

STATE OF DENIAL

SERBIA 2023
WAR CRIMINALS' LESSONS IN PATRIOTISM



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Abbreviations

BIA – Security Intelligence Agency of the Republic of Serbia

BiH – Bosnia and Herzegovina

DSS – Democratic Party of Serbia

EU – European Union

FRY – Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

HLC – Humanitarian law Center

ICTY – International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia

IRMCT – International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals

JNA – Yugoslav People's Army

KLA – Kosovo Liberation Army

MP - Member of Parliament

Mol – Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia

NATO – The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OSA – youth organisation *Omladinsko studentska akcija*

OWCP – Office of the War Crimes Prosecutor

MP – Member of Parliament

REM – Regulatory Body for Digital Media

RTS – Radio Television of Serbia

SAJ – Special Anti-Terrorist Unit of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia

SFRY – Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

SNS – Serbian Progressive Party

SPS – Socialist Party of Serbia

SRS – Serbian Radical Party

YA – Yugoslav Army

YIHR – Youth Initiative for Human Rights

Introduction

Since it was established in 2003, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) has consistently advocated for a society founded on truth, justice, responsibility, freedom, democracy, and peace. According to YIHR activists, dealing with the past, acknowledging the facts surrounding crimes committed during the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, and accepting responsibility for them are essential steps towards building such a society.

YIHR closely monitors and reports on institutional and extra-institutional denial and relativisation of war crimes and other human rights violations in the context of the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. It also tracks the glorification of individuals convicted of war crimes and their instrumentalization in the public discourse of Serbia. In December 2023, YIHR published *State of Denial: Serbia 2022 – Time of Silent Pride*, a report analysing the culture of denial that has taken root in Serbia since the return to power of political parties gathered around the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) in 2012. The resurgence of narratives based on outright lies about the crimes of the 1990s, the use of euphemisms and half-truths, and the relativisation of responsibility for these crimes stem from a renewed policy towards the past, which is best encapsulated in the statement by the then Defence Minister Aleksandar Vulin, who declared the end to the “time of shame” and the beginning of the time of “silent pride”.¹

In a letter to the Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić dated 15 January 2024, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović presented the main findings of the Council of Europe’s report *Dealing with the Past for a Better Future: Achieving Justice, Peace and Social Cohesion in the Region of the Former Yugoslavia*, published in November 2023. The letter condemned, inter alia, the practice of denial of war crimes and the glorification of war criminals, calling on Serbian authorities to remove murals and graffiti celebrating them. The Government of Serbia was urged to establish clear procedures for the rehabilitation of convicted war criminals and to prohibit them from running for public office, as was the case with Vojislav Šešelj, who served as a Member of Parliament (MP) from 2016 to 2020.²

The report *State of Denial: Serbia 2023* continues to examine institutional denial of the war crimes of the 1990s through several key areas. It analyses certain judicial decisions which entrench denial and impunity, provides an overview of statements and actions by executive authorities with regard to commemorative activities, and highlights the media and political exploitation of war criminals. Additionally, it reviews the activities of specific ministries, the participation of convicted war criminals in the 2023 elections, and their presence in the public sphere through murals and graffiti.

Given the rise in denial practices, as well as the increasing instances in which the glorification of war crimes has been tolerated and even rewarded, the mechanisms of denial produced by the Serbian government institutions have taken on a triumphalist tone regarding these crimes.³

1 Youth Initiative for Human Rights, *State of Denial: Serbia 2022 – Time of Silent Pride*, YIHR (Belgrade: YIHR, December 2023). <https://yihr.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Stanje-poricanja-ENG.pdf>.

2 “Komesarka Saveta Evrope za ljudska prava poziva vlasti u Srbiji da uklone murale ratnih zločinaca”, YIHR, 23 February 2024. <https://yihr.rs/bhs/komesarka-saveta-evrope-za-ljudska-prava-poziva-vlasti-u-srbiji-da-uklone-murale-ratnih-zlocinaca/>

3 Hariz Halilovich, “25 Years After Srebrenica “Local” Genocide in a Global Context” in: *Bosnian Genocide Denial and Triumphalism: Origins, Impact and Prevention*, ed. S. Turcalo and H. Karcic (Sarajevo: Faculty of Political Sciences, 2021), pp. 115-125.

When it comes to individual war crimes, the most commonly relativised and denied events are the Račak massacre and the Srebrenica genocide. In both cases, the number and status of victims are downplayed,⁴ they are dehumanised, and their suffering is denied, while individuals suspected, charged, or convicted of these grave human rights violations frequently appear in the public sphere to comment on social and political issues. Particularly concerning in 2023 was the frequent presence of war criminals in educational and public institutions, where they gave so-called “lessons in patriotism” to children and young people.⁵ This is why this year’s edition of the report on denial in Serbia is titled War Criminals’ Lessons in Patriotism.

Methodological Framework

This is YIHR’s second report on the denial of war crimes and other human rights violations related to the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. The report is methodologically based on the content analysis of statements made by political officials and other individuals, official institutional statements, and media content.

Denial can be classified based on its source and proponent, distinguishing between institutional and extra-institutional denial. Institutional denial in Serbia is rooted in the state’s remembrance policy, which is marked by historical revisionism, the relativisation of crimes, and the denial of accountability.

Extra-institutional denial is particularly prevalent in the media, with proponents including not only media outlets, but also influential members of society such as university professors and retired military officers. Additionally, pseudo-scientists and self-proclaimed experts, as well as various right-wing and/or extremist groups, contribute to the spread of extra-institutional denial.

Convicted war criminals and individuals suspected of war crimes are also among the key proponents of extra-institutional denial. However, this form of denial does not exist in a social vacuum. It is actively supported by Serbian institutions, in particular through the political construction of reality. In this narrative, the relativisation and denial of the crimes are embedded in the state’s official discourse on the armed conflicts of the 1990s. Denial is not only tolerated and endorsed, but it is sometimes even financially supported.

This report identifies three denial strategies that are used in public discourse: literal denial, interpretative denial, and implicatory denial.

- Literal denial involves outright claims that something did not happen or that certain facts are untrue. This strategy is rarely employed in Serbia due to the substantial body of evidence and the well-established judicial findings of both the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and national courts.
- Interpretative denial acknowledges that an event took place but disputes its full extent – particularly its legal characterisation, which

⁴ The number and status of victims are often downplayed, particularly concerning their classification as military or civilian. In both the Račak massacre and the Srebrenica genocide, civilian victims are denied, with many being partially or entirely portrayed as members of armed forces.

⁵ “General Lazarević održao čas patriotizma ‘Da se ne zaboravi’”, Belle Amie TV, 24 November 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUX20-EA4z4>

is often dismissed as incorrect, overly severe, or unjust. This is the primary strategy used by Serbian government officials, especially in relation to war crimes confirmed by ICTY judgments. As a rule, it is most commonly applied to deny the Srebrenica genocide, rejecting the legal interpretation of the facts of the crimes, challenging the credibility of those who established the facts, and downplaying both the crime's significance and the responsibility of those involved, even while ostensibly acknowledging the harm.

- Implicatory denial serves to deflect moral or psychological responsibility. It recognises that a certain war crime occurred, but introduces reservations, often by attributing it to actors unaffiliated with the side employing this strategy. This form of denial frequently shifts responsibility onto the victims, using historical context as a justification for the crime.⁶

These strategies are often intertwined and employed simultaneously. When confronted with irrefutable evidence, literal denial does not disappear, but rather transforms into legalistic reinterpretation or political justification

Some of the most prominent examples of both institutional and extra-institutional denial of war crimes are presented at the end of this report.

Actions of Judicial Institutions: In the Service of Impunity and Denial

In several cases during 2023, the Office of the War Crimes Prosecutor (OWCP) and the War Crimes Department of the Higher Court in Belgrade continued the practice of war crimes denial through inadequate prosecution of crimes committed during the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). This was particularly evident in their avoidance of regional cooperation, failure to provide proper justification for judgments, imposition of minimum sentences, and excessive delays in proceedings in the cases of Miomir Jasikovac (Srebrenica III) and Novak Đukić (Tuzla Gate).⁷

On 23 November 2022, the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina filed an indictment against Miomir Jasikovac, former commander of the Military Police Platoon of the Zvornik Brigade of the Republika Srpska Army. The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina confirmed the indictment on 20 December 2022, charging Jasikovac with genocide committed in Srebrenica in July 1995. However, at the time of the indictment, Jasikovac was outside BiH's jurisdiction, as he was residing in Novi Sad and held citizenship of the Republic of Serbia.⁸ According to the indictment, Jasikovac and members of his military platoon participated in detention, transport and execution

⁶ "Komesarka Saveta Evrope za ljudska prava poziva vlasti u Srbiji da uklone murale ratnih zločinaca", Youth Initiative for Human Rights, 23 February 2024. <https://yih.rs/bhs/komesarka-saveta-evrope-za-ljudska-prava-poziva-vlasti-u-srbiji-da-uklone-murale-ratnih-zlocinaca/>

⁷ Humanitarian Law Center, Report on War Crimes Trials in Serbia during 2023 (Belgrade: HLC, May 2024), p. 236. http://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Godisnji_izvestaj_2324_eng_CEO_web.pdf

⁸ Srebrenica Memorial Center, Izvještaj o negiranju genocida u Srebrenici 2023 (Srebrenica: Srebrenica Memorial Center, 2023), pp. 30-31. https://srebrenicamemorial.org/assets/photos/editor/MCS_izvjestaj_2023_BOS.pdf

of prisoners between 13 and 15 July 1995. These executions took place near the school in Orahovac, the dam in Petkovci, and a gravel pit in Kozluk, where more than 2,300 individuals were killed.⁹

On 5 December 2022, the OWCP issued an indictment against a defendant identified as AA, commander of the Military Police Platoon of the Zvornik Brigade of the Republika Srpska Army for war crimes. According to the indictment, AA is accused of “participating, alongside his subordinates from the Military Police Platoon, in imprisoning members of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina and male civilians, whom they transferred to certain locations, knowing that they would subsequently be executed. The executions took place in Orahovac, Ročević, and at the Petkovci dam”. According to the indictment, more than 300 persons were executed on these locations.¹⁰

On 13 January 2023, the OWCP reached a plea agreement with Jasikovac, who was concealed under the pseudonym AA. Jasikovac pleaded guilty and received the minimum sentence of five years’ imprisonment. This agreement effectively prevented further prosecution under the indictment issued by the Prosecutor’s Office of BiH, which had charged him with genocide and the murder of more than 2,300 persons. The Higher Court in Belgrade’s judgment, rendered in January 2023, drastically reduced the number of victims compared to ICTY-established facts and changing the crime’s legal qualification. As a result, Jasikovac was convicted of war crime against civilian population in co-perpetration and sentenced to the minimum prescribed five-year sentence.¹¹

Since the OWCP’s establishment, it has issued five indictments for crimes committed in Srebrenica in July 1995, but none have been legally qualified as genocide.¹² The plea agreement reached in the Jasikovac and Brano Gojković’s cases – where Jasikovac was indicted before the Court of BiH and a wanted notice was issued for Gojković for his alleged role¹³ in the Srebrenica genocide, yet both of them were ultimately convicted under a different qualification – as well as systematic avoidance of prosecuting crimes against humanity and genocide committed during the armed conflicts of the 1990s before Serbian courts, reflect an entrenched policy of impunity and denial of facts established by international courts.

In the Tuzla gate case, the 2014 judgment of the Court of BiH, which sentenced Novak Đukić to 20 years’ imprisonment, remained unenforced throughout 2023. Since 2018, forensic experts have repeatedly determined that Đukić is medically unfit to stand trial, prompting annual forensic examination that invariably yield the same conclusions.¹⁴ The persistent delays in this case, along with the failure of the Appellate Court in Belgrade to issue a decision in the eight-year long proceedings on whether to recognise the judgment of the Court of BiH in the Đukić case, have been repeatedly criticised by the European Union (EU) in its reports on Serbia’s progress towards EU integration.¹⁵

9 Jovana Kolarić, “Genocid pod pseudonimom”, Peščanik, 28 April 2023. <https://pescanik.net/genocid-pod-pseudonimom/>

10 Srebrenica Memorial Center, Izveštaj o negiranju genocida u Srebrenici 2023 (Srebrenica: Srebrenica Memorial Center, 2023), pp. 30-31. https://srebrenicamemorial.org/assets/photos/editor/MCS_izvestaj_2023_BOS.pdf

11 “Press Release: Srebrenica, 28 Years of Avoiding Accountability”, Humanitarian Law Center, 11 July 2023. <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?p=38958&lang=de>

12 Ibid.

13 “Tužilaštvo BiH nije zadovoljno sporazumnim priznanjem u predmetu protiv Brane Gojkovića koji je sklopilo Tužilaštvo u Beogradu”, War Crimes Prosecutor’s Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 5 February 2016. <https://www.tuzilastvobih.gov.ba/?id=3181&jezik=b>

14 Humanitarian Law Center, Report on War Crimes Trials in Serbia during 2023 (Belgrade: HLC, May 2024), p. 7. http://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Godisnji_izvestaj_2324_eng_CEO_web.pdf

15 European Commission, Serbia 2023 Report (Brussels: EC, 8 November 2023), p. 29. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_695_Serbia.pdf

Actions and Statements by Executive Authorities: Denial in 2023

Commemorative Practices

State commemorations are often used to shape a new political narrative about the wartime past and promote nationalist policies by manipulating victim number and historical facts. The commemorations marking the anniversary to the 1999 NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), held in March 2023, clearly reflected the government's stance on both victims of the bombing and the war itself.

The official commemoration of the start of the NATO bombing was held on 24 March 2023 in Sombor. In his address, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić denied the crimes committed by Serbian forces against Kosovo Albanians, in particular those that occurred before the NATO intervention. He cynically referenced the term “humanitarian catastrophe”, used by international organisations to describe Serbian forces' actions in 1998.¹⁶ Since the Serbian National Assembly rejected¹⁷ a proposal on 19 October 2021 to establish a previously announced¹⁸ republican commission tasked with compiling a list of bombing victims, the President has stopped mentioning the number of the victims.¹⁹ However, other government officials have continued this practice. Prime Minister Ana Brnabić inflated the number of NATO bombing victims by sharing a video on social media that NATO killed 4,000 people, adding that she would never forget the victims.²⁰

As in previous years, the anniversary of Operation Storm was jointly commemorated by Serbian state institutions and the Republika Srpska entity in Prijedor, BiH. In 1992, Republika Srpska forces established several concentration camps for non-Serbs in this town, where more than 3,000 Bosniaks, Croats, and other non-Serbs were buried in mass graves. The decision to hold central commemoration of the victims of Operation Storm there sparked strong reactions from survivors and human rights activists, who criticised the decision to honour victims from another state in a town where non-Serb victims are ignored.

As in previous years, the commemoration programme combined speeches by high-ranking state and church officials with a cultural and artistic programme. In his speech, Serbian President Vučić emphasised the continuity of crimes against Serbs in Croatia and World War II crimes at the Ustasha concentration camp Jasenovac to Operation Storm, and equated the genocidal policy of the Independent State of Croatia with crimes committed during the 1990s conflicts. During speeches by Vučić and Milorad Dodik, President of the BiH

16 Humanitarian Law Center, Report on War Crimes Trials in Serbia during 2023 (Belgrade: HLC, May 2024), p. 20. http://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Godisnji_izvestaj_2324_eng_CEO_web.pdf

17 “Transkript Treće sednice Drugog redovnog zasjedanja Narodne skupštine Republike Srbije, 1. dan rada”, Otvoreni parlament, 19 October 2021. https://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/drustvo/popisuju-se-zrtve-nato-bombardovanja_1092923.html

18 “Popisuju se žrtve NATO bombardovanja”, Radio televizija Vojvodina, 12 February 2020. https://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/drustvo/popisuju-se-zrtve-nato-bombardovanja_1092923.html

19 “On the Occasion of State Commemoration of the NATO bombing anniversary”, Humanitarian Law Centre, 25 March 2023. <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?p=38701&lang=de>

20 “Sećanje na NATO bombardovanje – 78 dana užasa, državna ceremonija u Somboru”, RTS, 24 March 2023. <https://www.rts.rs/lat/vesti/drustvo/5158035/secanje-na-nato-bombardovanje--78-dana-uzasa-drzavna-ceremonija-u-somboru.html>

Entity Republika Srpska, photographs of Bosniaks fleeing Žepa after Republika Srpska Army attacks were displayed in the background instead of images of fleeing Serbs. This provoked fierce criticism from both survivors and the wider BiH public. Although the agency Pozitiv, which was hired to create multimedia content for commemoration, took responsibility and apologised, the incident once again highlighted Serbia's official remembrance policy of historical revisionism and victim manipulation.²¹

In late February 2023, during the 30th anniversary of the Štrpci abduction and massacre, YIHR activists in Serbia, Montenegro and BiH submitted a dossier of responsibilities to representatives of the governments of Serbia, Montenegro and Republika Srpska. The dossier contained letters to government officials outlining five demands, along with documents from the trial of Nebojša Ranisavljević, which demonstrated that senior FRY officials had knowledge of the planning of the abduction one month before the crime, but took no action to prevent it. As a result, representatives of three YIHR offices sent letters to Prime Ministers Brnabić, Abazović and Višković, calling for an urgent establishment of a joint commission to investigate the responsibility of the authorities of the Republic of Serbia, Republic of Montenegro, FRY, and Republika Srpska for the Štrpci massacre. The proposal called for the commission to publish a report on the responsibility of the said institutions within two years.²² None of the three governments responded to YIHR's demands, continuing the state silence on one of the gravest crimes committed against the citizens of Serbia and Montenegro during the armed conflict in BiH.

Institutionalising the New Approach – The Political Use of War Criminals

In addition to the central commemoration of the NATO bombing, several smaller events were organised, featuring former military and police officials convicted or suspected of war crimes. Veselin Šljivančanin, a former major in the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), convicted by the ICTY for violations of the laws or customs of warfare, was part of the state delegation that laid flowers at the monument of Milica Rakić, a girl killed during the NATO bombing. Nikola Šainović participated in the commemoration organised by the municipal organisation of the Socialist Party of Serbia Vračar, while Defence Minister Miloš Vučević placed wreath at a memorial dedicated to members of the 37th Motorised Brigade of the Yugoslav Army (YA), accompanied by the brigade's former commander Ljubiša Diković. In the area under Diković's control, approximately 1,400 Albanian civilians were killed, and several thousand were expelled.²³ The Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) filed a criminal complaint against Diković, prompting pre-investigation proceedings, but no charges were brought. Instead, state authorities continued to actively shield him.

The Toplica District administration awarded the St. Vitus Charter Tzar Lazar to retired General Vladimir Lazarević, portraying him as "an example to younger generations of how one fights and defends their country".²⁴ YIHR condemned this decision, characterising it as

21 Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Human Rights in Serbia 2023. Law, Practice and International Human Rights Standards (Belgrade: Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2024), p. 324. <https://www.bgcenter.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Human-Rights-in-Serbia-2023-Tabak-odobrenje-za-stampu.pdf>

22 "YIHR handed over a dossier of responsibilities to the presidents of the three governments for the war crime in Štrpci", Youth Initiative for Human Rights, 27 February 2023. <https://yih.rs/en/inicijativa-predala-paket-odgovornosti-predsednicima-tri-vlade-za-zlocin-u-strpcima/>

23 Humanitarian Law Center, Report on War Crimes Trials in Serbia during 2023 (Belgrade: HLC, May 2024), p. 23. http://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Godisnji_izvestaj_2324_eng_CEO_web.pdf

24 Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Human Rights in Serbia 2023. Law, Practice and International Human Rights Standards (Belgrade: Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2024), p. 325. <https://www.bgcenter.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Human-Rights-in-Serbia-2023-Tabak-odobrenje-za-stampu.pdf>

an endorsement of violence and criminal policy.²⁵ A month earlier, on 26 May 2023, Lazarević attended a SNS gathering in Belgrade, organised in response to mass citizens' protests titled Serbia against Violence. Protesters had demanded accountability for rising violence in society following two mass shootings in early May, which took place in Belgrade and in villages near Mladenovac and Smederevo.²⁶

The 2022 State of Denial report clearly demonstrated that the politics of denial and relativisation of war crimes from the 1990s are central to Aleksandar Vučić's regime. Amendments to the Criminal Code in 2016 and the failure to enforce the law prohibiting neo-Nazi manifestations have ensured that the denial of war crimes remains unpunished and, in some cases, institutionally reinforced. The Law on War Memorials, in force since 2018, which enables the systematic erasure of non-Serb victims, and the 2023 Bylaw on Veteran Medals, further institutionalise the denial of crimes and the glorification of war criminals.²⁷

As part of this trend, in March 2023, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs introduced the veteran medal, awarding it to war veterans, disabled veterans, and the families of military and police personnel from the 1990s wars. General Lazarević, accompanied by Minister Nikola Selaković, took part in medal-awarding ceremonies in three locations in September and October 2023: Medveđa (6 October), Merošina (12 October), and Prohor Pčinjski Monastery (22 October).²⁸ These ceremonies effectively portrayed convicted war criminals as model citizens.

At the ceremony in Kuršumlija, Lazarević addressed the audience, stating: "We are looking at the new face of Serbia – Serbia that is no longer ashamed of its veterans". In mid-November, Lazarević participated in a panel discussion at Niš University Hall, alongside former Kosovo investigating judge Danica Marinković, former Special Police Unit commander Goran Radosavljević Guri, and State Secretary Dejan Antić from the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs. During this event, they denied the war crime committed against Kosovo Albanians in the village of Račak in 1999.²⁹

In late May, the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) issued its final judgment related to war crimes committed during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. Former officials of the Serbian Ministry of the Interior's (MoI) State Security Service, Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović, were convicted for their role in war crimes committed in several BiH municipalities as part of a joint criminal enterprise, as well as for the murder of Marija Senaši in Dalj Planina, Croatia. The judgment also confirmed Serbia's involvement in the armed conflicts in BiH and Croatia. Serbian state officials remain silent on the judgment and judicial facts it established. Meanwhile, Tomislav Kovač, former Minister of the Interior of Republika Srpska, who has been indicted by the BiH Prosecutor's Office for

25 "Inicijativa mladih: Povelja Lazareviću je podrška nasilju i politici zločina", Insajder, 26 June 2023. <https://insajder.net/prenosimo/inicijativa-mladih-povelja-lazarevicu-je-podrška-nasilju-i-politici-zločina>

26 "Heroj na skupu Srbija nade: General Lazarević u prvim redovima", Večernje novosti, 26 May 2023. <https://www.novosti.rs/c/vesti/politika/1242544/heroj-skupu-srbija-nade-general-vladimir-lazarevic-prvim-redovima-video>

27 Bylaw on Veteran Medal, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, March 2023. available at: https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2023-04/Uredba%20o%20borackoj%20spomenici_removed.pdf

28 "Saopštenje: Ministar Selaković uručuje boračke spomenice u manastiru Sveti Prohor Pčinjski", Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, 20 October 2023. <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/srb-lat/aktuelnosti/vesti/ministar-selakovic-urucuje-boracke-spomenice-u-manastiru-sveti-prohor-pcinjski>

29 Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Human Rights in Serbia 2023. Law, Practice and International Human Rights Standards (Belgrade: Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2024), pp. 325-326. <https://www.bgcenter.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Human-Rights-in-Serbia-2023-Tabak-odobrenje-za-stampu.pdf>

genocide in Srebrenica, is frequently invited by media outlets to provide commentary and analysis of the judgment.³⁰

War Criminals in Educational Institutions in 2023

In late April 2023, Nebojsa Pavković, former commander of the Third Army of the YA and a convicted war criminal for crimes against humanity in Kosovo, addressed pupils of the primary school “Đura Jakišić” in Kač via video link from his prison in Finland. He delivered a lesson titled Košare – the Story of Heroes in the presence of the Mayor of Novi Sad, Milan Đurić.³¹

Following an inquiry from Democratic Party MP Nebojša Novaković, acting Education Minister Đorđe Milićević ordered an inspection of the primary school for glorifying a convicted war criminal. However, the inspection found no regularities, justifying its decision by stating that the lesson focused on the Košare battle.³² This set a precedent, effectively permitting other war criminals to participate in activities organised by primary and secondary schools. This was not the first such case – previously, in 2017, another convicted war criminal, Vladimir Lazarević, had also delivered a lecture at the Military Academy in Belgrade.³³

In October 2023, Dragoslav Bokan, founder and commander of the paramilitary unit White Eagles was elected to the Council of the Faculty of Philology at the University of Belgrade. In response, students launched a petition against this appointment, arguing that he was a person who had “has been spreading hate speech and promoting intolerance and violence for years”.³⁴

Proponents of War Crimes Denial

As in previous years, various members of the government, ministries, and both the executive and legislative branches, actively promoted a narrative of denial and glorification of war crimes committed during the armed conflicts of the 1990s. The most prominent government representative openly engaged in such rhetoric remains Aleksandar Vulin, who, while serving as head of the Security Intelligence Agency (BIA) in 2023, frequently glorified convicted war criminals and used hate speech when referring to national minorities or neighbouring nations of the former Yugoslavia.

Alongside him, the Ministry of Defence, led in 2023 by SNS president Miloš Vučević, played a key role in fostering this narrative. On 28 January 2023, Vučević unveiled a monumental bust of the late Lieutenant Colonel Goran Ostojić, head of staff of the YA 63rd Parachute Brigade. On that occasion, the Defence Minister described Ostojić as having “lost his life commanding the best of the best, his soldiers of

30 Humanitarian Law Center, Report on War Crimes Trials in Serbia during 2023 (Belgrade: HLC, May 2024), p. 24. http://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Godisnji_izvestaj_2324_eng_CEO_web.pdf

31 “We call for the responsibility of the director of the school in Kac and the mayor of Novi Sad for celebrating war criminal”, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, 16 May 2023. <https://yih.rs/en/pozivamo-da-se-utvrdi-odgovornost-direktorke-skole-u-kacu-i-gradonacelnika-novog-sada-zbog-slavljenja-ratnog-zlocinca/>

32 A copy of the minutes of extraordinary inspection of the Novi Sad City Administration of 28 August 2023 is stored in the YIHR archive.

33 “Lazarević počeo da predaje na Vojnoj akademiji”, N1, 26 October 2017. <https://n1info.rs/vesti/a337690-lazarevic-poceo-da-predaje-na-vojnoj-akademiji/>

34 “Studenti pokrenuli peticiju protiv imenovanja Dragoslava Bokana za člana Saveta Filološkog fakulteta”, Danas, 18 October 2023. <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/studenti-pokrenuli-peticiju-protiv-imenovanja-dragoslava-bokana-za-clana-saveta-filoloskog-fakulteta/>

the famous and glorious 63rd Parachute Brigade”.³⁵ However, Vučević made no mention of operations, such as Operation Reka, in which members of this unit were involved in war crimes against Kosovo Albanians.³⁶

In March 2023, Defence Minister Vučević laid a wreath at a memorial dedicated to members of the YA 37th Motorised Brigade, accompanied by the brigade's former commander, Ljubiša Diković. In Diković's zone of responsibility, approximately 1,400 Albanian civilians were murdered, and several thousand more were expelled.³⁷

At the 66th Belgrade Book Fair in October, the Ministry of Defence continued to promote its Warrior and Witness editions, along with Zastava film documentaries, which relativise the role of JNA and YA generals and military units in the wars of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). Documentaries were screened on the YA 125th Motorised Brigade, the YA 37th Motorised Brigade, and the YA 243rd Motorised Brigade, whose members participated in mass executions of civilians in Kosovo³⁸. Additionally, the book *The Fall of West Krajina Municipalities and the Suffering of Krajina Serbs*, published by the Organisation of the Republika Srpska Army Officers, was also launched at the Belgrade Book Fair. Its president, Slobodan Župljanin, has been accused of war crimes committed in Kotor-Varoš, BiH.³⁹

Besides the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior also played a significant role in denying war crimes, using commemorative events and screenings of its own documentaries. These documentaries, produced in previous years, were broadcast by the public broadcaster, Radio Television of Serbia (RTS), including the one about the war crime in Račak. On 2 February, Interior Minister Bratislav Gašić visited the headquarters and shooting range of the Special Anti-Terrorist Unit (SAJ) in Batajnica, stating that its members are “a pillar of Serbia's security”. Gašić made no mention of the 744 Albanian civilians from Kosovo, whose bodies were buried in mass graves at this very site, uncovered in 2001.⁴⁰

Media Exploitation of the Perpetrators

In January, Politika daily provided a platform for former YA General Vladimir Lazarević, who was convicted by the ICTY for aiding and abetting crimes against humanity in Kosovo, to openly deny these crimes, as well as the 1994 attack on the Markale market in Sarajevo. In the interview, Lazarević dismissed the crime committed in Račak and misrepresented the reasons why the ICTY panel decided not to present evidence related to it. The Račak massacre was also denied in a press statement by Nikola Šainović, former Deputy Prime Minister

35 “Ministar Vučević otkrio spomen-bistu heroju sa Košara potpukovniku Goranu Ostojiću”, Ministry of Defence, 28 January 2023. <https://www.mod.gov.rs/lat/19674/ministar-vucevic-otkrio-spomen-bistu-heroju-sa-kosara-potpukovniku-goranu-ostojicu19674>

36 Humanitarian Law Centre, “Operation Reka” Dossier (Belgrade: HLC, 2015), p. 31. https://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Dossier-Operation_Reka.pdf

37 “Ministar Vučević položio venac povodom Dana sećanja na NATO žrtve”, Ministry of Defence, 24 March 2023. <https://www.mod.gov.rs/lat/19883/ministar-vucevic-polozio-venac-povodom-dana-secanja-na-zrtve-nato-agresije19883>

38 Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, *Human Rights in Serbia 2023. Law, Practice and International Human Rights Standards* (Belgrade: Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2024), p. 326. <https://www.bgcenter.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Human-Rights-in-Serbia-2023-Tabak-odobrenje-za-stampu.pdf>

39 “Na sajmu knjiga u Beogradu fotelja za Šešelja i tribina za Mladićeve branitelje”, Radio Free Europe, 26 October 2023. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/sajam-knjiga-beograd-srbija-%C5%A1elj-mladi%C4%87-republika-srpska-kritika-pisac/32655248.html>

40 “Gašić: SAJ je stub bezbednosti Srbije”, N1, 2 February 2023. <https://n1info.rs/vesti/gasic-saj-je-stub-bezbednosti-srbije/>

of the FRY, who was sentenced by the ICTY to 18 years' imprisonment for crimes against humanity committed in Kosovo.⁴¹

Danas daily gave space to Veselin Šljivančanin by publishing a letter in which he challenged the facts established in the ICTY judgment that sentenced him to the imprisonment of 10 years for violations of the laws and customs of warfare in Vukovar. He described the ruling as “is one of the judgments without legal basis”. Šljivančanin also complained about the treatment of Serbian convicts in The Hague and lamented that, even after serving his sentence, he is not a free citizen, but will “carry a label for the rest of his life”.⁴²

The commemoration of the 28th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide was once again accompanied by widespread media manipulation, including genocide denial and claims that only BiH Army soldiers, along with a few civilians, were buried in Potočari. There were also distortions of court judgments and assertions that Srebrenica was being exploited to “destroy Serbia” and label it as genocidal nation. The most prominent sources of disinformation and manipulative narratives were pro-government tabloids *Informer* and *Srpski telegraf*, which referred to Srebrenica as “a fake genocide, a great myth and an orchestrate massacre”. Across pro-government media, in line with state policy, the term genocide was systematically avoided when referring to the events of July 1995. Instead, they used terms such as crime, massacre, suffering, or the phrase “Srebrenica events”, with the editors of the RTS central news programme particularly standing out in this practice.⁴³

In early December, a video surfaced showing Milivoje Batinica striking one of the players from the mini-football team he coached during a game. Batinica, along with six former members of the Jahorina Training Centre of the Special Brigade of the Republika Srpska Interior Ministry, is currently on trial before the Higher Court in Belgrade for his role in the execution of more than 1,300 Bosniaks from Srebrenica in July 1995.⁴⁴

Aesthetics of Denial

In March 2023, YIHR submitted 308 complaints to communal services in ten towns and municipalities across Serbia, requesting the removal of murals and graffiti glorifying war criminal Ratko Mladić, as well as other war criminals such as Radovan Karadžić and Dragoljub Mihajlović. Under Serbian law, communal services are obligated to clean facades of images depicting Ratko Mladić and other war criminals, as well as any graffiti inciting hatred, including the symbol Z, associated with Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Despite all complaints being properly submitted, by the time this report was completed, local institutions had not even responded. This silence can be interpreted as a form of denial – allowing the glorification of war criminals in public spaces.⁴⁵

41 Humanitarian Law Center, Report on War Crimes Trials in Serbia during 2023 (Belgrade: HLC, May 2024), p. 20. http://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Godisnji_izvestaj_2324_eng_CEO_web.pdf

42 Ibid, p. 21.

43 Mihaela Šljukić, “Kako smo od genocida došli do srebreničkih dešavanja”, *Istinomer*, 12 July 2023. <https://www.istinomer.rs/analize/kako-smo-od-genocida-dosli-do-srebrenickih-desavanja/>

44 Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Human Rights in Serbia 2023. Law, Practice and International Human Rights Standards (Belgrade: Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2024), p. 326. <https://www.bgcenter.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Human-Rights-in-Serbia-2023-Tabak-odobrenje-za-stampu.pdf>

45 “YIHR Serbia submitted a request for the removal of more than 300 murals and graffiti dedicated to Ratko Mladić”, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, 13 March 2023. <https://yihr.rs/en/inicijativa-podnela-prijave-za-uklanjanje-vise-od-300-murala-i-grafita-posvecenih-ratku-mladicu/>

Denial Practices Regarding Specific War Crimes

Račak Massacre and Other War Crimes in Kosovo

One of the most frequently denied crimes in Serbia is the massacre committed in Račak on 15 January 1999, when Serbian forces killed at least 45 Kosovo Albanians, including one woman and one child. The majority of the victims were over the age of 50.⁴⁶ As noted in the report *State of Denial: Serbia 2022*, not only are the facts about the Račak massacre denied, but also the status and number of victims. The credibility of the international investigation conducted in the aftermath of the massacre is challenged, and the reasons behind the ICTY Prosecutor's Office's decision not to include the Račak massacre in its indictment against Milutinović et al. are deliberately misrepresented. The Račak massacre is typically presented in isolation from preceding events in the Kosovo conflict and is considered to be the direct cause of NATO's intervention against the FRY. Denial of the Račak massacre has been expressed by the representatives of government and institutions, the media, retired military and police generals, as well as individuals who participated or witnessed the event.

On 15 January 2023, the anniversary of the Račak massacre, the then Minister of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, Nikola Selaković, denied that a crime had taken place, stating that "Račak was and still is a legal and legitimate operation by the Serbian military and police against terrorist formations".⁴⁷

In July, in response to the trial against Kosovo police officer Sladan Trajković in Kosovo, Milovan Drecun, President of the Parliamentary Committee for Kosovo and Metohija, described the prosecution of arrested Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija as politically motivated, asserting that law and justice did not exist in these cases. He compared them to trials before The Hague Tribunal.⁴⁸ "For them, it is the same situation. This is a political court. Someone is prosecuted for a verbal offence, because they state what has already been proven - that there was no massacre of civilians in Račak. This has been proven by the fact that the very same Hague Tribunal removed Račak from the indictment against Slobodan Milošević. Thus, there was no massacre".⁴⁹

In January and February, the Franco-German plan for resolving the Kosovo issue was widely discussed in public, prompting a special session of the National Assembly of Serbia at the beginning of February. Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić attended the session to present a report on the negotiation process with Kosovo covering the period from 1 September 2022 to 15 January 2023. On 2 February 2023, during the parliamentary session, Vučić referred to Vladimir Lazarević, who was convicted by the ICTY for crimes against humanity

⁴⁶ The Prosecutor v. Vlastimir Đorđević, Judgment, 23 February 2011, IT-05-87/1-T, para. 416.

⁴⁷ "Selaković: Račak je bio i ostao legitimna akcija protiv terorista tzv. OVK", Radio televizija Vojvodina, 15 January 2023. https://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/politika/selakovic-racak-je-bio-i-ostao-legitimna-akcija-protiv-terorista-tzv.-ovk_1408469.html

⁴⁸ "Drecun: Sudenja uhapšenim Srbima na KiM su politička, kao ona u Haškom tribunalu", Tanjug, 28 July 2023. <https://www.tanjug.rs/srbija/politika/43244/drecun-sudenja-uhapsenim-srbima-na-kim-su-politicka-kao-ona-u-haskom-tribunalu/vest>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

in Kosovo, as “a great hero”. He then accused opposition MPs of having handed over Zdravko Tolimir - convicted of the Srebrenica genocide - to The Hague Tribunal.⁵⁰ Further, Vučić blamed opposition MPs from the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) for granting amnesty in 2000 and 2001 to Kosovo Albanians who had been political prisoners under Slobodan Milošević’s regime between 1998 and 2000.

In February, the fourth annual assembly of the Association of Veterans of the Special Police Units was held in the National Assembly of Serbia. Among the attendees was Obrad Stevanović, one of the key figures responsible for the covert operation to conceal the remains of Kosovo Albanians in Serbia. On that occasion, the President of the National Assembly, Vladimir Orlić, expressed gratitude to the veterans, fostering a narrative of heroism around war criminals: “For guarding our home and protecting all its children, you have earned eternal respect from the nation”. He then denied responsibility for the crimes committed, stating “Not only did they forbid us from remembering our heroes, but they also unjustly expelled many of them from service. They sent those who defended our country to foreign courts”.⁵¹

During his speech, President Aleksandar Vučić denied that Serbian police had committed war crimes against Kosovo Albanians before 24 March 1999.⁵²

This was not the only instance in 2023 when Vučić denied crimes committed in Kosovo. In March 2023, during a speech in Kraljevo, he dismissed the existence of the mass grave in Batajnica, stating: “This location has nothing to do with that site or those killings”.⁵³

* During the 1998-1999 Kosovo war, more than 13,000 people were killed, including over 10,000 Albanians and more than 2,000 Serbs. More than 1,600 individuals remain missing. After the war, several mass graves were discovered in Serbia containing the remains of murdered Kosovo Albanians. The largest, located in Batajnica near Belgrade, contains the remains of more than 700 victims.⁵⁴

On 15 January 1999, in the village of Račak, Kosovo, members of the Serbian MoI killed 45 Kosovo Albanians, the majority of whom were civilians.⁵⁵

Srebrenica Genocide

The genocide in Srebrenica, committed in July 1995 by the Republika Srpska Army, remains one of the central topics for the proponents of war crimes denial. The denial of the Srebrenica genocide intensifies as the commemoration approaches each year on 11 July, reaching its peak on the day of the anniversary. However, the topic of Srebrenica occasionally resurfaces outside this timeframe, depending on daily political circumstances. A key tactic employed by those promoting genocide denial is the targeting of individuals who acknowledge

50 “Transkript Treće posebne sednice Narodne skupštine Republike Srbije”, Otvoreni parlament, 2 February 2023. <https://otvoreniparlament.rs/transkript/7975>.

51 “Predsednik Narodne skupštine sa veteranima Posebnih jedinica policije”, Narodna skupština Republike Srbije, 25 February 2023. http://www.parlament.gov.rs/Predsednik_Narodne_skup%C5%A1tine_sa_veteranima_Posebnih_jedinica_policije.46620.941.html#

52 Ibid.

53 “Obraćanje predsednika Vučića građanima”, Alo, YouTube Channel, 31 March 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTGVQNYAB00&t=1582s>

54 For details, please see: <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?p=37869>

55 ICTY, Vlastimir Đorđević Judgment (2011), Volume I of II, Events in Račak, p. 146-156. https://www.icty.org/x/cases/djordjevic/tjug/en/110223_djordjevic_judgt_en.pdf

that the genocide occurred, using narratives of collective responsibility. This fosters an environment in which serious insults and threats are directed at such individuals, who are often vilified as anti-Serb elements.

Once again in 2023, Serbian authorities failed to participate in the commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide. In Serbia, only a handful of non-governmental organisations and citizens commemorate the victims of genocide through symbolic acts such as lighting candles, performances, and debates.⁵⁶

The issue of the Srebrenica genocide also has an international dimension. International support for genocide denial and opposition to international documents recognising the Srebrenica massacre as genocide are often framed as international support to Serbia and its national interests. This narrative, widely promoted in Serbian public discourse, creates space for further manipulation and refusal to acknowledge established facts.

MP and SPS member Vladan Zagrađanin shared on Instagram the news that a Russian delegate at the United Nations Security Council had vetoed the British-proposed resolution on Srebrenica, claiming that this act “prevented the adoption of a resolution which would label Serbs as a genocidal nation”.⁵⁷ This post exemplifies deliberate attempts to distort the issue by invoking collective responsibility as a means of manipulation.

Appearing on the TV Pink Programme Hit Twit, Prime Minister Ana Brnabić criticised certain political groups, labelling them as pseudo-patriots. She stated that these groups – DSS, Dveri and Zavetnici – had united with Dragan Šolak and Dragan Đilas, thereby betraying their voters. She further highlighted their willingness to form a coalition with those who recognise the Srebrenica genocide and the independence of the so-called Republic of Kosovo.⁵⁸

Deputy President of the National Assembly of Serbia and SNS member Sandra Božić insulted and denigrated actor Milan Marić on her X account after he spoke at the Serbia against Violence protest. She used a video in which Marić read testimonies of witnesses and victims from the Radislav Krstić and Ratko Mladić trials, referring to him with derogatory terms such as “anti-Serb trash” and accusing him of being “a promoter of the thesis that Serbs are a genocidal nation”.⁵⁹

As the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide approaches, various “special broadcasts” on the topic of Srebrenica are aired, often making it a central media issue. For example, on the Srebrenica genocide anniversary, convicted war criminal Vojislav Šešelj appeared on a morning show on national television channel, where he denied the genocide by downplaying the number of victims, and described the date as the day of the liberation of the Serb Srebrenica in a 50-minute speech.⁶⁰

56 “Vlasti Srbije ignoriraju zahtjeve da se prestane negirati genocid u Srebrenici”, Aljazeera Balkans, 10 July 2023. <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/videos/2023/7/10/vlasti-srbije-ignorisu-zahtjeve-da-se-prestane-negirati-genocid-u-srebrenici>

57 Vladan Zagrađanin, Instagram, 15 March 2023. <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cp0EN4noiMs/>

58 “Brnabić: Opozicija želi destabilizaciju Srbije i kaos na ulicama”, Serbian Progressive Party, YouTube channel, 13 November 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ci9cIU6ly0>

59 Sandra Božić, X, 10 June 2023, <https://twitter.com/bozicsandra/status/1667316490964533248?s=46>

60 “Ekskluzivno – Vojislav Šešelj otkriva šta se zaista dešavalo u Srebrenici”, TV Happy, YouTube channel, 11 July 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQm3sQNV0uI>

On the same day, TV Informer aired a special programme on Srebrenica, featuring, among others, SNS MP Marjan Ristićević, who stated: “A crime occurred in Srebrenica against Bosniak soldiers. There were no women and children. There was no genocide. No one can dictate what our opinion should be”.⁶¹

In the same programme, Miodrag Linta, president of the Association of Serbs from the Region and SNS MP, dismissed Srebrenica “as a huge myth, a fabricated story by part of the international community that the Republika Srpska Army sought to destroy Muslims, that is, Bosniaks”. He further claimed: “The analysis has shown that we had fake witnesses and fake experts, that Serbs were meant to be pre-emptively labelled as a criminal nation”.⁶²

In response to a protest letter sent by the Museum of Genocide in Belgrade to the German Embassy over a statement by German Minister of Agriculture Cem Özdemir, who said that Kosovo was a victim of genocide carried out by Serbia, the museum’s director, Dejan Ristić, and custodian-historian Bojan Arbutina appeared on TV K1. During the programme, they spoke about “*permanent labelling of Serbs for genocide*”, particularly emphasising “*the so-called genocide in Srebrenica*.” They argued that this narrative aims to brand all Serbs as criminals, a perspective they claimed has been promoted since the 1990s, when Serbs were accused of the *so-called Srebrenica genocide*.

⁶³

The fact that genocide denial is not only tolerated, but rewarded by Serbian state institutions was demonstrated in July 2023. On the day commemorating the 28th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, the public in BiH was disturbed by social media posts from two female students from Sarajevo, who glorified individuals convicted of genocide and war crimes.⁶⁴ Four days later, it was announced that, at the invitation of Aleksandar Vulin, director of the BIA, the two students would continue their studies at the Academy for National Security in Belgrade, with accommodation provided in a student dormitory.⁶⁵ In the days that followed, billboards expressing support for Aleksandar Vulin appeared in Romanija and Pale, later spreading to Rogatica and Višegrad, and eventually Srebrenica.⁶⁶ This example of Serbian state institutions rewarding individuals who glorify war criminals best illustrates a trend of not only fostering denial, but also promoting triumphalism over war crimes.

✱ For most of the war in BiH, Srebrenica, located in eastern Bosnia, was an enclave where tens of thousands of Bosnian Muslims/Bosniaks sought refuge after fleeing attacks by Bosnian Serb forces in the surrounding areas. In March 1995, Radovan Karadžić, President of Republika Srpska and commander-in-chief of the Republika Srpska Army, ordered Bosnian Serb forces to eliminate the Muslim

⁶¹ “Specijalna emisija o Srebrenici na Informer TV! Ivković: Dokazano je da genocida u Srebrenici nije bilo!”, Informer, 11 July 2023 <https://informer.rs/tv/live-tv/810480/specijalna-emisija-o-srebrenici-na-informer-tv-ivkovic-dokazano-je-da-genocida-u-srebrenici-nije-bilo>

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ “Protestno pismo – Dejan Ristić i Boja Arbutina”, K1, YouTube channel, 5 October 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZtEdxtNgaw>

⁶⁴ In the posted photo, one of them is wearing a T-shirt featuring the image of Chetnik duke Mitar Maksimović and holding up three fingers, while the other shared a photo of Ratko Mladić, the war commander of the Republika Srpska Army, who was convicted by the ICTY and sentenced to life imprisonment for genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of the laws and customs of warfare during the 1992-1995 war in BiH. The photo was accompanied by the text: “Convicted to Immortality. You were and always will be our hero”.

⁶⁵ Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Human Rights in Serbia 2023. Law, Practice and International Human Rights Standards (Belgrade: Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2024), p.331. <https://www.bgcenter.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Human-Rights-in-Serbia-2023-Tabak-odobrenje-za-stampu.pdf>

⁶⁶ “Bilbord podrške Vulinu na bh. planini Romaniji”, Radio Free Europe, 17 July 2023. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/bilbordi-podrske-vulin-pale-romanija/32507233.html>

population from the enclaves of Srebrenica and Žepa. In July 1995, more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys were executed, while 30,000 women, children, and elderly people were forcibly removed. The ICTY and IRMCT prosecuted 20 individuals for crimes in Srebrenica, with Radovan Karadžić, Ljubiša Beara, Željko Tolimir, Vujadin Popović, Radislav Krstić and Ratko Mladić convicted of genocide. The International Court of Justice confirmed in one of its judgments that the events in Srebrenica constituted genocide.⁶⁷

Glorification of Convicted War Criminals

Close ties between political parties and war criminals have become normalised in Serbia's political landscape. Convicted war criminals attend political party events and participate in the work of party structures, serving as an integral element of the nationalist policies upheld by certain political parties.

Vladimir Lazarević

One of the convicted war criminals most frequently referenced by government representatives and regularly seen at numerous gatherings organised by the government is Vladimir Lazarević. During a National Assembly session in February, which Lazarević attended, President Vučić stated that the previous government had “thrown into a sack and sent to The Hague Serbian hero from Kosovo, General Lazarević”, thereby openly defending the convicted war criminal.⁶⁸

In May, the SNS organised a rally titled Serbia of Hope in downtown Belgrade, in front of the National Assembly. President Vučić was one of the speakers, while Lazarević was seen in the front rows.⁶⁹

On 28 June 2023, during the *Toplica St. Vitus People's Assembly*, held at the St. Archangels Michael and Gabriel Monastery in the village of Kondželja near Prokuplje, the Toplica District administration awarded charters to distinguished individuals and institutions. The highest honour, the *Tzar Lazar* charter, was awarded to Lazarević. The Organisational Committee unanimously decided on this recognition, stating that Lazarević had “*made an immeasurable contribution to the defence of our country during the 1999 aggression and stands as a true example for younger generations on how to fight and defend their country*”.⁷⁰

Beyond awarding honours to war criminals, their presence at ceremonies where medals were distributed to war veterans — alongside

⁶⁷ Available at: <https://www.irmct.org/specials/srebrenica/timeline/bhs/>

⁶⁸ Vojin Radovanović, „Vučić o osuđenom ratnom zločincu, generalu Lazareviću, Jovanović (Novi DSS) uvredljivo o Kandić, Biserko i pokojnoj Borki Pavićević”, *Danas*, 2 February 2023. <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/vucic-o-osudjenom-ratnom-zlocincu-generalu-lazarevicu-jovanovic-novi-dss-uvredljivo-o-kandic-biserko-i-pokojnoj-borki-pavicevic/>

⁶⁹ “Heroj na skupu srbija nade: General Vladimir Lazarević u prvim redovima [VIDEO]”, *Novosti*, 26 May 2023. <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/politika/1242544/heroj-skupu-srbija-nade-general-vladimir-lazarevic-prvim-redovima-video>

⁷⁰ Lj. M. “‘Car Lazar’ bivšem ratnom komandantu Prištinskog korpusa”, *Južne vesti*, 19 June 2023. <https://www.juznevesti.com/Kultura/Car-Lazar-bivsem-ratnom-komandantu-Pristinskog-korpusa.sr.html>

high-ranking state officials — further normalises and legitimises their role in public life. In October, Minister Nikola Selaković awarded veteran medals at ceremonies in Medveđa⁷¹, Merošina⁷², and the St. Prohor Pčinjski Monastery⁷³. Lazarević was present at all three events.

In November 2023, SNS youth organised a lecture in Niš titled Lessons in Patriotism – Not to Be Forgotten. The lecture was delivered by Lazarević.⁷⁴

* Vladimir Lazarević was the commander of the YA Priština Corps during the war in Kosovo. He was sentenced by the ICTY to 14 years' imprisonment for crimes against humanity, specifically for the deportation and forcible removal of Albanian civilians in Kosovo.

Vojislav Šešelj

Vojislav Šešelj holds a unique position in Serbia's political landscape. He is widely regarded as the political father of Aleksandar Vučić, with whom he closely cooperated from the 1990s until 2008, when Vučić left the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) to establish the SNS. Šešelj's ties to the current regime ensure his frequent appearances on national TV stations and in public spaces. Moreover, Šešelj's private meetings with state officials have become increasingly common.

Šešelj is a frequent guest on certain TV stations, often appearing alongside government representatives. In March, he appeared on TV Pink's Hit tvit programme alongside SNS MP Vladimir Đukanović.⁷⁵ At the end of the year, the two were again featured together on TV Informer.⁷⁶

For years, Šešelj has been a fixture at the Belgrade Book Fair, and 2023 was no exception. His publishing company, Greater Serbia, had a stall there, where Šešelj personally signed his books.⁷⁷

One of the clearest indications of the close relationship between the ruling regime and Šešelj was Vučić's attendance at a private celebration marking the baptism and wedding of Šešelj's son. When questioned about his presence at the event, President Vučić stated

71 "Ministar Selaković danas u Medvedji dodelio prve grupne Boračke spomenice", Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, 6 October 2023. <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/aktuelnosti/vesti/ministar-selakovic-danas-u-medvedji-dodelio-prve-grupne-boracke-spomenice>

72 "Ministar Selaković svečano uručio Boračke spomenice u Merošini", Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, 12 October 2023. <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/aktuelnosti/vesti/ministar-selakovic-svecano-urucio-boracke-spomenice-u-merosini>

73 "Selaković uručio 53 boračke spomenice borcima iz opština Bujanovac, Preševo i Trgovište", Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, 22 October 2023. <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/aktuelnosti/vesti/selakovic-urucio-53-boracke-spomenice-borcima-iz-opstina-bujanovac-presevo-i-trgoviste>

74 Nevena Bogdanović, "Simboli ruske invazije, pretnje i veličanje ratnih zločinaca u izornoj kampanji u Srbiji", Radio Free Europe, 6 December 2023. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/izborna-kampanja-srbija-ratni-zlocini-rusija-invazija-pretnje/32718745.html>

75 "Žestoko! Vojislav Šešelj: Tadić, Jeremić i Ponoš su najgori šljam i ološ", RTV Pink, YouTube channel, 3 March 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WitE3u9pwyU>

76 "Specijalna emisija na Informer TV! Žestoka debata u studiju! Šešelj: Rasturiceemo Đilasa na izborima!", Informer, 14 December 2023. <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/856588/seselj-ceda-jovanovic-izbori-opozicija-srbija>

77 Zoran Glavonjić i Dženana Halimović, "Na Sajmu knjiga u Beogradu fotelja za Šešelja i tribina za Mladićeve branitelje", Radio Free Europe, 26 October 2023. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/amp/sajam-knjiga-beograd-srbija-%C5%A1e%C5%A1elj-mladi%C4%87-republika-srpska-kritika-pisac/32655248.html>

that he was not ashamed “to go and congratulate the baptism and wedding to his godfather” and that no one could tell him “whether to renounce someone who baptised his older son and his daughter”.⁷⁸

In November, a coalition between the ruling SNS and Šešelj's SRS was agreed upon for the Belgrade and local elections in Serbia.⁷⁹

* Vojislav Šešelj has been the President of the Serbian Radical Party for decades. The IRMCT sentenced him to 10 years' imprisonment for persecution and incitement to persecution, deportation, and the forcible removal of Croats from the village of Hrtkovci in Vojvodina in 1992.

Veselin Šljivančanin

Another convicted war criminal who frequently appears in public alongside government officials is Veselin Šljivančanin. One of his earliest such appearances was at the commemoration marking the anniversary of the start of the NATO bombing, where he joined the state delegation in laying a wreath at the monument to children killed during the airstrikes.⁸⁰

As a member of the SNS Main Board, Šljivančanin regularly attends party events. In May, he participated in the SNS party assembly in Kragujevac.⁸¹ He was also present at the St. Vitus Day celebration organised by the SNS at Hotel Yugoslavia in Belgrade, where President Vučić addressed the audience.⁸²

* During the 1990s, Veselin Šljivančanin was a JNA and YA officer and one of the commanders of JNA forces in the battles near Vukovar in 1991. The ICTY sentenced him to ten years' imprisonment for war crimes against wounded Croatian soldiers and prisoners of war at the Ovčara farm near Vukovar.

Nikola Šainović

In line with the broader trend of integrating convicted war criminals into Serbia's public and political life, the SPS gathering in Rakovica serves as another example of this practice. As a member of the SPS Presidency, Nikola Šainović attended the event alongside Minister

78 Iva Martinović, “Vučić, Šešelj i veze kojih se ne odriču”, Radio Free Europe, 13 June 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WitE3u9pwyU> <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/vucic-seselj-veze/32457791.html>

79 “Šešelj: Radikali u koaliciji sa SNS na beogradskim i lokalnim izborima”, N1, 1 November 2023. <https://n1info.rs/vesti/seselj-radikali-u-koaliciji-sa-sns-na-beogradskim-i-lokalnim-izborima/>.

80 Snežana Čongradin, “Vučić svesno glorifikuje zločince: Sagovornici Danasa o pojavljivanju Šljivančanina na postavljanju venca žrtvama bombardovanja”, Danas, 24 March 2023. <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/vucic-svesno-glorifikuje-zlocince-sagovornici-danasa-o-pojavljivanju-sljivancanina-na-postavljanju-venca-zrtvi-bombardovanja/>

81 “Ratni zločinac iz Ovčare bio Vučićev gost u Kragujevcu”, 24 sata, 28 May 2023. <https://www.24sata.hr/news/video-ratni-zlocinac-iz-ovcare-bio-vucicev-gost-u-kragujevcu-913264>

82 “Pokušaće da nam lome i ruše zemlju iznutra – Vučićna Vidovdanskom koktelu, otkrio sa kakvom majicom je njegov sin otišao u Gračanicu: To misli svako od nas Vučića”, Blic, 28 June 2023. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/vucic-probace-da-nam-lome-zemlju-ne-znam-kako-ce-ici-sa-kosovom/w60cxnl>

of Foreign Affairs and SPS President Ivica Dačić, as well as the President of the City of Belgrade Assembly, Nikola Nikodijević.⁸³

Throughout 2023, Šainović made multiple appearances on various television stations alongside public officials. On TV Informer, he appeared alongside Vladimir Vasić, Secretary General of the Association of Serbian Banks.⁸⁴ In June⁸⁵ and November⁸⁶, he was also featured twice alongside Veljko Odalović, President of the Commission for Missing Persons of the Government of Serbia.

* During the 1990s, Nikola Šainović served as Serbian Prime Minister and later as Deputy Prime Minister of the FRY. The ICTY sentenced him to 18 years' imprisonment for crimes against humanity and violations of the laws and customs of warfare in Kosovo.

Nebojša Pavković

An open class titled Košare: Stories of Heroes was held at the “Đura Jakišić” primary school in Kać. On that occasion, Nebojša Pavković addressed the audience via video link from his prison in Finland.⁸⁷ Another speaker was Milan Đurić, Mayor of Novi Sad, whose presence legitimised Pavković and reinforced the narrative of portraying a convicted war criminal as a hero before an audience which included primary school pupils.

YIHR called on the Ministry of Education to establish the responsibility of the school principal for allowing a convicted war criminal to participate in the event and urged the Assembly of the City of Novi Sad to initiate the dismissal of the Mayor.⁸⁸

* During the Kosovo war, Nebojša Pavković was the commander of the YA Third Army. The ICTY sentenced him to 22 years' imprisonment for crimes against humanity committed against Kosovo Albanians in 1999. He was found responsible for deportations, other inhumane acts, murders and persecution – acts constituting crime against humanity, as well as for murders that violated the laws and customs of warfare.

83 “Predizborni skup u Rakovici – Toma Fila: Borimo se za jačanje radničkih prava”, Socialist Party of Serbia, 23 November 2023. <https://www.sps.org.rs/2023/11/23/predizborni-skup-u-rakovici-toma-fila-borimo-se-za-jacanje-radnickih-prava/>

84 “Hoće li Amerika preživeti 2024. godinu? Nikola Šainović i Vladimir Vasić ekskluzivno za Informer TV!”, Informer, 7 July 2023. <https://informer.rs/tv/live-tv/809523/amerika-propast-banaka-ukrajina-rusija-rat>

85 “Kurti nabija prst u oko čitavoj međunarodnoj zajednici! Šainović i Odalović za Informer TV: Srbi na KiM se brane svojim živim postojanjem!”, Informer, 16 June 2023. <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/803336/veljko-odalovic-nikola-sainovic-aljbin-kurti>

86 “Ovo je mazohizam šta Evropa sebi radi! Sagovornici Kurira: Pristali su da im Amerika gospodari, a nemoćni su bilo šta da urade”, Kurir, 27 November 2023. <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/4301704/analiticari-evropa-se-potpuno-potcinila-americi>

87 Gorica Nikolin, “Na javnom času u Kaću govorio i Pavković: Uključio se iz finskog zatvora, YIHR traži opoziv Đurića”, 021.rs, 16 May 2023. <https://www.021.rs/story/Novi-Sad/Vesti/340847/Na-javnom-casu-u-Kacu-govorio-i-Pavkovic-Ukljucio-se-iz-finskog-zatvora-YIHR-trazi-opoziv-Djurica.html>

88 “We call for the responsibility of the director of the school in Kać and the mayor of Novi Sad for celebrating war criminal”, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, 16 May 2023. <https://yihr.rs/en/pozivamo-da-se-utvrdi-odgovornost-direktorka-skole-u-kacu-i-gradonacelnika-novog-sada-zbog-slavljenja-ratnog-zlocinca/>

Dragan Vasiljković

Continuing a pattern that raises questions about the institution's commitment to dealing with the past, Minister of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, Nikola Selaković, took a walk with Dragan Vasiljković during the commemoration of the anniversary of the death of King Petar I Karađorđević in August.⁸⁹

* Dragan Vasiljković, known as Captain Dragan, was the founder and leader of the Serb paramilitary unit Knindžas during the war in Croatia. He was sentenced in Croatia to 13 years' imprisonment for crimes against Croatian civilians and prisoners of war.

Pero Petrašević

On 5 December, Provincial Secretary for Sports and Youth, Dane Basta, a member of SNS, visited the municipality of Šid. On that occasion, the Mayor of Šid Zoran Semenović and Provincial Secretary Basta visited Boxing Club Pikaso, owned by Pero Petrašević. Petrašević, a former member of the paramilitary unit Scorpions, was sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment for his role in the execution of six boys and men from Srebrenica, killed by this unit in Trnovo in July 1995. Semenović and Basta met with Petrašević, while the municipality of Šid announced on its official website a day earlier that "Boxing Club Pikaso was a central point of talks about investments in sports at the local level and support for young talents".

In late May, the IRMCT sentenced former heads of the Serbian State Intelligence Agency, Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović, to 15 years' imprisonment each. Alongside crimes committed in Bosanski Šamac, Bijeljina, Zvornik, and Doboј, they were also found guilty of the executions of Srebrenica inhabitants in the Trnovo area, carried out by members of the Scorpions paramilitary unit.

Four former Scorpions members - Slobodan Medić, Branislav Medić, Pero Petrašević and Aleksandar Medić – were sentenced in Serbia in 2007 to a total of 53 years in prison for the execution of Srebrenica inhabitants in Trnovo. In Croatia, Scorpions members Milorad Momić and Slobodan Davidović were sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment each for the same crime.

Participation of War Criminals in the 2023 Election Campaign

Four convicted war criminals (Vojislav Šešelj, Vladimir Lazarević, Veselin Šljivančanin, and Nikola Šainović) supported the lists of the ruling SNS and SPS coalition in the parliamentary elections held in December 2023. Additionally, four parliamentary candidates were linked to wartime events and war crimes: Vjerica Radeta, Petar Jojić, Ljiljana Mihailović and Miljan Damjanović, all of whom were

⁸⁹ Nikola Selaković's official Instagram profile, 15 March 2023. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CwA1rLvtm3s/?igshid=NjIwNzlyMDk2Mg%3D%3D>

charged by the IRMCT with the obstruction of justice.⁹⁰ A frequent guest at election activities held by Nikola Selaković, a prominent SNS member on the Serbia Must Not Stop electoral list, was Goran Radosavljević Guri.⁹¹

Individuals linked to wartime events, such as Dragoslav Bokan and Uroš Šuvaković, also support the lists gathered around the SNS and the SPS. Svetozar Andrić remains an active SNS member and, until recently, member of the Belgrade City Council, despite the HLC having filed a criminal complaint against him for war crimes in BiH.⁹² Milivoje Batinica, one of the seven accused of war crimes against more than 1,300 Bosniak civilians in Kravica near Srebrenica, was claimed by the Serbia against Violence collation to be a founder of SNS in Zrenjanin and an employee of the state-owned enterprise Telekom.⁹³ Like others accused in this case, Batinica is defending himself while not in custody.⁹⁴

During the election campaign, ruling parties continued to discredit political opponents through the use of chauvinist, Ustasha, and Nazi symbols. The most well-known examples include chauvinist posters in Belgrade in October targeting *Movement of Free Citizens* leader Pavle Grbović,⁹⁵ as well as those targeting the Novi Sad-based OSA organisation in November 2023⁹⁶. These materials falsely portrayed political figures and organisations as supporters of the Ustasha movement through the use of hate symbols. Similarly, a chauvinist campaign against *New DSS* president Miloš Jovanović, labelling him “*the liberator of Albanian terrorists*”, is yet another instance of attempts to discredit political opponents.⁹⁷ Particularly concerning was the use of the Z symbol, associated with Russian aggression against Ukraine, by SPS MP candidate Dušan Bajatović during the election campaign,⁹⁸ as well as the promotion of Nazi ideology by Olivera Zekić, president of the Council of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM).⁹⁹

A sign of continuity in the glorification of war criminals was evident during the election campaign. The election campaign began with the

90 “First Mission in Relation to the Monotiling of the Šešelj et al. contempt of course case concludes today in Belgrade”, International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, 8 November 2024. <https://www.irmct.org/en/news/first-mission-relation-monitoring-seselj-et-al-contempt-court-case-concludes-today-belgrade>

91 “Ministar Selaković svečano uručio boračke spomenice u Merošini”, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, 12 October 2023. <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/aktuelnosti/vesti/ministar-selakovic-svecano-urucio-boracke-spomenice-u-merosini>

92 “Nova: Svetozar Andrić, osnivač logora Sušica, novi član Gradskog veća Beograda”, N1, 28 August 2022. <https://n1info.rs/vesti/nova-svetozar-andric-osnivač-logora-susica-novi-clan-gradskog-veća-beograda/>

93 “Trener u Srbiji i optuženik za ratne zločine udarao igrača, opozicija traži reakciju nadležnih”, Radio Free Europe, 1 December 2023. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/batinica-napad-utakmica-ratni-zlocini/32709948.html>

94 Pojedinačni predmeti u postupku „Srebrenica” pred Odeljenjem za ratne zločine Višeg suda u Beogradu, Predmet „Nedeljko Milidragović i drugi”, Humanitarian Law Center. Available at: <https://www.hlc-rdc.org/Transkripti/srebrenica.html>

95 “Grbović u ustaškoj uniformi, Jovanović sa albanskom kapom, Dogovor za bedu: Širom Beograda plakati protiv opozicije, samo na Zvezdari ih ima 200”, Fonet/Danas, 22 October 2023. <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/plakati-protiv-opozicije-grbovic-jovanovic-dogovor-za-bedu/>

96 “Plakati sa ustaškim simbolima koji targetiraju organizaciju OSA osvanuli na Bulevaru oslobođenja”, 021.rs, 24 November 2023. <https://www.021.rs/story/Novi-Sad/Vesti/359346/Plakati-sa-ustaskim-simbolima-koji-targetiraju-organizaciju-OSA-osvanuli-na-Bulevaru-oslobodjenja.html>

97 Una Sabljaković, “Albanski ‘teroristi’ u Miloševićevim zatvorima”, Kosovo 2.0, 6 June 2023. <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/sr/albanski-teroristi-u-milosevicevim-zatvorima/>

98 Nevena Bogdanović, “Simboli ruske invazije, pretnje i veličanje ratnih zločinaca u izornoj kampanji u Srbiji”, Radio Free Europe, 6 December 2023. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/izborna-kampanja-srbija-ratni-zlocini-rusija-invazija-pretnje/32718745.html>

99 “Olivera Zekić i nacistička uniforma: Savet REM-a utvrdio da šefica nije prekršila Kodeks”, Vreme, 8 February 2024. <https://vreme.com/vesti/olivera-zekic-i-nacisticka-uniforma-savet-rem-a-utvrdio-da-sefica-nije-prekršila-kodeks/>

opening of an illegal private museum dedicated to Dragoljub Mihailović in Belgrade by SPS MP Igor Braunović¹⁰⁰ and concluded with the opening of a memorial room dedicated to Slobodan Milošević by SPS MP candidate and Milošević's grandson, Marko Milošević.¹⁰¹

The condemnation of the Srebrenica genocide was used as a tool to discredit political opponents, although genocide denial was the prevailing stance among election lists and candidates. Miša Vacić's announcement of legal action against those responsible for removing graffiti and murals dedicated to Ratko Mladic, along with Šešelj's threat to prosecute those who acknowledge that genocide was committed in Srebrenica, represent direct threats to freedom of expression.

100 Sonja Gočanin, "Ko u Beogradu podiže spomenik i otvara muzej Draži Mihailoviću?", Radio Free Europe, 12 October 2023. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/beograd-spomenik-draza-mihailovic/32634421.html>

101 "Slobodan Milošević dobija spomen-sobu u Nišu", Južne vesti, 12 December 2023. <https://www.juznevesti.com/drustvo/slobodan-milosevic-dobija-spomen-sobu-u-nisu/>

Examples of Institutional Denial

Date	Statement	Institution	War crime denied	Type of denial
15 January 2023	"On this day 24 years ago, Serbian and FRY security forces carried out an anti-terrorist operation and eliminated a terrorist group in the village of Račak, in the municipality of Štimlje."	Nikola Selaković, Minister of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs	Račak massacre	Banal denial
2 February 2023	"Do you know who was arrested as a great enemy of the Serbian state? Thrown into a sack and sent to The Hague. General Vladimir Lazarević, a Serbian hero from Kosovo and Metohija. It wasn't Vučić who packed him up and sent to The Hague, but Miloš Jovanović and Vojislav Koštunica, those so-called heroes who now lecture me on patriotism and Kosovo and Metohija. They were the ones who sent him to The Hague. The man had to go. General Lazarević, a great hero. Did he go to The Hague during our time or someone else's?"	Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia	War crimes in Kosovo	Literal denial
25 February 2023	"Irresponsible people who once led the country not only forbade us from remembering our heroes, but also unjustly expelled many of them from service. They sent those who defended our country to foreign courts, made catastrophic, devastating decisions for the state, and deliberately undermined its ability to defend itself."	Vladimir Orlić, President of the National Assembly	War crimes in Kosovo	Literal denial
28 January 2023	"Today, Serbia is strengthening its army, because there is no state without a strong military, Never again will anyone, through administrative measures, disband our glorious units or take away the flags of the 63rd Parachute or 72nd Brigade, because these flags are crowned with their victories and sanctified by the sacrifices of their members."	Miloš Vučević, Minister of Defence	War crimes during Operation Reka, Kosovo, in which members of the YA 63rd Parachute Brigade participated	Literal denial/ Silence

7 July 2023	“So, Vojislav Šešelj was not convicted of a war crime. Vojislav Šešelj was convicted of inciting the deportation of Croats from Hrtkovci. And that is not a war crime, Mr. Milivojević, because no Croat from Hrtkovci was deported – instead, all Croats from Hrtkovci, from Golubinci, from Slankamen, from other places where they lived swapped their houses.”	Aleksandar Martinović, Minister of Public Administration and Local Self-Government	War crime of the deportation of Croatian civilians from Hrtkovci	Banal denial
12 November 2023	“Opposition parties are composed of those who go to Zagreb and denounce their country, those who claim that genocide occurred in Srebrenica.”	Ana Brnabić, Prime Minister	Srebrenica genocide	Implicatory denial
2 November 2023	Vladimir Đukanović congratulated Vojislav Šešelj “for everything he did in The Hague” and falsely claimed that he was “eventually acquitted”. When journalist Ljubica Gojgić corrected him, pointing that Šešelj was convicted of crimes against humanity, Đukanović replied that Šešelj had been “on trial for a verbal offence” and that “this crap about a verbal offence will definitely be overturned one day”.	Vladimir Đukanović, MP from the Serbian Progressive Party	War crime of the deportation of Croatian civilians from Hrtkovci	Literal denial
29 October 2023	“It’s fair that they openly admitted they would unite after the elections to bring me down. Because of this, they lost some votes. The right-wing joining forces with those who recognise the Srebrenica genocide – what’s the difference between Đilas and Jovanović? There is none.”	Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia	Srebrenica genocide	Implicatory denial
8 December 2023	“We walked together for 12 years, restoring faith in an army whose best generals they handed over to The Hague. They - the 5th of October scum - are ashamed of their leaders, while we take pride in our president. The Serbs have a leader!”	Aleksandar Vulin, resigning director of BIA	War crimes confirmed by the ICTY judgments	Literal denial

26 March 2023	"The parade of the Serbian Army will be held on 22 April. The next day, all media outlets in the region will say: 'Vučić holds a parade at the site where hundreds of Albanians were killed and shows no shame'. Of course, this location has nothing to do with that site or those killings."	Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia	Mass graves in Batajnica, war crimes committed against Kosovo Albanians	Implicatory denial, disinformation
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Examples of extra-institutional denial

Date	Statement	Proponent of denial	War crime denied	Type of denial
15 January 2023	"Walker declared that Serbian police and military had carried out a massacre against civilians, despite the fact that no Serbian soldier had ever participated in any actions there. This deception was exposed immediately - Walker's lie was uncovered, first by Judge Danica Marinković and the Serbian investigating team in Priština, who were the first to arrive in Račak, and later through arguments presented before The Hague Tribunal, that no civilians were killed there and that Walker's claim was a horrible lie"	Vladimir Lazarević, convicted of crimes against humanity in Kosovo	Račak massacre	Literal denial
17 January 2023	"It was established at The Hague Tribunal that the events in Račak were a conflict between Serbian security forces and armed rebels. In fact, all those buried in the village graveyard are marked as KLA heroes."	Nikola Šainović, SPS presidency member, convicted of crimes against humanity in Kosovo	Račak massacre	Literal denial
2 June 2023	"While Jovica supported Sloba, we had Republika Srpska... I stand by Jovica today, just as I did back then. This judgment against Stanišić and Simatović is dangerous, as it could lead to further proceedings against us."	Tomislav Kovač, indicted for genocide in Srebrenica	The judgment against Jovica Stanišić and Frenki Simatović	Implicatory denial

7 June 2023	<p>"Although I believe that raising these issues at this moment is an unnecessary distraction, I will respond out of respect. A crime was committed in Srebrenica, but it was not genocide. Kosovo and Metohija are part of Serbia, as defined by the Constitution. Against NATO membership. Serbia should continue its EU integration."</p>	Miroslav Aleksić, MP from the People's Party	Srebrenica genocide	Interpretative denial
2 December 2023	<p>"We have long warned that the so-called KLA court is yet another farce orchestrated by the West. This was confirmed yesterday by its president, who stated during her visit to Priština that the court has no intention of prosecuting the idea of the KLA or undermining the foundations of the Kosovo state.</p> <p>What else could be expected from an institution established by a decision of the so-called Kosovo Assembly, with judges and prosecutors from the former Hague Tribunal? They certainly will not deliver justice to Serbian victims."</p>	Milica Đurđević Stamenkovski, MP from the Serbian Party of Zavetnici	Judicially established facts before the ICTY and Specialised Panels in Kosovo	Implicatory denial, disinformation

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