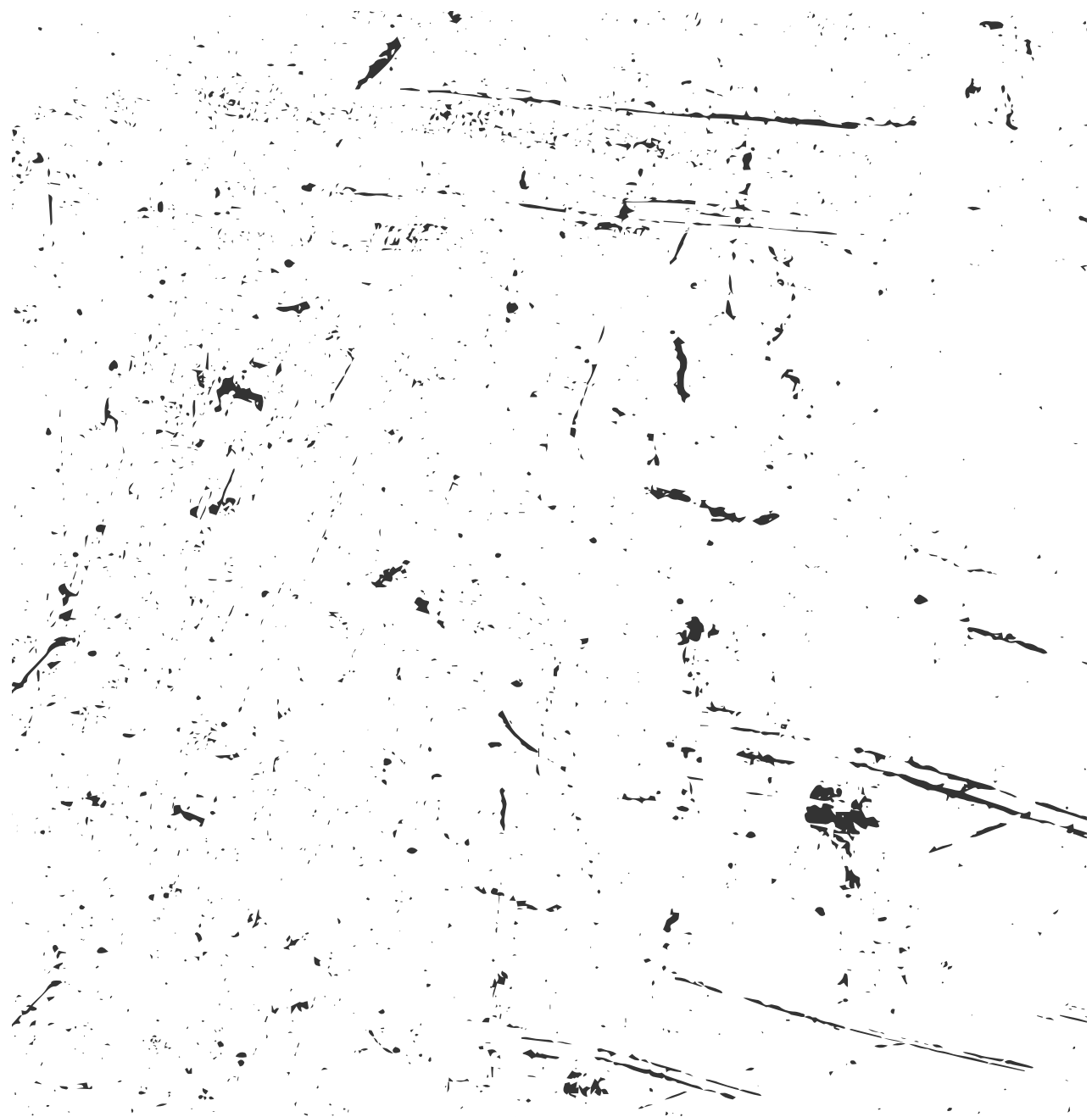
Recommendations for civil society organizations:

- Civil society organizations in Serbia and across former Yugoslav republics should connect horizontally as a way to sustain challenges to the state along the vertical axis; exchange experiences of dealing with state-sponsored revisionism as an

element of growing authoritarianism and develop a toolkit for identifying and combating warning signs of such behaviors across the region.

—Considering the currently hostile climate in which they operate, civil society organizations working on memory, justice, truth and reconciliation should consider new and creative methods of engaging with the public and stressing the interconnectedness between the government's attitude towards the past and its present-day actions in collective action against denial and revisionism.

—Civil society organizations should promote non-formal education programs for young people and history teachers and professors that focus on the facts about armed conflicts from the 1990s, creating space for improving the knowledge about war crimes.



TIMELINE OF SOME KEY EXAMPLES OF REVISIONISM AND DENIAL IN SERBIA AFTER THE SERBIAN PROGRESSIVE PARTY CAME TO POWER IN 2012

2012

TOMISLAV NIKOLIĆ BECAME PRESIDENT OF SERBIA

Nikolić is one of the founders of the Serbian Radical Party – an ultra-nationalist, right-wing, warmongering, populist party, which played a notable role in the wars of the 90s – of which he was the vice-president and deputy president of Vojislav Šešelj, convicted at the ICTY for crimes against humanity against Croats in Vojvodina. Nikolić left SRS in 2008, when he founded the Serbian Progressive Party. Nikolić made controversial statements, such as the one that genocide did not take place in Srebrenica, and on one occasion, in his capacity as President of Serbia, he met with Momčilo Krajišnik, a convicted war criminal.

2015

MINISTER IVICA DAČIĆ SPOKE POSITIVELY ABOUT NIKOLA ŠAINOVIĆ

After the return of convicted war criminal Nikola Šainović from prison in The Hague, Ivica Dačić, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, said "Nikola, you persevered! You treated Serbia and your party honorably and held your own heroically in The Hague. The SPS believes that you are not to blame".

2015

HIGH STATE OFFICIALS WELCOMED VLADIMIR LAZAREVIĆ

Lazarević landed on the plane of the Government of Serbia at Niš airport, where he was welcomed by high state officials, representatives of the army and the church.

2016

AMENDMENTS TO THE CRIMINAL CODE

Denial of war crimes, crimes against humanity has become punishable, but denial of crimes established by judgments of the ICTY and the ICJ is excluded from this ban.

2017

MEETING OF PRESIDENT TOMISLAV NIKOLIĆ WITH MOMČILO KRAJIŠNIK

On the same day, Aleksandar Vučić, Prime Minister, declared that "Serbia does not protect criminals, so neither should others".

2017

ALEKSANDAR VUČIĆ BECAME PRESIDENT OF SERBIA

Aleksandar Vučić was the General Secretary of the Serbian Radical Party. As a member of the SRS, he was known for glorifying Ratko Mladić. Vučić's statement in the National Assembly in July 1995 is well known: "Kill one Serb, we will kill a hundred Muslims".

2018

ANA BRNABIĆ, PM, DENIED GENOCIDE IN SREBRENICA

In an interview for Deutsche Welle, PM Ana Brnabić emphasized that "it was a terrible, terrible crime" but she disputed that the term genocide applied to Srebrenica. "Genocide is when you are...killing the entire population, the women, children and this was not that case". She added that "it was not done in the name of the Serbian people and Serbia cannot, Serbs cannot collectively be blamed for what happened. I do not think it was a genocide".

2021

THE MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS BANNED THE GATHERING FOR THE REMOVAL OF MLADIĆ'S MURAL

On that occasion, Minister Aleksandar Vulin stated: "Inviting non-governmental organizations from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Women in Black and something that is announced as 'Kosovo', and coming to Belgrade to whitewash facades is hypocritical, vile and driven by evil intent."

2021

MINISTER OF INTERIOR ALEKSANDAR VULIN DENIED THE CRIME IN RAČAK

"The big ones are angry at the Serbs who are not afraid to tell the truth, and especially the truth that shows how small they were in front of my people. We shot films about Košare, Paštrik, Račak, so that the anger of the big powers and the cowardice of 'random' Serbs would not kill the truth."

2022

POLICE OFFICERS FROM PRIBOJ GLORIFIED THE GENOCIDE IN SREBRENICA

The case refers to a video that was broadcast by the media in early 2022 from a private celebration of members of the Serbian police in Priboj, where a chauvinist song was sung glorifying the genocide in Srebrenica.

2023

RESIDENT VUČIĆ PRAISED VLADIMIR LAZAREVIĆ IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

In his address to the MPs, Vučić said: "Do you know who they arrested, the great enemy of the Serbian state? They packed him in a sack and sent him to The Hague. General Vladimir Lazarević, a Serbian hero from Kosovo and Metohija (...) General Lazarević, a great hero."

2023

CONVICTED WAR CRIMINALS SUPPORTED THE LIST OF THE RULING COALITION

Convicted war criminals (Vojislav Šešelj, Veselin Šljivančanin, Vladimir Lazarević, Nikola Šainović) supported the list of the ruling coalition of the Serbian Progressive Party and the Socialist Party of Serbia.

2024

CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE ADOPTION OF THE UNGA RESOLUTION ON THE SREBRENICA

The months-long campaign against the adoption of the Resolution on the Genocide in Srebrenica was led by the highest state officials, led by the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić. The campaign was marked by the explicit denial that genocide was committed in Srebrenica, drawing attention to the Serbian victims of the Second World War and insisting that Serbia is a small libertarian country leading the fight against the great powers.