

Analysis

# THE WARS OF THE 1990s

IN SERBIAN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS



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Analysis:  
“The Wars of the 1990s in Serbian History Textbooks”

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# Summary

The analysis of the content of history textbooks in Serbia presents the interpretation of the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, their causes, the war crimes committed by the warring sides, and the consequences these conflicts had on the states that emerged on the territory of the former shared state. The content of all 16 history textbooks currently used in Serbia was analyzed, nine of which are used in elementary schools and seven in general and vocational high schools.<sup>1</sup>

The analysis revealed that the events of the 1990s conflicts are still presented in a limited way, with a significant degree of bias, especially regarding the depiction of war crimes, depending on who is considered responsible for those crimes and who the victims are. The selective presentation of information and the avoidance of assigning responsibility when it comes to crimes committed by Serbian forces remain characteristic of the vast majority of textbooks currently in use. Responsibility for crimes is presented selectively, and Serbia and the Serbian

1 Dragomir Bondžić i Kosta Nikolić, History 8: Textbook with Selected Historical Sources for the 8th Grade of Primary School (Istorija 8: udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za 8. razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2021; Vesna Dimitrijević, History 8: History Textbook for the Eighth Grade of Primary School (Istorija 8: udžbenik istorije za osmi razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: Vulkan Znanje, 2021; Ratomir Milikić i Ivana Petrović, History 8: Textbook with Selected Historical Sources for the Eighth Grade of Primary School (Istorija 8: udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za osmi razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: Novi Logos, 2022; Aleksandar Todosijević i Sanja Petrović Todosijević, History 8: Textbook with Selected Historical Sources for the 8th Grade of Primary School (Istorija 8: udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za 8. razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: Klett, 2021; Predrag M. Vajagić, Aleksandar Rastović i Bojana Lazarević, History for the Eighth Grade of Primary School (Istorija za osmi razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: Gerundijum, 2022; Ljubodrag Dimić i Ljiljana Raković, History: Textbook with Selected Historical Sources for the 8th Grade of Primary School (Istorija: udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za 8. razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: Freska, 2022; Milica Omrčen i Nevena Grbović, History 8: Textbook with Selected Historical Sources for the Eighth Grade of Primary School (Istorija 8: udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za osmi razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: Eduka, 2022; Dragana Hadžić i Marko Stanojević, History 8 – Textbook with Selected Historical Sources (Istorija 8 – udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima), Belgrade: Data Status, 2021; Uroš Milivojević, Zoran Pavlović i Vesna Lučić, History 8: Textbook with Selected Historical Sources for the Eighth Grade of Primary School (Istorija 8: udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za osmi razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: BIGZ školstvo, 2022; Momčilo Pavlović, History for the 4th Grade of General and Socio-Linguistic High School (Istorija za 4. razred gimnazije opšteg i društveno-jezičkog smera), Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2023; Momčilo Pavlović i Đorđe Đurić, History for the 3rd Grade of Natural Sciences High School and the 4th Grade of General and Socio-Linguistic High School (Istorija za 3. razred gimnazije prirodno-matematičkog smera i 4. razred opšteg i društveno-jezičkog smera), Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2012; Duško Lopandić, Manja Milinović i Ratomir Milikić, History 4: Textbook with Selected Historical Sources for the Fourth Grade of General and Socio-Linguistic High School (Istorija 4: udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za četvrti razred gimnazije opšteg tipa i društveno-jezičkog smera), Belgrade: Novi Logos, 2022; Mira Radojević, History 3/4, Textbook: For the 3rd Grade of Natural Sciences High School, 4th Grade of General and Socio-Linguistic High School, and 4th Grade of Vocational School for Legal and Administrative Profiles (Istorija 3/4, udžbenik: Udžbenik za treći razred gimnazije prirodno-matematičkog smera, četvrti razred gimnazije društveno-jezičkog smera i opšteg tipa i četvrti razred srednje stručne škole za obrazovne profile pravni tehničar i birotehničar), Belgrade: Klett, 2021; Danko Leovac i Suzana Rajić, History 3: Textbook for the 3rd Grade of General and Socio-Linguistic High School (Istorija 3, udžbenik za treći razred gimnazije opšteg tipa i društveno-jezičkog smera), Belgrade: Freska, 2022; Radoš Ljušić i Ljubodrag Dimić, History 3/4: Textbook for the 3rd Grade of Natural Sciences High School and 4th Grade of General and Socio-Linguistic High School (Istorija 3/4, udžbenik za treći razred gimnazije prirodno-matematičkog smera i četvrti razred gimnazije opšteg i društveno-jezičkog smera), Belgrade: Freska, 2014; Ivan Becić, History for the 2nd Grade of Vocational Secondary Schools (Istorija za 2. razred srednjih stručnih škola\*), Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2020.

people are generally portrayed as the sole or primary victims in the territory of the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s wars.

Most attention is given to the armed conflict in Kosovo, somewhat less to the one in Croatia, and the least to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The textbook authors devote most attention to the war in Kosovo, but the majority still focus on the period of NATO bombing from March to June 1999. Although the 1998 conflict period is mentioned in some textbooks, it mainly focuses on attacks by the Kosovo Liberation Army on members of the security forces of the Republic of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as well as on civilians in Kosovo. Extensive coverage is given to crimes committed by NATO forces, locations where civilians were killed during the bombings, and detailed data on the destruction of infrastructure are presented, but precise information about the number of casualties is not provided. Depending on the textbook, the number of civilian casualties ranges between 1,000 and 4,000. Civilian victims among Kosovo Albanians are mentioned if they were killed by NATO bombs or by the Kosovo Liberation Army during wartime and post-war violence.

The armed conflict in Croatia is also presented in a one-sided manner, with responsibility, both for its outbreak and for the crimes committed, mostly attributed to Croatian forces. The greatest amount of attention is given to the operations carried out by Croatian forces, Flash (Bljesak) and Storm (Oluja), where the number of expelled Serbs is mentioned, while crimes committed during the capture of Vukovar and the shelling of Dubrovnik are mentioned in only a few textbooks.

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina receives the least amount of attention in history textbooks, despite being the longest and most devastating conflict in the former Yugoslavia in terms of both the number of casualties and the level of destruction. A sign of progress is that war crimes committed during this conflict are acknowledged, but there is often an emphasis on portraying all three sides as equally responsible. Apart from that, Srebrenica is included in nearly all textbook interpretations of the history of wars in former Yugoslavia as a distinct and mass atrocity, and while the majority of textbooks note that it has been legally classified as genocide, they frequently question the credibility of the institution that classified or presents Srebrenica within a broader context of war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the aim of providing some form of justification for what Serbian forces did in the summer of 1995.

Textbooks noticeably devote more space to personal stories and testimonies of people who survived events from the 1990s, but similar to the treatment of victims, the focus is primarily on

crimes suffered by members of the Serbian population, these include testimonies of those who survived Operation Storm, the NATO bombing, or there are portrayals of Yugoslav Army soldiers who were killed during the Battle of Košare, etc.

## Introduction

The dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia began in June 1991, after Slovenia and Croatia declared independence. Between 1991 and 2001, several international and internal armed conflicts took place on the territory of the former state. The first clashes began in the spring in Croatia (1991–1995) and in Slovenia (June–July 1991), followed by international armed conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995) and Kosovo (1998–1999). Internal armed conflicts in Macedonia (February–August 2001) and southern Serbia (1999–2001) marked the end of the military conflict phase. During the wars fought across the territory of the former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 2001, more than 130,000 people lost their lives<sup>2</sup>, about 4.5 million were forced to flee or were displaced from their homes, and families are still searching for approximately 10,000 missing persons.<sup>3</sup>

In the course of carrying out ethnic cleansing across entire territories of the former Yugoslavia, mass and systematic crimes were committed, including mass killings of civilians and prisoners of war. Women and girls were especially subjected to systematic sexual violence, including forced pregnancies, while thousands of civilians and prisoners of war were detained in concentration camps and prisons where they were exposed to various forms of torture and inhumane treatment. A large number of victims' bodies were destroyed in operations aimed at eliminating evidence, through mass concealment or complete destruction of the remains. Cultural and historical monuments were massively and deliberately destroyed in an attempt to almost or completely erase entire communities from the areas where they had lived for centuries.

In order to restore the endangered international peace and security, and acting in accordance with Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, the UN Security Council established the International Criminal Tribunal by Resolution 827 in 1993, tasked with prosecuting individuals

2 RECOM Reconciliation Network estimates. Breaking the Silence on Mass Graves and the Fate of the Missing in the Wars on the Territory of the Former SFRY. Available at: <https://www.recom.link/bhsc/prekid-cutnje-o-tajnim-grobnicama-sudbini-nestalih-u-ratovima-na-podrucju-bivse-sfrj/>.

3 According to data from the International Committee of the Red Cross, in late August 2021, during the commemoration of the International Day of the Disappeared, it was announced that approximately 9,969 persons were still being sought in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/international-day-disappeared-search-continues-three-decades> . <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/human-rights-day-missing-persons-yugoslavia>.



responsible for grave violations of international humanitarian law committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia since January 1, 1991 (ICTY). This tribunal was intended to stop crimes and punish those responsible for serious breaches of international law.<sup>4</sup> From its establishment until the end of 2004, when the last indictments were issued, the ICTY indicted 161 individuals for the gravest violations of international law in former Yugoslavia. Of these 161 persons, 90 were convicted, 19 acquitted, proceedings against 37 were discontinued or charges were withdrawn, 13 were referred to courts in the region, while the proceedings against former officials of the Serbian State Security Service were resumed before the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (MICT).

Among them were the former President of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milošević; several high-ranking members of the Army of Republika Srpska, including the Chief of Staff of the Army of Republika Srpska, Ratko Mladić, and the former President of Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadžić; two former Chiefs of Staff of the Yugoslav Army, Momčilo Perišić and Dragoljub Ojdanić; senior political, military, and police officials from Serbia during the Kosovo war, such as Nikola Šainović, Milan Milutinović, Nebojša Pavković, Vladimir Lazarević, Sreten Lukić, and Vlastimir Đorđević; top commanders of the State Security Service (DB) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) of the Republic of Serbia during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović; commanders of Croatian forces during Operation Storm, including Croatian Army and Police generals Ante Gotovina, Ivan Čermak, and Mladen Markač; and the former Prime Minister of Kosovo and one of the commanders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, Ramush Haradinaj, among others.

Among the numerous crimes committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia that were prosecuted by international and domestic courts, the crime committed by the Army of Republika Srpska and Bosnian Serb forces in Srebrenica in July 1995 stands out in particular due to its legal classification. In that month, more than 8,000 Bosniaks—mostly men and boys—were killed after being captured in and around Srebrenica, following the fall of this United Nations-protected enclave to forces under the command of Ratko Mladić. In a series of verdicts delivered by the ICTY against political leaders and members of the armed forces of Republika Srpska, this crime was defined as genocide, and the events were characterized as an attempt to destroy the Bosnian Muslim population of eastern Bosnia. In its 2007 ruling in the case of *Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia* for violations of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the International Court of Justice found Serbia responsible for failing to

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4 Resolution 827 of the UN Security Council, 25 May 1993, S/RES/827 (1993).

prevent the genocide in Srebrenica and for failing to punish those responsible for the crime.<sup>5</sup>

In December 2010, by a resolution of the UN Security Council,<sup>6</sup> the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (MICT) was established with the aim of carrying out several essential functions of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and the ICTY, including the preservation of the legacy of these two international courts.<sup>7</sup> The Mechanism began its work in July 2012 in Arusha (Tanzania), and in July 2013 in The Hague (Netherlands), and from the outset operated in parallel with both tribunals, continuing its work after their closure in 2015 and 2017, respectively.

Since its inception, the work of the ICTY has been analyzed in terms of its contribution to both the development of international law and the process of confronting the past in the countries that emerged from the former Yugoslavia. The Tribunal counts among its achievements a significant contribution to establishing accountability and bringing perpetrators to justice, as well as providing a platform for victims and survivors to give voice to “the horrors they witnessed and endured.” In addition, the Tribunal particularly emphasizes its role in the “undeniable establishment of historical facts” as part of its fight against the denial of the truth, asserting that, thanks to the ICTY’s work, “the crimes committed throughout the region can no longer be denied.”<sup>8</sup> However, this last point is thoroughly questioned and criticized across the region, and remains a subject of debate and deep disagreement.

Denial of crimes represents one of the greatest challenges communities in the region face in their efforts to build a responsible attitude when it comes to the crimes of the past. Since the early 2000s, public opinion research has been conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, and Serbia regarding the war crimes committed during the 1990s. These studies quickly revealed that denial of crimes is the prevailing attitude among the majority of the population in these countries. The types of denial observed in these survey results vary, victims are

5 Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro), Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 2007. Available at: <https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/91/judgments>.

6 Resolution 1966 of the UN Security Council, 22 December 2010, S/RES/1966 (2010).

7 The functions of the Mechanism include locating and prosecuting remaining fugitives, conducting and completing all appellate proceedings for which a notice of appeal was filed after the competent branch of the Mechanism began its work, as well as reviewing the judgments of the ICTR, ICTY, and MICT if new facts emerge that were unknown at the time of trial or appeal, and if the chamber accepts that such facts, if proven, could be decisive in issuing the verdict. Additionally, the Mechanism may conduct retrials in cases previously tried before the ICTR, ICTY, or the Mechanism itself, and carries out investigations, trials, and appeals in cases of contempt of court and false testimony committed during proceedings before these tribunals. With the assistance of international and regional organizations, the MICT monitors cases referred to national courts by the ICTY or ICTR, and also provides assistance to national judiciaries. Furthermore, the Mechanism continues to ensure the protection of victims and witnesses who testified before the tribunals and MICT, supervises the enforcement of sentences, and is responsible for the preservation of materials and the management of the archives of the ICTR, ICTY, and the Mechanism.

8 Available at: <https://www.icty.org/bcs/o-mksj>.

acknowledged only when they belong to one's own community, and are typically portrayed as the most numerous, while the number of victims from the "other side" or their suffering are either downplayed or denied altogether.<sup>9</sup> The Tribunal's work is perceived as biased and unobjective, and therefore holds little value for the communities implicated in these cases.<sup>10</sup> There are many reasons why societies in the region have not accepted the established facts and the history of the 1990s wars as recorded in the ICTY rulings, from the very beginning, the Tribunal was contested, from the manner of its establishment, its composition and mandate, to the selection of cases and the way indictments were conducted. Accusations of bias in its work came from every state in the region, mostly based on perceptions of "unfairness" shown by the Tribunal towards the accused.

On the other hand, it is exactly because of the work of the ICTY that the wars in the former Yugoslavia are among the best-documented conflicts of modern times. More than 4,650 individuals testified, and over 10,800 trial days were conducted, documented in more than 2.5 million pages of transcripts.<sup>11</sup> This probably makes it the largest archive on the wars in the former Yugoslavia. The documentation—both collected from parties involved in the conflict and created by the Tribunal itself—is largely accessible to researchers through a public database on the Court's website. Some cases prosecuted by the Tribunal cover multiple countries, involve dozens of participants, and thousands of victims. The established facts span tens of thousands of pages, many of which are publicly available. Despite this, denial of crimes has remained part of official state policies since the end of the armed conflicts, continuing to cause pain to victims and keeping them in a state of constant re-traumatization.<sup>12</sup>

Serbia faced the issue of denial immediately after the fall of Slobodan Milošević from power in 2000. However, since 2012, denial in Serbia has gained strength, primarily due to the Serbian Progressive Party's (SNS) attitude toward the wars of the 1990s. According to an analysis by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights titled "The State of Denial: Serbia 2022 – The Time of Silent Pride (Stanje poricanja: Srbija 2022 Vreme tihog ponosa)," denial in Serbia has gone through several phases — from the formation of the new government in 2001 until the assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić in March 2003; then the second phase, which followed

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9 Public Awareness of Serbian Citizens about the Wars of the 1990s, War Crimes and Trials of the Accused for War Crimes (Obaveštenost građana Srbije o ratovima '90-ih godina, ratnim zločinima i suđenjima optuženima za ratne zločine). Public opinion research of Serbian citizens for the daily newspaper Danas (publisher Dan Graf). Available at: [https://www.hlcrdc.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/01/Istrazivanje\\_javnog\\_mnjenja\\_Sudjenja\\_za\\_ratne\\_zlocine\\_Demostat.pdf](https://www.hlcrdc.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/01/Istrazivanje_javnog_mnjenja_Sudjenja_za_ratne_zlocine_Demostat.pdf).

10 Ibid.

11 Available at: <https://www.icty.org/node/9590>.

12 The Report on Denial of the Genocide in Srebrenica in 2020 (Izveštaj o negiranju genocida u Srebrenici 2020. Godine). Available at: [https://srebrenicamemorial.org/assets/photos/editor/Izveštaj\\_o\\_negiranju\\_genocida\\_2.pdf](https://srebrenicamemorial.org/assets/photos/editor/Izveštaj_o_negiranju_genocida_2.pdf).

the rise of Vojislav Koštunica to power in March 2004; the third phase, which began with the signing of the Declaration on Political Reconciliation between the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party of Serbia; and finally, the last phase, in which Serbia has been since the Serbian Progressive Party came to power.<sup>13</sup> During the first phase, Serbia faced intense demands from the international community to cooperate with the ICTY and to break away from Slobodan Milošević's regime. However, due to a lack of consensus within the ruling coalition, Serbia's actions were often contradictory, and a responsible approach to the past was not established.<sup>14</sup> The second phase was marked by intensified cooperation with the Tribunal, but this was carried out through a strategy of "voluntary surrender" of the accused. At the same time, the Serbian government promoted a narrative of the Tribunal as "unjust," provided substantial material support to the families of the accused, and saw the accused off to The Hague as heroes.<sup>15</sup> The Declaration on Political Reconciliation, signed in October 2008 between the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party of Serbia, marked the political rehabilitation of the SPS, which enabled and strengthened denial, relativization, and the "ignoring of human rights violations committed by Serbian military, police, and paramilitary forces."<sup>16</sup> Finally, with the arrival of the SNS and the parties gathered around it to power, even the few (mostly unsuccessful) attempts for Serbia to build a responsible relationship with the past came to an end. According to the Youth Initiative's analysis, the "Time of Silent Pride" is characterized by a "revitalization of myths" created during Milošević's Serbia, relating to the "defensive wars Serbia fought and the unfair prosecution of deserving officers and fighters":

"These myths become the foundation of a new narrative built using lies, euphemisms, half-truths, relativizations, legalistic and verbal acrobatics in public discourse. This new approach to the past has been formalized through laws and regulations that prescribe what and how we remember, supported by the production of content aimed at reinterpreting and relativizing the facts established by the courts regarding the wars of the 1990s."<sup>17</sup>

In a society where convicted war criminals are called heroes and are featured in street murals, becoming key voices in conversations about the present and shaping the narrative of the past, generations born after 2005/2006 attend school without any memories of the 1990s wars and with little or no awareness of their consequences.

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13 The State of Denial: Serbia 2022 The Time of Silent Pride (Stanje poricanja: Srbija 2022 Vreme tihog ponosa), Youth Initiative for Human Rights, December 2023, pp. 2-3, available at: <https://yihf.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Stanje-poricanja-SRB.pdf>.

14 Ibid, p. 2.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid, p. 3.

17 Ibid.

# What do Young People know about the Past?

In August 2023, in collaboration with the public opinion research agency SmartPlus, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights conducted a study to examine how much young people know about what happened during the wars, what their opinions are when it comes to war crimes and their perpetrators, and how they view reconciliation and revisionist practices.<sup>18</sup> The research was carried out in August 2023 on a sample of 910 young people in Serbia, aged between 18 and 30.<sup>19</sup>

The research showed that young people's knowledge of the wars of the 1990s strongly influences their attitudes toward those wars, but also that their knowledge is quite limited. Most of what they know about the wars comes from conversations with parents and/or close family members, followed by what they learn at school, and then from the internet and traditional media.<sup>20</sup> This study, like previous ones, revealed that topics related to the wars of the 1990s are often overlooked in schools, as they are usually scheduled toward the end of the academic year—when both students and teachers are more focused on final grades than on covering new material. However, the research also showed that young people feel this topic is insufficiently covered in history classes: as many as 59% of respondents believe that more should be taught about the wars of the 1990s than has been the case so far.<sup>21</sup>

General knowledge about the wars of the 1990s, such as the number of victims, already shows signs of bias—for example, according to this research, the majority of respondents believe that more than 5,000 people were killed in the NATO bombing.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, their knowledge of events in which members of other ethnic groups were victims is limited. Based on this research, nearly 80% of young people know little or nothing about crimes committed by members of the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs against Kosovo Albanians, crimes committed by paramilitary formations against Bosniaks and Croats, as well as crimes committed by the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) against Croats and by the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) against Bosniaks.<sup>23</sup> Fewer than 4% of young people rate their knowledge of these events as excellent or believe they know a lot about them, while around 16% rate their knowledge as moderate.<sup>24</sup> Slightly higher levels of

18 Opinions of Young People about the 1990s Wars, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, November 2023, p. 7. Available at: [https://yih.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/231110-YIHR-Istrazivacki-izvestaj\\_Stavovi-mladih-u-Srbiji-o-ratovima-devedesetih\\_web-verzija.pdf](https://yih.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/231110-YIHR-Istrazivacki-izvestaj_Stavovi-mladih-u-Srbiji-o-ratovima-devedesetih_web-verzija.pdf).

19 Ibid, p. 9.

20 Ibid, p. 17.

21 Ibid, p. 18.

22 Ibid, p. 17.

23 Ibid, pp. 20-21.

24 Ibid.

knowledge are reported when it comes to crimes committed against the Serbian population by Croatian forces, the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)—more than 22% of respondents rated their knowledge of these events as moderate.<sup>25</sup> According to the young respondents, the most significant events related to the wars of the 1990s are: Operation Storm (Oluja) (18.68%), the NATO bombing (13.74%), the killing of civilians (4.40%), the dissolution of Yugoslavia (4.29%), and Srebrenica (2.75%). Although the NATO bombing was part of the armed conflict in Kosovo, it is particularly telling that only 1.18% of respondents consider it the most significant event of the 1990s.

Only a very small percentage of respondents say they know a lot about the work of the ICTY—1% say they know very much, and 3% say they know a lot—while nearly half (47%) believe they know very little, and almost a quarter (23%) say they know nothing at all.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, their perception of the ICTY is quite strong—62% of young people hold a negative attitude toward the Tribunal.<sup>27</sup> Approximately the same proportion of respondents—between 60% and 64%—disagree that the judgments of the Hague Tribunal were fair and impartial, that they had a positive impact on the democratic development of Serbian society, or that they contributed to uncovering the full truth about the events of the 1990s wars (60% of them).<sup>28</sup> More than 40.98% of respondents believe that the main purpose of the trials brought before the ICTY was to place the blame for war crimes on Serbia, while 23.31% of young people saw the primary goal of the trials as fulfilling the demands of the international community.<sup>29</sup> The goals most often emphasized by the Tribunal's founders, supporters and the Tribunal itself — preventing future war crimes and supporting the reconciliation process — are supported by only 6.48% and less than 3.18% of respondents, respectively.<sup>30</sup>

When it comes to crimes committed during the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia this research has confirmed that the victims of crimes committed by Serbian forces are completely invisible to the Serbian public.<sup>31</sup> The majority of respondents, 62.09%, had heard about the forced displacement of Serbs from Croatia in 1995, during Operations Flash and Storm in the spring and summer of that year, while just over half (53.52%) had heard about crimes committed

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid, pp. 24-25.

27 As noted in the study, half of that number holds a strongly [author's note] negative opinion, as much as 32% of the entire sample, while 30% of the entire sample has a generally negative opinion [author's note].

28 Ibid, p. 25.

29 Ibid, p. 27.

30 Ibid.

31 Jelena Đureinović, Politics of Memory on the Wars of the 1990s in Serbia: Historical Revisionism and Challenges of Memorialization (Belgrade: Humanitarian Law Center, October 2021), p. 14. Available at: [https://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Politika\\_secanja\\_bhs.pdf](https://www.hlc-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Politika_secanja_bhs.pdf).

by KLA members during the war in Kosovo.<sup>32</sup> When it comes to crimes committed by Serbian forces in Croatia, 15.28% had heard that paramilitary units from Serbia and members of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) killed civilians in Vukovar, and 14.95% had heard that the JNA bombed Dubrovnik.<sup>33</sup> Less than 20% of respondents had heard that Sarajevo was under siege by Serbian forces for more than three years (19.45%), while only 10.44% of young people had heard that members of the "Scorpions" unit, in 1995 near Trnovo, executed Bosniak boys taken from Srebrenica and filmed the entire event with a video camera.<sup>34</sup> A similar number, 7.47%, had heard that in 1992 Serbian armed forces committed systematic rapes of Muslim women in Foča, while slightly fewer, 7.14%, had heard that during the war in Bosnia there were camps for Croats and Muslims (Omarska, Trnopolje, Keraterm, and others).<sup>35</sup> Only 5.71% of young people had heard that paramilitary units from Serbia killed civilians in Bijeljina in 1992.<sup>36</sup>

Young people are also insufficiently informed about crimes committed on Serbian territory or against non-Serbian citizens of Serbia during the 1990s. Only 11.87% had heard that Croats in Vojvodina were intimidated and forcibly displaced during the war in Croatia, 11.10% had heard that Albanians were killed and forced to leave Kosovo before the NATO bombing, while only 10.55% had heard that in Sjeverin and Štrpci, during 1992 and 1993, Bosniak/Muslim citizens of Serbia were abducted from train and a bus and subsequently killed.

A negligibly small number of young people in Serbia have heard about the crimes committed during the armed conflict in Kosovo (during the period of NATO bombing) and their consequences. Only 4.73% had heard that Serbian armed forces killed a large number of Albanian women, children, and elderly in Podujevo and Suva Reka (Kosovo), while a slightly higher number, 10.44%, had heard that a large number of bodies of Albanian civilians were found in mass graves in Batajnica.<sup>37</sup>

The only war crime committed by Serbian forces (VRS) that young people in Serbia are more knowledgeable about is the genocide in Srebrenica, which 42.42% of young respondents had heard about. This is primarily attributed to the fact that for over two decades there has been a continuous campaign of "denying the legal qualification" of this crime, rather than successful

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32 Opinions of Young People about the 1990s Wars, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, November 2023, p. 35.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.



efforts to confront the past.<sup>38</sup>

An even smaller percentage of young people believe in the truthfulness of crimes attributed to Serbian forces – they generally accept the authenticity of events where Serbs were victims<sup>39</sup>, but doubt the responsibility of Serbian forces for crimes committed against members of other ethnic groups. Nearly half of them (44.19%) doubt that Serbian forces massacred Albanians in Suva Reka and Podujevo; 34.62% do not believe that Serbian paramilitary units killed civilians in Bijeljina; 25.74% doubt that the Yugoslav Army and the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs expelled and killed Albanians from Kosovo before the NATO bombing; while as many as 24.21% doubt the existence of the mass grave in Batajnica, even though the Serbian government publicly confirmed its existence in May 2001.<sup>40</sup> When asked about the greatest crime committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, young people in Serbia consider the crimes committed by Croatian forces during Operations Flash and Storm in 1995 as the biggest crimes (19.01%), followed by the NATO bombing (12.09%), and only then the killing of civilians of any nationality (8.13%).<sup>41</sup> Although the only crime legally defined as genocide during the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia is the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, only 4.73% of young people in Serbia consider it the greatest crime.<sup>42</sup>

The research showed that young people hold similar views when considering these crimes through the lens of whether they were an inevitability of war or war crimes. As many as 48.15% of young people believe that the intimidation and forced displacement of Croats in Hrtkovci was an inevitability of war, while 48.02% share this view regarding the multi-year siege of Sarajevo by Serbian forces. The bombing of Dubrovnik by the JNA in 1991 is seen as an inevitability of war by 44.85% of young people, and a slightly smaller number (41.58%) perceive the expulsion and killing of Albanians from Kosovo before the NATO bombing in the same way.<sup>43</sup> The results are drastically different when it comes to crimes against Serbs — 93.27% consider the crimes committed by the Croatian army against Serbs during Operations “Flash” and “Storm” in the spring and summer of 1995 to be war crimes, and 90.51% hold the same view regarding the killing and torture of Serbs in Osijek in 1991.<sup>44</sup> A slightly lower percentage consider the Croatian army’s operation in the Medak Pocket in 1993, crimes committed by the KLA in Kosovo, the

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38 Ibid, p. 34.

39 Ibid, p. 36.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid, p. 38.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid, p. 37.

44 Ibid.



raping of Serbian women in the Čelebići camp, and the torture and killings in the Lora prison in Split to be war crimes.<sup>45</sup>

This research has shown that young people's knowledge about the wars of the 1990s is limited and biased, dominated by superficiality, (self-)victimization, and the relativization of responsibility for committed crimes when Serbian forces are held accountable. Although they are familiar with the main figures of the 1990s, such as Slobodan Milošević, Vojislav Šešelj, Ratko Mladić, Radovan Karadžić, Franjo Tuđman, Alija Izetbegović, Ante Gotovina, Nebojša Pavković, and Vladimir Lazarević, their opinions are ethnically biased. As a result, young people tend to have a more positive view of convicted Serbian war criminals and consider the ICTY verdicts against them unjust, believing that they are not responsible for the crimes for which they were prosecuted and convicted.

Another important conclusion of this research is that young people are aware of the limited nature of their knowledge and, probably because of that, they believe that the wars of the 1990s are insufficiently taught in schools. They also think the school curriculum should be expanded to include more content on these topics.

## Analysis of History Textbook Content in Serbia

In a content analysis of history textbooks prepared and published by the Humanitarian Law Center in 2015, several issues were identified that pointed to bias and superficiality in the history textbooks used in Serbia from 2000 to 2014.

The analysis focused on comparing the interpretation of war crimes committed during the armed conflicts in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo in history textbooks with the facts established by the ICTY regarding the abovementioned events. It was concluded that the events of the 1990s wars are presented sparsely and superficially, and that they are depicted with bias, especially in the context of representing the committed war crimes and the victims.<sup>46</sup> The data were presented selectively, and facts that might indicate a negative role of Serbia and

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> „Analysis of the Content of History Textbooks in Serbia about the Wars in the Former Yugoslavia in Light of Established Facts before the ICTY (Analiza sadržaja udžbenika istorije u Srbiji o ratovima u bivšoj Jugoslaviji u svetlu utvrđenih činjenica pred MKSJ), in History Textbooks in Post-Conflict Societies: Education for Reconciliation? (Udžbenici istorije u post-konfliktnim društvima: Obrazovanje za pomirenje?), ed. Marijana Toma (Belgrade: Humanitarian Law Fund, 2015), p. 14.

the Serbian people during this period were omitted. Instead, the textbook authors made efforts to portray Serbs and the Serbian people as the sole or greatest victims among the peoples of the former Yugoslavia during the wars of the 1990s.<sup>47</sup> Much more attention and space were devoted to the political and social crisis that followed the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980 than to the wars during which the former Yugoslav state disintegrated.<sup>48</sup> Tito was portrayed as the key figure in preserving Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav idea, without whose presence Yugoslavia was doomed to collapse.<sup>49</sup>

Regarding the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, more attention is given to the wars in Croatia and Kosovo (during the NATO bombing period) than to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, even though this conflict was the longest and most devastating armed conflict in the former Yugoslavia in terms of both casualties and the scale of destruction. Little attention is also given to war crimes committed in these conflicts; mostly crimes in which members of the Serbian people were victims are presented, often accompanied by some legal qualification. In contrast, crimes committed by Serbian forces are described briefly, responsibility is avoided, or they are not mentioned at all.<sup>50</sup> Currently, 16 history textbooks are in use in Serbia — nine for

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47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid, pp. 19-25.

elementary schools and seven for general and vocational high schools.<sup>51</sup>

# The Dissolution of Yugoslavia and the Beginning of Armed Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia

The political and economic crisis of the Yugoslav state that began after the death of the Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito, as well as the major political and social changes in Europe and the world—the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the communist system under the control of Soviet Union, and the fall of the Berlin Wall—are interpreted differently in various primary school history textbooks.

The death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980 is generally considered the chronological beginning of the breakup of the unified Yugoslav state, primarily because with his death, the “personality

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51 Dragomir Bondžić and Kosta Nikolić, History 8: Textbook with Selected Historical Sources for the 8th Grade of Primary School (Istorija 8: udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za 8. razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2021; Vesna Dimitrijević, History 8: History Textbook for the Eighth Grade of Primary School (Istorija 8: udžbenik istorije za osmi razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: Vulkan Znanje, 2021; Ratomir Milikić and Ivana Petrović, History 8: Textbook with Selected Historical Sources for the Eighth Grade of Primary School (Istorija 8: udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za osmi razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: Novi Logos, 2022; Aleksandar Todosijević and Sanja Petrović Todosijević, History 8: Textbook with Selected Historical Sources for the 8th Grade of Primary School (Istorija 8: udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za 8. razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: Klett, 2021; Predrag M. Vajagić, Aleksandar Rastović and Bojana Lazarević, History for the Eighth Grade of Primary School (Istorija za osmi razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: Gerundijum, 2022; Ljubodrag Dimić and Ljiljana Raković, History: Textbook with Selected Historical Sources for the 8th Grade of Primary School (Istorija: udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za 8. razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: Freska, 2022; Milica Omrčen and Nevena Grbović, History 8: Textbook with Selected Historical Sources for the Eighth Grade of Primary School (Istorija 8: udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za osmi razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: Eduka, 2022; Dragana Hadžić and Marko Stanojević, History 8 – Textbook with Selected Historical Sources (Istorija 8 – udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima), Belgrade: Data Status, 2021; Uroš Milivojević, Zoran Pavlović and Vesna Lučić, History 8: Textbook with Selected Historical Sources for the Eighth Grade of Primary School (Istorija 8: udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za osmi razred osnovne škole), Belgrade: BIGZ školstvo, 2022; Momčilo Pavlović, History for the 4th Grade of General and Socio-Linguistic High School (Istorija za 4. razred gimnazije opšteg i društveno-jezičkog smera), Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2023; Momčilo Pavlović and Đorđe Đurić, History for the 3rd Grade of Natural Sciences High School and the 4th Grade of General and Socio-Linguistic High School (Istorija za 3. razred gimnazije prirodno-matematičkog smera i 4. razred opšteg i društveno-jezičkog smera), Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2012; Duško Lopandić, Manja Milinović and Ratomir Milikić, History 4: Textbook with Selected Historical Sources for the Fourth Grade of General and Socio-Linguistic High School (Istorija 4: udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za četvrti razred gimnazije opšteg tipa i društveno-jezičkog smera), Belgrade: Novi Logos, 2022; Mira Radojević, History 3/4, Textbook: For the 3rd Grade of Natural Sciences High School, 4th Grade of General and Socio-Linguistic High School, and 4th Grade of Vocational School for Legal and Administrative Profiles (Istorija 3/4, udžbenik: Udžbenik za treći razred gimnazije prirodno-matematičkog smera, četvrti razred gimnazije društveno-jezičkog smera i opšteg tipa i četvrti razred srednje stručne škole za obrazovne profile pravni tehničar i birotehničar), Belgrade: Klett, 2021; Danko Leovac and Suzana Rajić, History 3: Textbook for the 3rd Grade of General and Socio-Linguistic High School (Istorija 3, udžbenik za treći razred gimnazije opšteg tipa i društveno-jezičkog smera), Belgrade: Freska, 2022; Radoš Ljušić and Ljubodrag Dimić, History 3/4: Textbook for the 3rd Grade of Natural Sciences High School and 4th Grade of General and Socio-Linguistic High School (Istorija 3/4, udžbenik za treći razred gimnazije prirodno-matematičkog smera i četvrti razred gimnazije opšteg i društveno-jezičkog smera), Belgrade: Freska, 2014; Ivan Becić, History for the 2nd Grade of Vocational Secondary Schools (Istorija za 2. razred srednjih stručnih škola), Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2020.

whose authority was one of the most important foundations on which the Yugoslav state rested”<sup>52</sup> disappeared. His death, which caused “great sorrow” in Yugoslavia, marked the “beginning of the collapse of his work – the socialist federative Yugoslavia,”<sup>53</sup> and signaled a period of “renewed strengthening of nationalism in the Yugoslav republics and the resurgence of historical national conflicts.”<sup>54</sup> Several aspects of the crisis in the early 1980s are covered in primary school textbooks — the crisis in Kosovo, the economic crisis, separatist tendencies of the Yugoslav republics, changes in the political system, and so on.

The Kosovo crisis is generally described in a fairly consistent way in most textbooks. According to some authors, the situation in Kosovo had not been stable since 1968, as “Albanian separatists constantly pressured the Serbs, destroyed their property, and were even killing them”<sup>55</sup> which resulted in the displacement of Serbs and a continuous decrease in the Serbian population.<sup>56</sup>

The textbook by Momčilo Pavlović for the 4th grade of general and social-linguistic high school programs states that:

*“The outbreak of Albanian nationalism and separatism in the spring of 1981 marked the awakening of a latent nationalism that was fatal for the community. [...] Contrary to widespread propaganda, the Albanian political elite already exercised sovereign control over Kosovo. Pressure on Serbs continued, including rapes, destruction of property, and even murders motivated by national hatred. This only intensified the displacement of Serbs, which in fact had been ongoing since 1945, and led to the reduction of the Serbian share of the total population to 13.2%.”<sup>57</sup>*

Some authors also mention an estimated number of Serbs who emigrated from Kosovo between 1966 and 1989 to Serbia and other parts of Yugoslavia—around 200,000 of them.<sup>58</sup> One of the textbooks particularly emphasizes the political causes of the crisis in Kosovo, highlighting that “the constitutional arrangements from 1974 enabled the province to be almost completely isolated from Serbia.” Under this pressure, between 1961 and 1981, 42% of all Serbs and 63% of

52 Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, 221.

53 Omrčen and Grbović, 205-206.

54 Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, 221.

55 Hadžić and Stanojević, 206.

56 Ibid.

57 Pavlović, 222.

58 Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, 221.

all Montenegrins left the province.”<sup>59</sup>

The responsibility for the crisis in Kosovo is attributed solely to Albanian aspirations for independence, but textbooks interpret Albanian motives differently—according to some authors, Albanians aimed for secession from Serbia<sup>60</sup> and the creation of an independent state<sup>61</sup>, while most authors addressing this topic speak of Albanian efforts for the Autonomous Province of Kosovo to become the seventh republic and to be recognized as a constituent (state-forming) nation.<sup>62</sup> Some authors particularly emphasize the slogans chanted by the demonstrators, such as “Kosovo — republic,” “Kosovo for Kosovars,” “Unification with Albania,” and “We are Albanians, not Yugoslavs,” highlighting the anti-Yugoslav nature of these protests.<sup>63</sup>

Several textbooks mention the police repression in Kosovo due to the demonstrations, stating that there were “armed clashes between the authorities and the demonstrators,” which led to the decision to declare ‘a state of emergency’ [...] “because the demonstrations were deemed a counter-revolution that threatened the constitutional order of the country and its territorial integrity.”<sup>64</sup> The textbook by Dragana Hadžić and Marko Stanojević states that the “separatist demonstrations [...] were suppressed by police action.”<sup>65</sup>

Only the textbook by authors Aleksandar Todosijević and Sanja Petrović Todosijević provides a broader discussion of the consequences of the crisis for the population in the southern Serbian province:

*“In 1981, unrest broke out in the territory of the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo. Representatives of Kosovo Albanians demanded that SAP Kosovo become the seventh republic of the SFRY and that Albanians be recognized as a constituent nation in Yugoslavia. After the suppression of the demonstrations in Kosovo, relations between Serbs and Albanians further deteriorated.”<sup>66</sup>*

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59 Ljušić and Dimić, 284.

60 Omrčen and Grbović, 208.

61 Ibid.

62 Hadžić and Stanojević, 206; Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, 221.

63 Ljušić and Dimić, 284.

64 Ibid.

65 Hadžić and Stanojević, p. 206;

66 Todosijević, Petrović-Todosijević, p. 212;

Authors generally agree that the long-lasting economic and political crisis was one of the greatest in Yugoslavia's history; inflation that affected the country was severe, and the population's living standards grew increasingly difficult.<sup>67</sup> Some authors also point to the communist leadership's inability to resolve the crisis: "the one-party system failed to find solutions for high unemployment, shortages of consumer goods, and growing social inequalities."<sup>68</sup> Only three primary school textbooks provide a more detailed account of the constitutional changes in Serbia and Yugoslavia, which further deepened the Yugoslav crisis and had a particular impact on the events in Kosovo.

The textbook by Predrag M. Vajagić, Aleksandar Rastović, and Bojan Lazarević covers this period of Serbian and Yugoslav history in a dedicated chapter titled The Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution. According to these authors, the Serbian leadership did not have a unified position on resolving the problems that arose in the relations between Serbia and the other Yugoslav republics.<sup>69</sup> Special focus is placed on the conflict between the President of the Presidency of the Republic of Serbia, Ivan Stambolić, and the President of the League of Communists of Serbia, Slobodan Milošević, regarding their approaches to the Yugoslav crisis.<sup>70</sup> While Stambolić was described as trying to resolve problems through cooperation with other republics and provinces and saw the revival of nationalism as something dangerous for Yugoslavia, Milošević was described as believing that Serbia should solve its problems independently.<sup>71</sup> It is noted that after meeting with Serbs in Kosovo Polje, Milošević voiced support for the complaints of Kosovo Serbs about the violence they endured from Albanians, which earned him widespread backing among the Serbian public and enabled him to defeat Stambolić at the Eighth Session of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia.<sup>72</sup> The goal of his policy, as stated by Vajagić and others, was the "establishment of a unified Serbia," which was supported by "mass gatherings of the Serbian people, under whose pressure the leaderships of Vojvodina and Kosovo and Metohija were removed," and "after more than four decades, Serbs were allowed to freely express their national feelings."<sup>73</sup> In this way, Serbia, through constitutional changes, "reestablished constitutional and legal unity throughout its entire territory."<sup>74</sup>

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67 Omrčen and Grbović, p. 206;

68 Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, p. 221;

69 Ibid, 239.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

The same period is covered under the same title in Mira Radojević's textbook for the final year of high schools, but the author also links it to Serbia's unequal position compared to other republics due to the constitutional changes of 1974. "Contrary to the constitutionally legalized aspirations of the Croatian and Slovenian leaderships to strengthen the powers of the federal units, Serbia, because of its dependence on its provinces, found itself in a subordinate political and economic position."<sup>75</sup> According to the author, this position of Serbia was the result of the Yugoslav policy of "Weak Serbia – Strong Yugoslavia."<sup>76</sup>

A completely different perspective on this crisis is presented in the textbook by Aleksandar Todosijević and Sanja Petrović-Todosijević—they emphasize that Milošević's policy aimed to "increase Serbia's control over its autonomous provinces—Vojvodina and Kosovo."<sup>77</sup> that his appearance in Kosovo in the spring of 1987 aimed to portray him as the "protector of the interests of the Serbian people."<sup>78</sup> His actions led to constitutional changes in 1989, which "reduced the level of autonomy of the provinces and strengthened the authority of republican institutions over the entire territory of the Socialist Republic of Serbia."<sup>79</sup> During the crisis that dominated the Yugoslav state, authors emphasize that the Serbian leadership under Milošević advocated for preserving a unified Yugoslavia, as only a united country served the interests of the Serbian people, who, as the largest ethnic group, were also the most widely spread.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, authors also highlight the aspirations of Slovenia and Croatia to reorganize the state from a federation into a confederation, in which each republic would be given the right to decide whether it wants to "remain within Yugoslavia or outside of it."<sup>81</sup> In examining the problems that shook the former joint state in the late 1980s, authors particularly emphasize the "especially difficult position" of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was a distinctly "multiethnic federal unit, where Muslims, Serbs, Croats, and citizens who identified and declared themselves as Yugoslavs lived fully intermingled with one another."<sup>82</sup> The textbook by Dragana Hadžić and Marko Stanojević discusses the consequences of the constitutional crisis in Kosovo—they state that due to the constitutional changes, "miners of Albanian nationality in Kosovo and Metohija went on a general strike," and they mention that after police intervention, hundreds of people

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75 Radojević, 374.

76 Ibid.

77 Todosijević, Petrović-Todosijević, 212.

78 Ibid, 213.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

were arrested.<sup>83</sup>

Some authors have described the demonstrations in Kosovo, as well as the constitutional provisions of 1974, as “disintegration processes” that “lead to the fragmentation of Serbia,” which called for urgent changes in Serbia’s constitutional and legal status to stop such a process. However, these efforts were not understood in Zagreb and Ljubljana, while the provincial leaderships interpreted them as a threat to autonomy.<sup>84</sup> Due to the growing dissatisfaction among the Serbian people, the “Serbian question” was openly raised. After Milošević’s visit to Kosovo Polje in 1987, he became the “leader of the people,” but time showed that he “was not prepared” to resolve this issue, that he did not understand it, and that he failed to grasp its democratic nature.<sup>85</sup>

The breakup of the Yugoslav communists and the revival of parliamentary life in the former Yugoslavia are covered in more detail in several textbooks. Alongside the political and economic crisis shaking Yugoslavia, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the communist system formed the backdrop against which the last congress of Yugoslav communists was organized.

As it is stated in one of the textbooks:

*“The Slovenian and Croatian delegations advocated for the independence of republican party organizations, the introduction of a multi-party-political system, and for the republics to receive the rights that states have. According to this proposal, Yugoslavia was to be transformed into a confederation of states formed by its republics. In contrast, the Serbian delegation supported the modernization of the Yugoslav state as a federation, in which each federal unit would be represented proportionally to its population size.”<sup>86</sup>*

The authors do not delve further into interpreting these statements, leaving the conclusion that the Serbian communists under Milošević’s control indeed acted as defenders of Yugoslavia in contrast to their party comrades from Slovenia and Croatia. However, the claim that the position advocating the modernization of Yugoslavia into a federation—where “each unit would be represented proportionally to its population”—effectively meant Serbia’s dominance due to its largest population.

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83 Hadžić and Stanojević, 206.

84 Ljušić and Dimić, 284-285.

85 Ibid, 285.

86 Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, 222.



The multi-party elections that followed the breakup of the Yugoslav communists in early 1990 are not covered in great detail, except in a few textbooks. One of them particularly emphasizes that “in Serbia and Montenegro, the communists remained in power, while in the other republics, parties with a civic orientation prevailed.”<sup>87</sup> Others note that “on the wave of awakened national sentiments, whose public expression was prohibited in socialist Yugoslavia,” voters also chose an independent path for their republics outside Yugoslavia, but emphasize that “the right to self-determination was denied to minority peoples.”<sup>88</sup> This topic is explored in more detail in the textbook by Dragomir Bondžić and Kosta Nikolić, where greater attention is given to the transformation of the Serbian communists into the Socialist Party of Serbia, as well as the revival and formation of old and new political parties, primarily exemplified by the reestablishment of the Democratic Party and the formation of the Serbian Renewal Movement, which would become the main opposition to Milošević’s SPS.<sup>89</sup> Attention is also given to the lack of democracy in Serbia in the early 1990s, the uprisings and demonstrations by opposition parties and students against Slobodan Milošević, motivated by the persecution and arrests of political opponents.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, several other authors discuss the protests against Milošević’s regime in more detail: “Milošević’s regime, through the media it controlled, conducted a campaign against opposition leaders, accusing them of being ‘compradores’ and working against Serbia’s interests.”<sup>91</sup> The opposition was dissatisfied with this, but especially with the control Milošević had over the media. They organized protests on March 9, 1991, which the police attempted to violently disperse, during which two people lost their lives.<sup>92</sup>

As with textbooks used up to 2015, the current ones also do not pay much attention to the influence of foreign policy factors in the context of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. One textbook that deals with this issue in more detail—and also attributes responsibility to these factors for what the authors call the fragmentation of Yugoslavia—is the textbook by Ljubodrag Dimić and Ljiljana Raković. Particularly emphasizing the changes brought by the end of the Cold War and the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe on Yugoslavia’s foreign and domestic political position, the authors stress that Yugoslavia’s political leaders were unable to adapt and fit into the new circumstances.<sup>93</sup> They particularly emphasize that the policy of non-alignment no longer held the same weight as it did during the decades of the bipolar world, and that the

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87 Dimić and Raković, 246.

88 Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, 222.

89 Bondžić and Nikolić, 209.

90 Ibid, 210.

91 Todosijević, Petrović-Todosijević, 215.

92 Ibid.

93 Dimić and Raković, 245.

new circumstances shaped the victors of the Cold War—the United States and the West—into a “new world order” in which small countries like Yugoslavia had to align their policies and interests.<sup>94</sup> Although the authors highlight the failures of the Yugoslav leadership to adapt to the new circumstances, they also indirectly assign responsibility to the United States and the global West, which, seeing that Yugoslavia did not fit into the new order, regarded Yugoslavia as having “no place in that new world order.” “And this came to pass with the fragmentation and breakup of the territory once defined by its borders.”<sup>95</sup>

In Mira Radojević’s textbook for the final year of general high school, the interest of certain parts of the international community in intervening in the Yugoslav conflict is analyzed. Radojević states that the war provided an opportunity for the European Community to position itself as an “international judge,” while the United States used it to “impose its leadership,” and Germany gained the chance to “free itself from the foreign policy constraints imposed after World War II.”<sup>96</sup>

## Beginning of the Wars – Slovenia

The armed conflict in Slovenia is, by most authors, viewed in the context of the wars that would follow or occur during the same period (Croatia), or as part of a broader conflict—that is, a “civil war,” which is how textbook authors generally define the armed conflicts in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

There is no disagreement among historians about when the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia began—the conflict started between the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) and the Territorial Defense of Slovenia, after Slovenia and Croatia declared independence following referendums in which the majority of citizens in both republics voted for sovereignty. The war lasted from June 27 to July 7, 1991. It began with the JNA’s attempt to carry out “an order from Ante Marković” (then President of the Federal Executive Council of Yugoslavia),<sup>97</sup> and to regain control over border crossings with Italy and Slovenia.<sup>98</sup> In the textbook by Ljubodrag Dimić and Ljiljana Raković, it is stated that Slovenia’s decision to take control of the border

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94 Ibid.

95 Ibid.

96 Radojević, 378.

97 Milikić and Petrović, 247.

98 Ibid, Dimić and Raković, 247, Todosijević, Petrović-Todosijević, 215-216.

crossings represented a “denial of Yugoslav state sovereignty.”<sup>99</sup> In the conflict, which lasted about ten days, several dozen people were killed (according to textbooks, between 40 and 70),<sup>100</sup> depending on whether the authors included members of the Slovenian Territorial Defense or only JNA personnel. Most authors emphasize that among the JNA casualties, the majority were young men between the ages of 18 and 23 who were serving their mandatory military service in Slovenia.<sup>101</sup> The war ended with the signing of the Brioni Declaration in July 1991<sup>102</sup> and the withdrawal of the JNA from Slovenia, after which Slovenia — “which had initiated the process of Yugoslavia’s dissolution” — definitively became a sovereign state.<sup>103</sup>

Only a few authors address other aspects of this conflict — Milikić and Petrović emphasize that this first armed conflict on European soil after the end of World War II revealed “the full brutality of a civil war in which the SFRY would disappear,” using as an example the downing of a JNA helicopter that was delivering food to soldiers stationed in blockaded barracks.<sup>104</sup> Dimić and Raković go even further — in their textbook, they claim that the Territorial Defense units (which existed in all republics of the former SFRY) in Slovenia and Croatia were armed and transformed into paramilitary units between 1971 and 1991.<sup>105</sup> On the other hand, only the textbook by Aleksandar Todosijević and Sanja Petrović Todosijević mentions the protest in which the mothers of JNA soldiers, who were serving their mandatory military service in Slovenia, interrupted a session of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, demanding the return of their sons home.<sup>106</sup> This textbook is also the only one that mentions the attempt of former SFRY Prime Minister Ante Marković and his political party, the Union of Reform Forces, to inform the citizens of Yugoslavia objectively through the creation of their own TV program, Jutel, which was broadcast by TV Sarajevo from 1990 to 1992. It also notes that in late July 1991, Jutel organized the anti-war campaign “Concert for Peace,” featuring the biggest music stars of the former Yugoslavia — a concert that all national TV stations refused to broadcast, except those in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. In Serbia, it was aired only by the local station Studio B, which had resisted the control of Milošević’s regime for many years.<sup>107</sup> This textbook also includes an

99 Dimić and Raković, 247.

100 Dimitrijević: 40 members of JNA; Milikić and Petrović: 50 members of JNA and around 20 members of Slovenian Territorial Defense; Todosijević, Petrović-Todosijević: more than 60 people, of which 44 members of JNA; Bondžić and Nikolić: 44 members of JNA, Lopandić, Milinović and Milikić: 50 members of JNA.

101 Hadžić and Stanojević, 207; Dimitrijević, 209; Todosijević, Petrović-Todosijević, 216.

102 Todosijević, Petrović-Todosijević, 216.

103 Dimić and Raković, 247.

104 Milikić and Petrović, 262.

105 Dimić and Raković, 247.

106 Todosijević, Petrović-Todosijević, 216.

107 Ibid, 217.

excerpt from the Brioni Declaration, the peace agreement signed on July 8, 1991, under the auspices of the European Economic Community, which stipulated the withdrawal of JNA forces from Slovenia.<sup>108</sup> Only one textbook mentions that, under this agreement, Slovenia and Croatia committed to refraining from taking “further steps toward independence,”<sup>109</sup> as noted by the ICTY in its ruling against Milan Martić.<sup>110</sup>

## War in Croatia

The armed conflict in Croatia began in the spring of 1991 and ended in the summer of 1995, following two military operations — “Flash” (in May 1995) and “Storm” (in August 1995) — carried out by the military and police forces of the Republic of Croatia to regain control over territories held by Croatian Serbs (Western Slavonia and the Krajina region). Eastern Slavonia was returned to Croatian authority through a peaceful reintegration process outlined in the Erdut Agreement, signed in November 1995.<sup>111</sup> During the four-year conflict between the forces of the Republic of Croatia and the forces of Croatian Serbs, the JNA, and Serbian paramilitary units, numerous crimes were committed against both Croatian and Serbian civilians. According to estimates from several documentation centers that have been researching and recording human losses in the former Yugoslavia for years, around 17,000 people were killed in Croatia.<sup>112</sup>

Most textbooks in Serbia devote considerable space to the armed conflict in Croatia, covering the causes that led to the war, its course, and its consequences. However, there is a noticeable ethnic bias in how the victims of the war in Croatia are portrayed. Two authors even define the crimes committed against Serbs in Croatia as genocide, highlighting this legal qualification as a subheading within the lesson unit titled: The Civil War in Croatia and the New Genocide committed against the Serbian People.<sup>113</sup>

Most textbooks place the beginning of the crisis in Croatia in 1990, when the first clashes began between Croatian Serbs and the new political leadership of the Republic of Croatia. Several textbooks particularly emphasize the fear felt among the Serbian population in Croatia, where “old hatred between Serbs and Croats was flaring up.”<sup>114</sup>, due to collective memory of crimes

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108 Ibid, 2016.

109 Dimitrijević, 209.

110 Prosecutor v. Milan Martić, Trial Chamber Judgment, IT-95-11-T, para. 136.

111 Letter dated 15 November 1995 from the Permanent Representative of Croatia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, A/50/757 S/1995/951, 15 novembar 1995.

112 RECOM - Reconciliation Network, Victims of the Wars in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia 1991-2001. Available at: <https://www.glaszrtava.org/zrtve/>

113 Dimić and Raković, 247.

114 Bondžić and Nikolić, 210.

committed during the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), which was an “anti-Serb and a criminal creation.”<sup>115</sup> Most authors agree that Croatia’s steps toward independence focused on stripping the Serbian people in Croatia of their rights, as Serbs lost their status as a constituent nation and were reduced to a national minority under the new constitution.<sup>116</sup> Serbs in Croatia feared that their “existence was threatened and that a new genocide was imminent.”<sup>117</sup> An anti-Serb campaign was waged against them; they were fired from jobs in public service, especially in the police and enterprises, and subjected to “fabricated criminal, misdemeanor, and disciplinary proceedings with the sole aim of minimizing political and national rights.” Because of this, their politics shifted from fighting for political and cultural autonomy to fighting for complete “separation from Croatia and remaining in Yugoslavia,” which resulted in the proclamation of the Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK).<sup>118</sup> The RSK constitution confirmed the right to self-determination and “the creation of a democratic state of the Serbian people on their ‘historical and ethnic territory.’”<sup>119</sup> The loss of their rights was a decisive factor that led to the armed rebellion against the “Croatian Ustasha-like state (paramilitary units, return of Ustasha émigrés, secret recording by the Counterintelligence Service about General Martin Špegelj’s weapons procurement, etc.).”<sup>120</sup>

The war in Croatia began as a “local, limited, and partly controlled”<sup>121</sup> conflict at the end of March 1991 in Plitvice, but the spring was marked by clashes between “paramilitary formations of Croatia and Serbs in Borovo Selo.”<sup>122</sup> Croatian police and paramilitary forces attacked and blockaded JNA barracks; “roads were mined, prominent Serbs and JNA members, as well as their family members, were executed, and houses and apartments were looted.”<sup>123</sup> Due to the fighting, “some Croats had to leave the territory of the RSK,” and it is also noted that “a large number of Serbian refugees, mostly from urban areas,” headed toward Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>124</sup> Until the withdrawal of the JNA following the signing of the ceasefire in early 1992, the role of the JNA in the conflicts in Croatia is generally presented positively — the JNA prevented clashes by positioning itself between the Croatian police and irregular forces and

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115 Dimitrijević, 208.

116 Dimić and Raković, 247; Bondžić and Nikolić, 211; Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, 223; Dimitrijević, 209; Milikić and Petrović, 262;

117 Bondžić and Nikolić, 211.

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid.

120 Dimić and Raković, 247.

121 Bondžić and Nikolić, 211.

122 Dimić and Raković, 247.

123 Hadžić and Stanojević, 208.

124 Ibid.

Serbs;<sup>125</sup>, its soldiers and barracks were attacked and blockaded by Croatian forces<sup>126</sup>, and its role and goal were to protect the territorial integrity of the entire Yugoslavia.<sup>127</sup>

When it comes to the fighting that took place in Croatia at the beginning of the war, several textbooks mention the battles around Vukovar and Dubrovnik<sup>128</sup>, without specifying how the fighting began and/or unfolded, what its scale was, or what the consequences of these battles were. Only two textbooks provide somewhat more detailed information on these topics.

In the textbook by Ratimir Milikić and Ivana Petrović the following is stated:

*“The beginning of the armed conflict and war in Croatia was marked by an attack by Croatian irregular units on the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) in September 1991, when all military facilities were blockaded, and its members were arrested and killed. The JNA attempted to remove the blockades and break through to territories not controlled by Croatian forces. During that time, the Battle of Vukovar was fought — a town on the Danube where approximately equal numbers of Croats and Serbs lived, and where a Serb had been elected mayor. Croatia sent a large number of irregular military units to Vukovar in order to enforce new laws adopted in Zagreb. Several thousand people were killed in the fighting for the town. War crimes were also committed against the civilian population during the battles. In other parts of Croatia, armed clashes also took place, during which a large number of civilians were forced to flee their homes.”<sup>129</sup>*

The textbook by Vesna Dimitrijević is somewhat more precise, as it also mentions, among other things, war crimes and the ethnicity of the victims who perished in these operations:

*“During the summer, Croatian authorities began blockading JNA barracks, believing that the Yugoslav army had sided with Serbs. In September, the first war crimes were committed — Croatian forces killed 13 captured Serbs near Karlovac. Clashes intensified around Dubrovnik and Vukovar. After the complete destruction of the city, JNA units lifted the blockade of Vukovar in*

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125 Milikić and Petrović, 262.

126 Dimitrijević, 209.

127 Bondžić and Nikolić, 211.

128 Bondžić and Nikolić, 211; Todosijević, Petrović-Todosijević, 220; Hadžić and Stanojević, 208; Dimić and Raković, 248.

129 Milikić and Petrović, 263.

*November. Following the takeover of the city, a war crime was committed against around 260 captured Croatian soldiers and civilians, who were executed at a nearby agricultural estate known as 'Ovčara'."*<sup>130</sup>

The textbook by Aleksandar Todosijević and Sanja Petrović Todosijević provides more information about the crimes as well — in a text box, the authors specifically explain what crimes against humanity are and offer more details about one of the political leaders of the Croatian Serbs who was prosecuted before the ICTY, Milan Babić. It is stated that Babić was charged with crimes against humanity committed against members of the Croatian population living in areas controlled by the Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK), that he pleaded guilty in 2004, and was sentenced to 13 years in prison, after which he committed suicide while in the Tribunal's custody.<sup>131</sup> The authors also pay special attention to the murder of the Zec family, a Serbian family in Zagreb, which was carried out by members of Croatia's special police units.<sup>132</sup>

Much more detail is given about the end of the war in Croatia and the operations of Croatian forces in the spring and summer of 1995. The textbooks mention various initiatives coming from the international community in an attempt to stop the war in Croatia and secure peace — the deployment of United Nations peacekeeping forces (UNPROFOR), as well as various diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving peace through negotiated agreements. Two textbooks specifically mention the Z-4 Peace Plan, which envisioned the peaceful reintegration of the areas inhabited by Serbs into Croatia — autonomy for the Knin Krajina region and full integration of Western and Eastern Slavonia, Baranja, and Western Srem.<sup>133</sup> While one textbook states that the authorities of the Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK) rejected the plan<sup>134</sup>, another notes that there was "procrastination" in accepting it.<sup>135</sup> Croatian authorities took advantage of this and, in early May, launched Operation "Flash," which, according to the textbook, "carried out a pre-planned ethnic cleansing of Serbs from the territory of Western Slavonia."<sup>136</sup> Although most primary school textbooks mention this event, only two refer to the number of victims: Dimitrijević states that "more than 280 soldiers and civilians were killed in the operation, and around 15,000 were expelled"<sup>137</sup>, while the other one cites the figure of 15,000 displaced Serbs<sup>138</sup>. Operation "Storm"

130 Dimitrijević, 209.

131 Todosijević and Petrović-Todosijević, 220.

132 Ibid, 221.

133 Hadžić and Stanojević, 208.

134 Ibid.

135 Dimić and Raković, 248.

136 Ibid.

137 Dimitrijević, 210.

138 Todosijević, Petrović-Todosijević, 221.

is covered in more detail, mostly focusing on the number of victims and its consequences for Croatian Serbs, as well as on the fact that Croatia had international support for this and similar operations, while UN forces and the international community “which were supposed to protect the Serbs did not react.”<sup>139</sup> Dimić and Raković even claim that “the military actions of the Croatian army were partly prepared in NATO army headquarters, primarily those of the United States and France. The Croatian military and political leadership demanded that the result of these operations be the complete destruction of the Serbian people in the territory of Croatia,”<sup>140</sup> and that during these operations, “unable to defend themselves, the majority of Serbs left their ancestral homes in Croatia and fled to Republika Srpska and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.”<sup>141</sup>

Operation “Storm” is described as “the largest expulsion of people from their homes in post-war Europe, to which no reaction came from the Western countries,” while “the manner of planning and carrying out the military operations, including the killing of civilians, destruction of material and cultural property of the Serbian people, and their mass displacement (250,000), bears all the characteristics of a genocide.”<sup>142</sup> As the goal of “Storm,” two textbooks quote the words of former Croatian president Franjo Tuđman: “to deliver such blows that the Serbs practically disappear [from these areas].”<sup>143</sup> Only one of the textbooks mentions what happened after these operations — “during Operations Flash and Storm and months following their conclusion, many crimes were committed against the Serbian civilian population (persecutions, deportations, looting, destruction, killings, inhumane acts, and cruel treatment), as well as ethnic cleansing.”<sup>144</sup> The number of victims of Operation Storm (or Operations Storm and Flash) ranges between 200,000 and 250,000 Serbs who were expelled from the regions of Dalmatia, Lika, Banija, and Kordun.<sup>145</sup> Two textbooks state the figure of 300,000 Serbs expelled from Krajina.<sup>146</sup> Several textbooks mention that, according to Serbian sources, around 447,000 Serbs left the territory of Croatia during the war.<sup>147</sup>

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139 Hadžić and Stanojević, 208.

140 Dimić and Raković, 248.

141 Milikić and Petrović, 266.

142 Dimić and Raković, 248.

143 Bondžić and Nikolić, 211 and Dimitrijević, 211.

144 Todosijević and Petrović-Todosijević, 221.

145 The figure of 200,000 is cited in the textbooks by Vesna Dimitrijević (p. 210) and Dragomir Bondžić and Kosta Nikolić (p. 216); the textbook by Hadžić and Stanojević cites 220,000 Serbs but includes the victims of Operation Flash in that number (p. 209); Aleksandar Todosijević and Sanja Petrović Todosijević mention 230,000 Serbs who were expelled during Operation Storm (p. 221); the figure of 250,000 expelled Serbs is cited by Dimić and Raković (p. 248), Milivojević, Pavlović, and Lučić (p. 248), Vajagić, Rastović, and Lazarević (p. 225), as well as Milikić and Petrović (p. 266).

146 Lopandić, Milinović and Milikić, 169 i Becić, 166.

147 Radojević, 379.



One of the authors of a textbook for the fourth grade of general high school, Momčilo Pavlović, in addition to citing the number of Serbs expelled during Operations Storm and Flash, also referenced data from the Croatian Helsinki Committee, a Croatian non-governmental organization that investigated crimes against the Serbian population in 1995. According to their findings, 99% of Serbs left Krajina, and in Knin alone, 80% of Serbian houses were burned down.<sup>148</sup> As an illustration of the persecution of Serbs by Croatian forces, Pavlović included statistical data in the appendix showing the percentage of Serbs in the population of the Republic of Croatia from 1948 to 2011.<sup>149</sup> The textbook for eighth grade by Aleksandar Todosijević and Sanja Petrović Todosijević also discusses demographic changes, stating that according to the 1991 census, Serbs made up 12.2% of the total population of Croatia, but today they constitute less than 5% of the citizens of the Republic of Croatia, and only a small number of the displaced population have returned to Croatia.<sup>150</sup>

Two textbooks present a series of military operations and war crimes committed during the war in Croatia (and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, though that part is covered in the section analyzing the armed conflict in BiH) in the form of a table. The events from 1991 are listed chronologically: the bloody Easter at Plitvice, the incident in Borovo Selo, the massacre in Gospić, the Battle of Vukovar, the massacre at Ovčara, and the massacre in Škabrnje; then from 1992: massacres in Western Slavonia, Operation Corridor, and the attack on the Miljevački Plateau; from 1993: Operation Maslenica, Operation Medak Pocket, and Bloody September in Lika; followed by 1995: Operation Flash and Operation Storm.<sup>151</sup> In none of the cases are detailed descriptions of these events provided, including information about the warring parties or the number of victims and/or casualties. Instead, students are encouraged to research these operations and crimes with the help of their teachers.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) dealt with the armed conflict in Croatia in a number of cases. Among others, the following individuals were prosecuted for war crimes in Croatia: Slobodan Milošević, former president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia; Momčilo Perišić, former Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army; high-ranking commanders of the State Security Service (DB) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) of the Republic of Serbia during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović; commanders of Croatian forces during Operation Storm, Croatian Army and Police generals Ante Gotovina, Ivan Čermak, and Mladen

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148 Pavlović, 225.

149 Ibid.

150 Todosijević and Petrović-Todosijević, 221.

151 Pavlović, 228 and Pavlović and Đurić, 249.

Markač; Milan Martić and Milan Babić, former presidents of the Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK); Slavko Dokmanović, president of the municipality of Vukovar; Goran Hadžić, president of the Serbian Autonomous Region of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srem, and president of the RSK; senior officers of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), Pavle Strugar and Miodrag Jokić, for crimes in Dubrovnik; and JNA officers Mile Mrkšić, Veselin Šljivančanin, and Miroslav Radić for crimes in Vukovar. Indictments were also issued against Janko Bobetko, Chief of the General Staff of the Croatian Army, and Željko Ražnatović Arkan, commander of the Serbian Volunteer Guard, but both died before the indictments could be brought against them.

For crimes committed in Croatia, the ICTY convicted Milan Martić, Milan Babić, Pavle Strugar, Miodrag Jokić, Mile Mrkšić, and Veselin Šljivančanin, while Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović were convicted in a retrial before the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT). Slobodan Milošević, Slavko Dokmanović, and Goran Hadžić died in the ICTY detention unit before the conclusion of their proceedings. Ivan Čermak, Ante Gotovina, Mladen Markač, Momčilo Perišić, and Miroslav Radić were ultimately acquitted for crimes committed in Croatia.

According to established facts before the ICTY, the conflict in Croatia was fought between Croatian armed forces and formations and the forces of the SAO Krajina, with the support of the JNA and Serbia, from the spring of 1991 until the summer of 1995. In many operations, members of the SAO Krajina Serb militia and the JNA participated jointly.<sup>152</sup> During these operations, the ICTY found that members of Serbian forces — including members of the JNA, the police, and the Territorial Defense of SAO Krajina — committed various crimes and “acts of violence against non-Serb civilian populations, including killings, arbitrary arrests and detention, beatings, looting of private property, destruction of Catholic churches, and the burning of houses. It was established beyond reasonable doubt that the targets of these crimes and acts of violence were almost exclusively civilians of non-Serb ethnicity, who were consequently forced to leave the area.”<sup>153</sup> In addition, in a number of rulings, the ICTY found that non-Serb civilians who remained in the territory of the Republic of Serbian Krajina were subjected to various crimes and acts of violence aimed at forcing them to completely leave the area — which the majority of them had done by April 1995.<sup>154</sup> In addition, in a series of judgments, as presented in the 2015 analysis by the Humanitarian Law Center (FHP), the ICTY established a number of facts about crimes committed by the JNA and Serbian forces during the siege of Vukovar, which resulted in the near-total destruction of the city and ended with the

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152 Prosecutor v. Milan Martić, Trial Chamber Judgment, IT-95-11-T, para. 138.

153 Prosecutor v. Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović, Judgment, MICT-15-96-T, para. 102.

154 Ibid.

execution of around 200 Croatian civilians and prisoners at the Ovčara farm — the first mass crime in the former Yugoslavia.<sup>155</sup> Although the battles around Dubrovnik at the beginning of the war are mentioned in several textbooks, it is omitted that the ICTY established that on December 6, 1991, JNA forces unlawfully shelled the Old Town, during which several civilians were killed and wounded, several buildings in the Old Town were completely destroyed, and many others were damaged.<sup>156</sup>

The facts about the crimes established in the verdict against Gotovina and others have not found their place in the majority of history textbooks in Serbia — nor is it mentioned that entire towns were treated as targets for shelling, or that Croatian forces committed numerous crimes not only during Operation Storm and immediately afterwards, but throughout the entire month of August and September, mostly against elderly and vulnerable Serbian civilians. Their property was looted and destroyed, and the Croatian political leadership introduced discriminatory measures against Serbs who had left Krajina, preventing them from returning to their homes.<sup>157</sup> Only Danko Leovac and Suzana Rajić, authors of the history textbook for the third grade of general and social-linguistic high school programs, included in a separate text box the key conclusions from the first-instance verdict against Gotovina and others. They highlighted that the defendants were “convicted of participating in a joint criminal enterprise led by Franjo Tuđman, whose goal was to forcibly and permanently remove the Serbian population during and after Operations Flash and Storm. The Hague Tribunal found them guilty of the crimes of persecution, deportation, plunder, destruction, murder, inhumane acts, and cruel treatment, but acquitted them of responsibility for the forcible displacement of the population.”<sup>158</sup> This textbook also mentions the acquittal by the Appeals Chamber of three Croatian officers, which was issued in November 2012.

## War in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The international armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the longest and most devastating of all the wars fought on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. It began in April 1992 and ended with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in November 1995. As guarantors of peace in Dayton, both the Republic of Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Republic of Serbia) appeared as signatories; they actively supported Bosnian Serbs and Croats, respectively,

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155 HLC, Analysis, 19.

156 Prosecutor v. Miodrag Jokić, Summary of Judgment, IT-01-42/1.

157 Prosecutor v. Ante Gotovina et al., Judgment, IT-06-90-T, paras. 2307–2308.

158 Leovac and Rajić, 109.

during this armed conflict. A vast number of crimes were committed during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a total of 95,940 people lost their lives. Among them, the majority were Bosniaks, with more than 31,000 civilians killed (representing as much as 81.35% of all civilian casualties), followed by 4,178 Bosnian Serb civilians (10.93%) and 2,484 Bosnian Croat civilians.<sup>159</sup>

However, this armed conflict receives less coverage in most textbooks in Serbia compared to the wars in Croatia and Kosovo. The most detailed information about the nature of the warring parties is provided by the textbook by Aleksandar Todosijević and Sanja Petrović Todosijević:

*"In the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, multiple warring parties were involved:*

- The military and police forces of the Bosniak government, later organized into the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Army of BiH), which, depending on the phase of the war, were supported by various Muslim formations, Croatian forces, and NATO units;*
- Serbian military and paramilitary formations, later organized into the Army of Republika Srpska, which, depending on the phase of the war, were supported by the JNA forces and paramilitary groups from Serbia;*
- Croatian military forces of the so-called Republic of Herceg-Bosna, supported by military and paramilitary formations from Croatia."<sup>160</sup>*

There is no consensus in Serbian textbooks about when the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina began. Some historians consider March 1992 as the start of the war, citing the event when "Muslim fighters attacked a Serbian wedding procession in Sarajevo and assaulted a Serbian Orthodox Church priest," which they see as the immediate trigger for the outbreak of conflict in Sarajevo, when Serbs erected barricades on city streets. They regard this event as the beginning of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>161</sup>

Some authors state that the exact date of the start of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina is still a matter of dispute among Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, but they present only the

<sup>159</sup> Mirsad Tokača, *Bosnian Book of the Dead (Bosanska knjiga mrtvih)*, (Research and Documentation Center Sarajevo – Humanitarian Law Center: Sarajevo, 2012), pp. 115–116.

<sup>160</sup> Todosijević and Petrović-Todosijević, 223.

<sup>161</sup> Lopandić, Milinović and Milikić, 167; Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, 224; Hadžić and Stanojević, 210.

Serbian interpretation, claiming that a member of the Green Berets, Ramiz Delalić Čelo, was the one who fired on the Serbian wedding procession, thus starting the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>162</sup> One author, however, believes that the war also began with the crossing of Croatian units into Bosnia and Herzegovina and their attacks on members of the JNA and civilians.<sup>163</sup>

Most textbooks, however, place the start of the war within the context of Bosnian Serbs' disagreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina's declaration of independence and the political leadership's efforts to remain in Yugoslavia, which Slovenia and Croatia had already left. The causes of the war are described as: "disregard for the will of the Serbian people as one of the three constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the holding of a referendum on Bosnia and Herzegovina's independence, the demand for recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina as an independent state despite opposition from Serbian representatives, and interference by the United States and other Western countries, all of which led to armed conflict."<sup>164</sup> According to one textbook, the "dissolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina" began in October 1991, after the Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted the Act on the Sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its secession from Yugoslavia — a decision rejected by Serbian deputies who considered it unconstitutional.<sup>165</sup> Another textbook states that "the Muslim leadership advocated for an independent Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Croats declared the Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna, and the Serbs, on January 9, 1992, proclaimed the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the future Republika Srpska)."<sup>166</sup> Some authors consider the decision to declare Bosnia and Herzegovina's independence as the trigger for the war, since it was "made unlawfully and against the will of the Serbian people as a constituent nation in that republic."<sup>167</sup> The creation of Republika Srpska is defined as "an expression of the will and struggle of the Serbian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina amid the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation." One textbook goes into more detail about the referendum held in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the tense situation, and the arming of all national groups, the blockade of Sarajevo and other cities that followed after the killing of a Serbian wedding guest, as well as the attacks by "Muslim and Croatian formations on JNA members, and the blockade of barracks."<sup>168</sup>

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162 Leovac and Rajić, 110

163 Milikić and Petrović, 263 and Lopandić, Milinović and Milikić, 167.

164 Pavlović, 227.

165 Milivojević, Pavlović and Lučić, 249 and Radojević, 377.

166 Dimitrijević, 211.

167 Ljušić and Dimić, 287.

168 Hadžić and Stanojević, 210.

After Bosnia and Herzegovina was recognized by the international community, the Serbs declared the independence of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and “under international pressure, the JNA had to withdraw from Bosnia and Herzegovina, so the Serbian people formed their own army.”<sup>169</sup> The first period of the war is described in one textbook as follows: “Thanks to the weapons left behind by the JNA, as well as the skill and courage of its officers and soldiers, the Army of Republika Srpska quickly brought most of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s territory under its control. Of vital importance to the Serbian people was securing a land connection between the western and eastern parts of Republika Srpska, which ran along the right bank of the Sava River. In 1992 the Croatian forces attempted to cut off this corridor, but in a large operation, the Serbs pushed them back to the left bank of the Sava River.”<sup>170</sup>

Unlike this textbook, another one states:

*“After a series of isolated smaller clashes, fighting broke out across Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatian army units launched military operations in the Posavina region and southwestern Bosnia. From April 1992 onwards, Serbian armed formations established control over Bijeljina and other towns along the Drina River, near the border with Serbia (Zvornik, Foča, and Višegrad). The conflicts in Eastern Bosnia were accompanied by numerous crimes and ethnic cleansing against the civilian population.”*<sup>171</sup>

Some authors specifically mention that in May 1992, during the withdrawal of JNA forces from Bosnia and Herzegovina, “Muslim units fired on unarmed soldiers in lines retreating from Sarajevo and Tuzla and committed war crimes, killing more than one hundred officers and soldiers.”<sup>172</sup> The same textbook also states that Sarajevo was under blockade by Serbian forces but emphasizes that many Serbs were “detained in the city, as Muslim forces did not allow them to leave” and that “war crimes against Serbs were committed within the city, confirmed in 2021 by an independent international commission.”<sup>173</sup> In contrast, the eighth-grade textbook by Aleksandar Todosijević and Sanja Petrović Todosijević notes that heavy fighting took place around Sarajevo and that “exposed to attacks, the citizens of Sarajevo faced shortages of food, water, and electricity for more than three years.”<sup>174</sup>

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169 Dimitrijević, 211.

170 Ibid.

171 Todosijević and Petrović-Todosijević, 223.

172 Lopandić, Milinović and Milikić, 167.

173 Ibid.

174 Todosijević and Petrović-Todosijević, 223.

Most authors describe the crimes committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina as mass atrocities; some even provide the total number of casualties (around 100,000), emphasizing that in terms of both the number of casualties and the extent of destruction, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the largest conflict in the former Yugoslavia.<sup>175</sup> One textbook uses the term “pogroms of civilians—Serbs, Croats, and Muslims,” which left behind mass graves, listing their locations — Kazani near Sarajevo, Kozarac in Prijedor, Foča, Šipovo, Bratunac, Srebrenica, “ruined cities (Mostar, Sarajevo, Goražde),” while describing the ethnic cleansing carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina as “recorded as the harshest form of creating new national territories.”<sup>176</sup> Most authors also characterize the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina as religious in nature, noting that during the war “Orthodox and Catholic churches, monasteries, parish houses, mosques, and madrasas were destroyed.”<sup>177</sup>

Like in the case of Croatia, two textbooks presented a series of military operations and war crimes committed during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the form of a table. Chronologically, the events from 1992 are: clashes around Sarajevo, attack on a JNA column in Sarajevo, attack on a JNA column in Tuzla, Operation Corridor; from 1993: the massacre in Kravica, the massacre in Zenica, the massacre in Budakovići; from 1994: the massacre at Markale, Operation Tiger 94, Operation Spider; from 1995: the massacre at Kapija, lifting of the Sarajevo blockade, crimes against civilians in Bratunac and surroundings, the massacre in Srebrenica, the massacre at Markale, Operation Deliberate Force, Dayton Agreement.<sup>178</sup> As in the previous case, no detailed information is provided on these events, including the warring parties or data on victims and/casualties. Furthermore, the choice of events is problematic — war crimes are combined with military operations and peace agreements.

Some authors see the international community as an important factor in the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which played an active role both through diplomatic means and ultimately through military intervention. It is stated that all three sides in the conflict had external support: the Muslims received support from Saudi Arabia and the Republic of Turkey, the Croats from Croatia, and the Serbs were aided by Serbia.<sup>179</sup> Particular emphasis is placed on the international community’s efforts to secure peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina through various proposed peace agreements, but some authors especially highlight the role of the

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175 Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, 224.

176 Leovac and Rajić, 110.

177 Ibid.

178 Pavlović, 228 and Pavlović and Đurić, 249.

179 Ibid.



United States, which “directly prevented” the Lisbon Agreement proposal.<sup>180</sup> Several authors state that the United States became more actively involved in resolving the Yugoslav conflict from 1994 onwards, especially after the shelling of the Markale marketplace, in which a large number of civilians were killed: “The Serbian forces were immediately accused of the attack (to this day, it has not been proven from which warring side the shell was fired),” after which NATO issued an ultimatum to the Serbs to withdraw heavy weaponry from around Sarajevo.”<sup>181</sup> The United States also exerted pressure on Croatia to make peace and enter into an alliance with the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1994 through the Washington Agreement, which ended the Muslim-Croat conflict that had begun in 1993.<sup>182</sup> Vesna Dimitrijević states that the United States viewed “the arrival of thousands of foreign volunteers, Islamic extremists, into the army commanded by Alija Izetbegović favorably. Many of them would later, as members of terrorist organizations, pose a threat to the security of Western European countries and the United States.”<sup>183</sup>

## Srebrenica

Unlike the analysis conducted by the Humanitarian Law Center (FHP) in 2015—which found that Srebrenica was mentioned in several history textbooks, but that only one addressed in detail the legal classification of the genocide—of the 16 textbooks currently used in Serbia, only one fails to mention Srebrenica at all.<sup>184</sup> Of the remaining 15, three textbooks mention Srebrenica but do not distinguish it from other crimes<sup>185</sup>, while one textbook does highlight it, but the discussion follows an interpretation of crimes committed against Serbs in the Srebrenica area in 1992 and 1993, when Muslim forces killed “children and the elderly.”<sup>186</sup> Following this, Serbian units “committed grave war crimes against Muslim fighters and men who were breaking out of the town. Some of them were captured and executed, while others were killed in combat.”<sup>187</sup>

Two textbooks discuss Srebrenica, but they do not mention the legal classification of the crime committed against Bosniaks in July 1995. They also fail to note that the ICTY prosecuted

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180 Proposal of the British diplomat Lord Carrington and José Cutileiro, Portuguese diplomat, coordinator of the European Community Conference on Yugoslavia.

181 Milikić and Petrović, 265.

182 Ljušić and Dimić, 287.

183 Dimitrijević, 213.

184 Ivan Becić, History for the 2nd Grade of Vocational Secondary Schools (Istorija za 2. razred srednjih stručnih škola), 10th reprinted edition, Zavod za udžbenike: Belgrade, 2023.

185 Radojević, 379; Ljušić and Dimić, 287; Leovac and Rajić, 110.

186 Lopandić, Milinović and Milikić, 169.

187 Ibid.



those responsible for the crime and classified it as genocide, nor do they mention that the International Court of Justice, in its 2007 ruling, also defined the crime as genocide.<sup>188</sup> However, the authors do note that in March 2010, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Declaration on Srebrenica, which “strongly condemned” the crime committed in Srebrenica and called on the other warring parties to continue the process of reconciliation<sup>189</sup> and to condemn the crimes committed against Serbs.<sup>190</sup>

Three history textbooks mention that members of the Serbian forces committed crimes in Srebrenica, for which some were prosecuted before the ICTY, such as Radislav Krstić<sup>191</sup> and/or that the International Court of Justice classified these crimes as genocide, without mentioning the Declaration of the National Assembly of Serbia. One of them states:

*“The greatest crime in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was committed in July 1995, following the entry of Serbian forces under the command of General Ratko Mladić into Srebrenica, a UN-protected zone. Thousands of Bosniak men were killed at that time; they had been captured while attempting to reach territory controlled by the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This crime cast a dark shadow over the brave struggle of the Army of the Republika Srpska, commanded by professional officers who, during their training, acquired knowledge of the proper treatment of prisoners of war. The International Court of Justice has classified this crime as genocide.”<sup>192</sup>*

In six history textbooks used in Serbia, Srebrenica is discussed within an international legal context, mentioning that one of the courts dealing with this crime classified it as genocide, and that Serbia, by adopting the Declaration in the National Assembly, took an important step to distance itself from this crime.<sup>193</sup>

Regarding the number and nature of the victims in Srebrenica, some authors do not know the “reliable” number of casualties<sup>194</sup>, while others state that “historians disagree on the number

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188 Bondžić and Nikolić, 212 and Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, 226.

189 Bondžić and Nikolić, 212.

190 Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, 226.

191 Pavlović, 229.

192 Dimitrijević, 214.

193 Milikić and Petrović, 266; Omrčen and Grbović, 207; Hadžić and Stanojević, 210-211; Dimić and Raković, 250; Milivojević, Pavlović and Lučić, 250; Todosijević and Petrović-Todosijević, 224-225.

194 Omrčen and Grbović, 207.

of those killed and fallen”<sup>195</sup>, Generally, the figure mentioned is several thousand (fit for military service) men, some of whom died in combat and others were executed<sup>196</sup>, and some authors note that the exact number of those executed has yet to be definitively established.<sup>197</sup> Two textbooks give the number of eight thousand Srebrenica victims, but in both cases, the authors immediately present the claim that this figure is considered an “exaggeration.”<sup>198</sup> Meanwhile, in the textbook by Momčilo Pavlović for the 4th grade of general and social-linguistic high-school, which also cites the number of eight thousand victims, it is stated that the data on the total number of victims in Srebrenica is “questionable.”<sup>199</sup>

Unlike Serbian historians, the ICTY devoted most attention specifically to the crimes committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as to establishing the facts about the events that led to the war, as already noted in the analysis conducted by the Humanitarian Law Center in 2015.<sup>200</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, a special focus will be placed on the proceedings before the ICTY in cases related to Srebrenica, since this crime in Bosnia and Herzegovina has received the most attention in textbooks in Serbia.

Before the ICTY, 20 individuals were indicted for crimes committed by members of the VRS in Srebrenica, and 18 were convicted. Those convicted of genocide include Radovan Karadžić, President of the Republika Srpska and Supreme Commander of the VRS until July 1996, who was sentenced to life imprisonment for genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of the laws and customs of war;<sup>201</sup> Ratko Mladić, Commander of the VRS Main Staff, who was sentenced by the ICTY to life imprisonment for genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of the laws and customs of war;<sup>202</sup> Zdravko Tolimir, Assistant Commander for Intelligence and Security Affairs of the VRS Main Staff, sentenced to life imprisonment for genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of the laws and customs of war;<sup>203</sup> Vujadin Popović, Lieutenant Colonel and Assistant Chief of Security in the VRS Drina Corps, sentenced to life imprisonment for genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of the laws and customs of war;<sup>204</sup> Ljubiša Beara, Colonel and Chief of Security of the VRS Main Staff, sentenced to life

195 Milikić and Petrović, 266.

196 Milivojević, Pavlović and Lučić, 250; Dimić and Raković, 250; Dimitrijević, 214.

197 Bondžić and Nikolić, 212 and Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, 226.

198 Pavlović and Đurić, 249 and Hadžić and Stanojević, 210.

199 Pavlović, 229.

200 HLC, Analiza, 20-21.

201 Prosecutor v. Radovan Karadžić IT-95-5/18 and MICT-13-55.

202 Prosecutor v. Ratko Mladić IT-09-92 and MICT-13-56.

203 Prosecutor v. Zdravko Tolimir (IT-05-88/2).

204 Prosecutor v. Popović and others IT-05-88.

imprisonment for genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of the laws and customs of war;<sup>205</sup> Drago Nikolić, Second Lieutenant and Chief of Security of the VRS Zvornik Brigade, sentenced to 35 years for aiding and abetting genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of the laws or customs of war;<sup>206</sup> and Radislav Krstić, Chief of Staff/Deputy Commander and later Commander (from 13 July 1995) of the VRS Drina Corps, sentenced to 35 years for aiding and abetting genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of the laws or customs of war.<sup>207</sup>

For crimes committed in Srebrenica in July 1995, Momir Nikolić, Assistant Commander for Security and Intelligence Affairs of the VRS Bratunac Brigade, was sentenced to 20 years for crimes against humanity after pleading guilty;<sup>208</sup> Radivoje Miletić, Head of the Department for Operational-Teaching Affairs of the VRS Main Staff, was sentenced to 18 years for crimes against humanity and violations of the laws and customs of war;<sup>209</sup> Dragan Obrenović, Chief of Staff and Deputy Commander of the 1st Zvornik Infantry Brigade of the VRS Drina Corps and acting Commander of the Zvornik Infantry Brigade, was sentenced to 17 years for crimes against humanity;<sup>210</sup> Ljubomir Borovčanin, Deputy Commander of the Special Police Brigade of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) of the Republika Srpska and Commander of the joint forces of MUP units subordinated to the VRS Drina Corps involved in the Srebrenica operation, was sentenced to 17 years for crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war;<sup>211</sup> Vidoje Blagojević, commander of the Bratunac Brigade of the VRS, was sentenced to 15 years for crimes against humanity and violations of the laws and customs of war.<sup>212</sup> Vinko Pandurević, lieutenant colonel and commander of the Zvornik Brigade of the Drina Corps of the VRS, was sentenced to 13 years for crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war;<sup>213</sup> Dragan Jokić, Chief of Engineering of the VRS Zvornik Brigade, was sentenced to nine years for crimes against humanity and violations of the laws and customs of war;<sup>214</sup> Milan Gvero, Assistant Commander for Morale, Legal, and Religious Affairs of the VRS Main Staff, was sentenced to five years for crimes against humanity;<sup>215</sup> and Dražen Erdemović, a soldier in the 10th VRS Commando Unit, was sentenced to five years for crimes against

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205 Ibid.

206 Ibid.

207 Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstić IT-98-33.

208 Prosecutor v. Momir Nikolić IT-02-60/1.

209 Prosecutor v. Popović and others IT-05-88.

210 Prosecutor v. Dragan Obrenović IT-02-60/2.

211 Prosecutor v. Popović and others IT-05-88.

212 Prosecutor v. Blagojević and Jokić IT-02-60.

213 Prosecutor v. Popović and others IT-05-88.

214 Prosecutor v. Blagojević and Jokić IT-02-60.

215 Prosecutor v. Popović and others IT-05-88.

humanity.<sup>216</sup>

The latest verdict for crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia was issued by the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals in the case of high-ranking members of the State Security Service (DB) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) of the Republic of Serbia during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović.<sup>217</sup> The Appeals Chamber found Stanišić and Simatović responsible as members of a joint criminal enterprise for violations of the laws and customs of war and crimes against humanity committed by various Serbian forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995.<sup>218</sup> One of the crimes for which Stanišić and Simatović were sentenced to 15 years involved members of the Serbian “Scorpions” unit, who executed six Bosniak men and boys from Srebrenica in Trnovo.<sup>219</sup>

Former Serbian and Yugoslav president Slobodan Milošević was also indicted for genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina before the ICTY, but he died in custody before the first-instance verdict was delivered in 2006.<sup>220</sup> Former Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, Momčilo Perišić, was acquitted in February 2013 of charges related to crimes committed in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Furthermore, the legal classification of the crimes in Srebrenica established by the ICTY was confirmed in 2007 by the International Court of Justice, which in its judgment in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina versus the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia found Serbia responsible for violating the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.<sup>221</sup>

## War in Kosovo and the Bombing of the FRY

The crisis in Kosovo, which began in the 1980s, escalated with Slobodan Milošević’s rise to power in Serbia in 1987. Following his arrival in office, repression against Kosovo Albanians intensified. Throughout the early 1990s, they responded with non-violent resistance, and later,

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216 Prosecutor v. Dražen Erdemović IT-96-22.

217 Prosecutor v. Stanišić and Simatović, MICT-15-96-A.

218 They were convicted for crimes committed in 1992 in Bijeljina, Zvornik, Bosanski Šamac, Doboj, and Sanski Most, and in 1995 in Trnovo and Sanski Most.

219 Prosecutor v. Stanišić and Simatović, Ruling of the Appeals Chamber, MICT-15-96-A.

220 Prosecutor v. Slobodan Milošević IT-02-54, available at: [https://www.icty.org/bcs/case/slobodan\\_milosevic](https://www.icty.org/bcs/case/slobodan_milosevic)

221 Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro), Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 2007. Available at: <https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/91/judgments>.

after the formation of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), with armed resistance. The armed conflict in Kosovo began in early 1998. After several failed diplomatic efforts to end the fighting, NATO launched an airstrike intervention against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in March 1999. The conflict ended in June with the withdrawal of the Yugoslav Army (VJ) and the Ministry of the Interior (MUP) of the Republic of Serbia from Kosovo. Members of the Yugoslav Army and Serbian police committed numerous war crimes against Kosovo Albanians, while the KLA was responsible for crimes committed against Serbs, Roma, and other non-Albanians, as well as Albanians whom they considered ‘collaborators’ with the Milošević regime.

The armed conflict in Kosovo is discussed in great detail in textbooks in Serbia, including its causes, the course of the conflict, international influence and involvement, the number of victims (on the Serbian side), and its consequences.

Some authors explain the crisis in Kosovo as an attempt by the Albanians to secede from Serbia and a complete separation of their political representatives from those of Serbia.<sup>222</sup> It is noted that in the early 1990s, the Albanians adopted a Declaration on the Establishment of the Republic of Kosovo within the SFRY and created parallel structures of government, while simultaneously boycotting Serbia and its institutions — including the population census, state schools, and more.<sup>223</sup>

Most authors, however, explain the crisis in Kosovo that eventually led to the 1998–1999 war by pointing to the formation and armed activity of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). One textbook states that “the daily armed actions of Albanian terrorist groups, under the name of Kosovo Liberation Army, including acts of banditry, ambushes, and clashes with law enforcement forces, in which increasing numbers of civilians—both Serbs and Albanians—were killed,”<sup>224</sup> led to a sharp escalation of the crisis in Kosovo. To support the claim, the author provides statistical data on terrorist attacks in Kosovo from 1991 to August 30, 1998, stating that 90,616 police officers and 20,510 civilians were attacked, of whom 1,374 police officers and 2,681 civilians were killed, while 49,282 members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and 2,195 civilians were wounded.<sup>225</sup> The first KLA attacks mentioned are those carried out in late April 1996, “against civilians and police in Dečan, Štimlje, near Kosovska Mitrovica, and in Peć.” It is stated that, at the time, the KLA did not have broad support among the Albanian population in Kosovo<sup>226</sup>, but it succeeded

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222 Leovac and Rajić, 113.

223 Ibid. Dimitrijević, 219.

224 Pavlović, 231.

225 Ibid.

226 Leovac and Rajić, 113

in positioning itself as a rival to the Democratic League of Kosovo, led by Ibrahim Rugova—a representative of the Kosovo Albanian majority who supported Kosovo’s independence but sought to achieve it through peaceful means and negotiations with the Serbs.<sup>227</sup> According to Serbian historians, the KLA was financed by the Albanian diaspora in Germany, Switzerland, and the United States<sup>228</sup>, and in addition to terrorist attacks in Serbia, it was also involved in drug trafficking across Europe, which further funded its operations.<sup>229</sup> The authors generally do not go into detail about KLA attacks, but describe them as numerous, emphasizing that the KLA did not target only the Serbian army and police, but also civilians—particularly “Albanians who did not support independence, girls who were in relationships with Serbs, Albanians employed in state institutions who did not resign at the KLA’s request, those believed to be collaborators with security services, as well as those who maintained good relations with Serbs.” In addition, it is emphasized that the KLA also carried out terror against other minority groups in Kosovo—Roma, Turks, and Gorani—thus violating “basic human rights and freedoms.”<sup>230</sup>

The depiction of the crisis that unfolds in the first half of 1998 is particularly detailed:

*“Attacks on police patrols began. On roads and highways, terrorists intercepted motor vehicles and checked people’s identification without authorization. Civilians were taken from buses, private vehicles, or their homes, disappeared without a trace, and were taken to camps. Kidnappings became frequent, targeting people working in their fields and vineyards. The Serbian population, although poorly armed, organized patrols and village watches.”*<sup>231</sup>

Under such circumstances, a “wide operation to neutralize Albanian armed groups” was launched, and the events from late February in Likošan and on March 5, 1998, in the village of Donje Prekaze in Drenica — “when the first KLA leader, Adem Jašari, was killed” — are considered the beginning of the Serbian–Albanian war.<sup>232</sup> By mid-1998, according to Serbian textbooks, the KLA controlled around 40% of Kosovo’s territory.<sup>233</sup> In the summer of 1998, KLA members briefly captured Orahovac, where, as stated, they committed numerous war crimes

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227 Lopandić, Milinović and Milikić, 170.

228 Milikić and Petrović, 270.

229 Lopandić, Milinović and Milikić, 170.

230 Leovac and Rajić, 114.

231 Ibid.

232 Bondžić and Nikolić, 218.

233 Leovac and Rajić, 114.

against Serbs.<sup>234</sup>

The international community was actively involved in the crisis from the very beginning — some authors claim that the West “openly” supported the Albanians from the start<sup>235</sup>, while others state that they also actively took part in KLA operations — initially through private military training companies from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, and later, members of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) expanded the KLA’s training, not only by providing weapons but also by giving “precise instructions for combat against Serbian police forces, military installations, and units, using intelligence data from the CIA and NATO.”<sup>236</sup>

In addition, one of the textbooks places particular emphasis on the demands that the international community presented to Serbia in order to stop the conflict in Kosovo — “the withdrawal of special police and army units, unrestricted access for all humanitarian and other organizations, the arrival of investigators from the Hague Tribunal, the start of an unconditional dialogue with the Albanian leadership, as well as the acceptance of international mediation in the negotiations.”<sup>237</sup>

As stated in most textbooks, Serbia rejected international involvement up until the fall of 1998. However, due to the “escalation of the crisis,” the UN Security Council called for an end to hostilities and the withdrawal of Serbian security forces from Kosovo, citing the “indiscriminate and excessive use of force.”<sup>238</sup> According to the textbooks, NATO’s threats of bombing contributed to the conclusion of the Agreement on the OSCE Verification Mission between Serbian forces and the KLA, which allowed the arrival of more than 1,400 observers from various countries. The authors of one textbook specifically emphasize that these were “vetted intelligence officer personnel,” whose real goal was to “assist in the reorganization of the KLA after its complete defeat during the suppression of the armed rebellion, to support the training of terrorists and their logistics so that the terrorists could regain positions on the ground.”<sup>239</sup> In addition, the OSCE Mission observers were also supposed to prepare and provide logistical support for the NATO bombing of Serbia, “a decision that had, in essence, already been made.”<sup>240</sup>

The “Račak incident” is cited as the pretext for the bombing, where, according to one textbook,

234 Milikić and Petrović, 270.

235 Bondžić and Nikolić, 218.

236 Leovac and Rajić, 114.

237 Bondžić and Nikolić, 219.

238 Ibid.

239 Ibid.

240 Ibid.

“the Serbian police allegedly carried out a massacre of innocent civilians of Albanian nationality.”<sup>241</sup> The textbook by Milikić and Petrović, however, offers a broader explanation — at the beginning of 1999, after the killing of several Serbian police officers, Serbian forces “liberated the Kosovo village of Račak from Albanian terrorists,” but William Walker, head of the OSCE Observer Mission, accused them “of committing a war crime against Albanian civilians who, according to the authors, were not even present in the village.”<sup>242</sup> The same authors also claim that it was later proven these accusations were false and that all those killed in Račak were members of the KLA “who died in combat.”<sup>243</sup>

After the failed negotiations in Rambouillet — discussed in most textbooks — during which the Serbian side was under “significant pressure” and was warned of a military intervention, what followed was the “twilight of the 20th century – the NATO bombing of the FRY.”<sup>244</sup> All textbooks currently used in Serbia refer to NATO’s military intervention against the FRY in the spring of 1999 using the legal term ‘aggression’.<sup>245</sup> Many point out that it was illegal<sup>246</sup>, as it was carried out without the approval of the UN Security Council, “thereby violating the UN Charter.”<sup>247</sup>

The basic information provided in Serbian textbooks about the NATO bombing include its duration, locations, number of casualties, data on destroyed infrastructure, estimated damage, and even highly detailed figures on the number of missiles and bombs dropped on the FRY. Momčilo Pavlović’s textbook for the fourth year of high school includes a special table listing incidents in which civilians were killed.<sup>248</sup> Momčilo Pavlović’s textbook for the fourth year of high school includes a separate table listing incidents in which civilians were killed. Among them are: Aleksinac (April 5), where 17 civilians died; the passenger train in the Grdelica Gorge (April 12), with at least 16 passengers killed (15 identified); near Đakovica (April 14), where 73 Albanian civilians were killed; the RTS building in Belgrade (April 23), where 16 employees died; Surdulica (April 27), with 17 victims; a bus in the village of Lužane (May 1), where around 50 passengers were killed, two-thirds of them children; a bus near Peć (May 3), with 20 passengers killed; Niš (May 7), where 15 residents died; the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade (May 7), where three Chinese journalists were killed; Koriša (May 14), with 87 Albanian civilians killed, mostly

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241 Hadžić and Stanojević, 215.

242 Milikić and Petrović, 270.

243 Ibid.

244 Ibid, 271 and Lopandić, Milinović and Milikić, 172.

245 Available at: <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/instree/GAres3314.html>.

246 Dimić and Raković, 254.

247 Milivojević, Pavlović and Lučić, 254.

248 Pavlović, 232.



women, children, and the elderly; and the bridge in Varvarin (May 30), where 10 civilians lost their lives. Some textbooks also state that NATO used “prohibited munitions” — cluster bombs and depleted uranium ordnance.<sup>249</sup>

Textbook authors devote particular attention to the battles between members of the Yugoslav Army and the KLA, NATO, and the Albanian army at the Košare outpost, located between Peć and Đakovica, from April to June 1999. Nearly all textbooks include information about the KLA’s attempt to carry out a ground offensive, as well as the fact that more than 100 members of the Yugoslav Army were killed in the fighting.<sup>250</sup> Two textbooks also present personal stories of several Yugoslav Army soldiers who distinguished themselves during the battle of Košare through acts of exceptional bravery and sacrifice for their fellow soldiers.<sup>251</sup>

When it comes to the number of victims, textbook authors continue to provide varying figures regarding civilian casualties — estimates range from 1,200 to 2,500 civilians;<sup>252</sup> around 2,500 civilians<sup>253</sup> and one textbook states that between 1,200 and 4,000 civilians were killed<sup>254</sup>. Two textbooks claim that more than 1,000 civilians and around 300 soldiers and police officers died, although the exact number remains undetermined to this day<sup>255</sup>, whereas Vesna Dimitrijević’s textbook states that more than 500 civilians were killed, along with 462 members of the military and 114 police officers.<sup>256</sup> Only one textbook refers to “other data,” without citing a source, according to which the total number of people of “all nationalities” who died in the armed conflict in Kosovo from 1998 to 2000 was 13,535. It further states that after the withdrawal of Serbian military and police forces from Kosovo, from June 1999 to the end of 2000, 1,257 people lost their lives — 717 Serbs, 307 Albanians, and 233 Roma and other non-Albanians.<sup>257</sup>

The consequences of the war in Kosovo are now discussed in much greater detail than what was established in the Humanitarian Law Center’s analysis. Textbooks state that after the withdrawal of the army and police from the territory of Kosovo, between 200,000 and 226,000 Serbs and

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249 Dimić and Raković, 254.

250 Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, 242.

251 The story of Second Lieutenant Predrag “Peđa” Levac is especially highlighted, but Sergeant Ivan Vasojević and Private Tibor Cerna are also mentioned. Levac and Rajić, 117 and Vajagić, Rastović, and Lazarević, 242.

252 Dimić and Raković, 254; Pavlović, 232; Radojević, 383; Pavlović and Đurić, 251 and Ljušić and Dimić, 290.

253 Hadžić and Stanojević, 216; Milivojević, Pavlović and Lučić, 254; Vajagić, Rastović and Lazarević, 242; Leovac and Rajić, 115.

254 Bondžić and Nikolić, 220.

255 Milikić and Petrović, 272 and Lopandić, Milinović and Milikić, 172.

256 Dimitrijević, 219 – 220.

257 These are data from the Humanitarian Law Center and the Humanitarian Law Center Kosovo and the results of their research for the Kosovo Book of Remembrance. Pavlović, 233.

other non-Albanians left the region of Kosovo<sup>258</sup>, while the KLA attacked the remaining Serbian and other non-Albanian population. Radoš Ljušić and Ljubodrag Dimić note that the arrival of NATO forces was accompanied by a wave of crimes against Serbs — “by early 2000, over 4,250 terrorist acts had been committed, 899 people were killed, 784 were wounded, and 834 were kidnapped.”<sup>259</sup> Some authors specifically emphasize that the international forces, which were supposed to guarantee security, failed to prevent the “ethnic cleansing of Serbs,” for which no one was held accountable.<sup>260</sup> Responsibility is placed on the international community for not reacting to allegations of “involvement of top KLA officials in human organ trafficking, organized crime, drug smuggling, and human trafficking.”<sup>261</sup> The United States is particularly accused of “seizing Kosovo and Metohija from Serbia and the Serbian people under the pretext of supporting democratic processes and protecting human rights, while in reality being driven by its own selfish interests, and enabling it to become an almost ethnically pure Albanian territory.”<sup>262</sup>

The ICTY, in several cases against high-ranking members of Serbia’s political, military, and police structures, established facts related to the armed conflict in Kosovo. Those prosecuted for crimes committed in Kosovo include: Deputy Prime Minister of the FRY Nikola Šainović (sentenced to 18 years in prison); President of Serbia Milan Milutinović (acquitted); Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army Dragutin Ojdanić (sentenced to 15 years); Commander of the Third Army Nebojša Pavković (22 years); Commander of the Priština Corps Vladimir Lazarević (14 years); Head of the Ministry of Interior (MUP) for Kosovo and Metohija Sreten Lukić (20 years); and Assistant Minister of the Interior and Head of the Public Security Department Vlastimir Đorđević (18 years). Members of the KLA were also prosecuted: KLA commander in the Dukagjin Operational Zone, Ramush Haradinaj, and Idriz Balaj, commander of the KLA special unit Black Eagles, were both acquitted; Lahi Brahimaj was sentenced to six years; Fatmir Limaj, KLA commander in the Lapušnik area, and Isak Musliu, KLA commander and head of the Lapušnik prison camp, were both acquitted; Haradin Bala, a guard at the Lapušnik camp, was sentenced to 13 years in prison. As noted in the HLC’s analysis, the ICTY established facts about war crimes committed by Serbian forces in which several thousand Albanians were killed between 1998 and 1999 across a large number of municipalities in Kosovo — including Peć, Dečani, Đakovica, Prizren, Orahovac, Suva Reka, Srbica, Kosovska Mitrovica, Vučitrn,

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258 Lopandić, Milinović and Milikić, 174.

259 Ljušić and Dimić, 290.

260 Dimić and Raković, 255.

261 Ibid.

262 Ibid.

Priština, Gnjilane, Uroševac, and Kačanik.<sup>263</sup> Additionally, in the case of Vlastimir Đorđević, the court established facts regarding the concealment of the bodies of Kosovo Albanians and their burial in mass graves in Serbia.<sup>264</sup>

## People in War

More and more history textbook authors in Serbia are using stories of ordinary people who have experienced wartime as illustrations of everyday life disrupted by armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, providing students with the opportunity to better understand complex historical processes through personal examples.

In Vesna Dimitrijević's textbook for the eighth grade of primary school, students can learn, through an excerpt taken from Momčilo Mitrović's article "The Refugee Family of the Nineties – Between Disintegration and Survival" (Izbeglička porodica devedesetih – između dezintegracije i opstanka)<sup>265</sup>, and diary entries of Sarajevo resident J. Bilek from 1992, how ordinary Sarajevans faced the outbreak of the war in Sarajevo and their efforts to get their son out of the besieged Sarajevo..<sup>266</sup> "[...] I am retired, and my son is a student. I did not let my son go out even to the gate, let alone to the street. The situation has been like this since April 5. My son is anxious and complains that he longs for fresh air [...]"<sup>267</sup>

Another Sarajevo story found its place in the history textbook for the fourth year of general high school under the title "The Sarajevo Romeo and Juliet," about the death of the young, in-love couple Admira Ismić and Boško Brkić in 1993 in Sarajevo. It states that they died holding each other while trying to cross to the Serbian side, shot by Muslim forces.<sup>268</sup> This story of a relationship between a Bosniak woman and a Serb man is presented to illustrate the "madness of war" and encourages students to discuss this interpretation.

In Mira Radojević's textbook, the testimony of Milka Vukašin from Drniš during Operation Storm is highlighted, taken from Vesti dana (Daily News), Hronika, November 18, 2012:

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263 HLC, Analysis, 24.

264 Prosecutor v. Vlastimir Đorđević, Ruling, IT-05-87/1-T.

265 The article was published in the book edited by Milan Ristović, *Private Life among Serbs in the Twentieth Century (Privatni život kod Srba u dvadesetom veku)*, 2007.

266 Dimitrijević, 212.

267 Ibid.

268 Lopandić, Milinović and Milikić, 168.

*"[...] Refrigerated trucks, tractors, covered with tarps. All packed with elderly people and children. Vacant stares, black scarves. I see a cross in a trailer. Old woman Živka Mališević didn't manage to bury her son [...] Hungry children. Now they're about to distribute a few loaves of bread to each trailer in the convoy. And then hell broke loose. Bombs came from above. I lay down over the children, later I saw blood. [...] I wonder: 'Is this 1941 again?' and at that moment I answer: 'Farewell, my Drniš, Dalmatia, never again...'"<sup>269</sup>*

In the textbook by Aleksandar Todosijević and Sanja Petrović Todosijević for the eighth grade of elementary school, students are assigned to find a video on the website YouTube featuring JNA soldier Bahrudin Kaletović,<sup>270</sup> who was interviewed by Jutel television. In the video, this young JNA soldier tries to explain to the journalist the war situation he found himself in, as well as their conversation about the message this soldier sent in the summer of 1991.<sup>271</sup> In addition to this assignment, the textbook also includes excerpts from other historical sources that present students with direct testimonies of people who survived the war's devastation—such as an oral testimony of Marija Karanović from Croatia in 1995, recorded in 1999; statements from various institutions about war events; and a series of photographs. These photographs include an image of a destroyed JNA tank in Vukovar in 1991, behind which scenes of the ruined Vukovar are documented; a photo of the bombed building of the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo during the Serbian siege of Sarajevo in 1992; an image of UNPROFOR personnel collecting victims' bodies in Ahmići, where more than 100 Bosniaks were killed by Croatian forces in 1993; and several photographs from the 1999 bombing period.<sup>272</sup>

Besides this, it is the only textbook that presents students with stories of heroes—people who died during the war in the former Yugoslavia because they tried to protect their friends and neighbors of different nationalities. It highlights the stories of Srdan Aleksić from Trebinje, who was killed for trying to protect his Bosniak neighbor, and Toma Buzov, a retired JNA officer from Novi Beograd, who was the only one to oppose the abduction of Bosniak passengers from a train at the Štrpci station near Prijepolje in 1993, and was killed alongside them because of it.<sup>273</sup>

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269 Radojević, 380.

270 Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7G4tmYFjET8>.

271 Todosijević and Petrović Todosijević, 218.

272 Ibid, 220-225.

273 Ibid, 226.

# Conclusion

In the 2015 analysis of history textbook content conducted by the Humanitarian Law Center, several problems were identified in the lessons covering the breakup of the SFRY and the armed conflicts from 1991 to 1999. These issues primarily relate to bias in interpretation and the assignment of responsibility for certain events before, during, and after the breakup of the SFRY, including massacres and war crimes that were mentioned, as well as the avoidance and/or silence regarding victims for whose suffering Serbian forces were responsible. As this analysis indicated, these problems remain present in most of the textbooks currently in use in Serbia.

The imbalance in the presentation of detailed data about the suffering of populations depending on their ethnicity remains, though to a somewhat lesser extent when it comes to Croatian and/or Bosniak victims compared to earlier textbooks. In some cases, victims from these two groups are mentioned, usually in the context of the total number of casualties or in relation to crimes so massive that their suffering cannot be overlooked, such as the genocide in Srebrenica. The attitude of Serbian historians toward Kosovo Albanians remains unchanged—if their suffering is mentioned at all, it is typically framed in the context of deaths as terrorists or members of the KLA in clashes with Serbian security forces (as in the case of Adem Jašari) or when killed by NATO bombings, with only timid references to civilian victims, mostly women, children, and the elderly. Although it has been established that more than 8,000 Kosovo Albanian civilians died in operations by Serbian forces, and that over 900 bodies—including women, children, and the elderly—were discovered and exhumed from mass graves in Serbia, these facts are not mentioned in Serbian textbooks.

Victimization (often self-victimization) continues to dominate every interpretation in the textbooks. Before the breakup of the SFRY, Serbia is portrayed as a victim of foreign nationalisms—primarily Slovenian and Croatian, as well as Albanian separatism—while the nationalism originating from Serbia and the activities motivated by it, including the ambitions and actions of Serbian politicians in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina aimed at secession, are presented as “pro-Yugoslav,” with Serbia cast as the “protector of Yugoslavia.” During the war, Serbs are depicted as either the sole or greatest victims, and when forces under their control commit crimes, these are usually framed as reactions to the actions of others. For example, Srebrenica is never mentioned without Kravica and Bratunac, whereas Operations Flash and Storm are presented without Vukovar. When perpetrators of crimes are mentioned, it is often noted that there are disagreements within the expert community regarding the work

and especially the credibility of the court before which they were accused or prosecuted, and the court is more often than not described as biased.

Unlike the previous analysis from 2015, Srebrenica is now included in almost all textbooks in Serbia—but the question remains whether this is due to the scale and consequences of the crime itself, or if it is also the result of a persistent campaign to deny its legal classification, as noted in the report on opinions of young people.<sup>274</sup> It is rarely mentioned outside the context of crimes committed against Serbs from Bratunac and Kravica, which are used to provide an explanation for the motive behind the genocide in Srebrenica. When the number of victims is mentioned, it is generally questioned and disputed, while the number of Serbian victims in that area of Bosnia and Herzegovina is taken from Milivoje Ivanišević's forgery created to justify the genocide in Srebrenica.<sup>275</sup> When its legal classification is mentioned, it is almost always accompanied—except in one instance—by challenges to the credibility of the court that issued the ruling.

Several regional and international initiatives have been launched over the past two decades to address the issue of interpreting the history of the 1990s in the countries of the region—not only in Serbia. These include the preparation of joint textbooks (an initiative involving historians from other Balkan countries, as well as from Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, and others), which offered a multi-perspective interpretation, as well as the ICTY's teaching manual for history teachers and professors on how to use judicially established facts in history education. The wealth of available archives and databases from the ICTY, along with those of other organizations and institutions that have researched and documented the armed conflicts, as well as the presence of survivors willing to share their memories with new generations, creates a broad space for new textbook interpretations rooted in facts and respect for the suffering of victims. The interpretation of recent history should rely primarily on the accessible and open archives of the ICTY and other organizations, which provide accurate and verifiable information about the events of the 1990s. In addition, more content focusing on the personal stories of victims and their families, materials about the fates of ordinary people, and survivor testimonies are essential for fostering empathy among young people and helping them better understand the perspectives of victims and survivors. In the absence of political will to change the relationship toward the recent past—and in the face of its ongoing abuse, the relativization of responsibility, and distortion of facts—it is necessary to create space for alternative education programs that would offer younger generations the opportunity to learn about the recent past based on facts rather than

274 Opinions of Young People about the 1990s Wars (Stavovi mladih o ratovima devedesetih), Youth Initiative for Human Rights, November 2023, p. 34.

275 Available at: <https://www.icty.org/sid/3639>.

manipulation. Such programs must include conversations with survivors and victims, visits to sites of suffering and remembrance, and other activities that provide young people with opportunities to develop empathy and understanding for the suffering of others.

In Serbia, as well as in other countries in the region, the fundamental question remains not how much, but whether there is any will at all to stop with the historical revisionism —revisionism that has not been limited to the 1990s but has completely altered the interpretation of World War II and deeply encroached upon earlier periods of history. In Serbia, this new approach to wartime history places nationalist myths at the core of the narrative about the heroic conduct of Serbian forces during the wars in the former Yugoslavia—forces that are seen as liberators rather than conquerors, whose war criminals are regarded as heroes, while their victims are often portrayed either as responsible for their own suffering or as lying about it. Leading this approach is the state leadership, with almost everyone else involved—state and local officials, ruling party members, the media, and war criminals themselves.<sup>276</sup> In such a context, these textbooks, together with other mechanisms and actors, educate and raise young people to become active and aggressive opponents of reconciliation based on acknowledgment of crimes. In this way, new generations remain trapped within a nationalist discourse that bases national pride and patriotism not on a truthful interpretation of their own past, but rather on a readiness to defend graffiti and murals dedicated to murderers on Belgrade’s facades from paint and eggs.

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276 The State of Denial: Serbia 2022 The Time of Silent Pride (Stanje poricanja: Srbija 2022 Vreme tihog ponosa), Youth Initiative for Human Rights, December 2023, p. 3, Available at: <https://yih.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Stanje-poricanja-SRB.pdf>

# Recommendations

Problems with history textbooks exist in all the countries that emerged from the former Yugoslavia, and their negative impact on the reconciliation process has long been recognized. As one of the factors shaping young people's opinions about the wars, these textbooks deepen the lack of knowledge of facts and encourage the denial of war crimes. Knowing the facts about the past and critically re-examining them is a key prerequisite for creating new generations who will be future bearers of reconciliation in the region, rather than its enemies.

- **Promoting alternative models of education on the past for youth:** Due to the lack of opportunity for a comprehensive reform of education that would include changes to history textbook content, alternative forms of education remain the only models where young people can learn about the facts of war crimes and armed conflicts of the 1990s. Informal education programs, which have existed in the region since the end of the armed conflicts, should focus as much as possible on the facts about the 1990s wars, creating space to improve young people's knowledge of war crimes. Youth education programs should also have a strong regional component, as this will enable them to view very sensitive topics from the perspective of their peers across the region, while simultaneously empowering them to develop critical thinking and democratic dialogue.
- **Developing empathy for the victims:** Furthermore, such programs should focus as much as possible on the individual stories of victims, thereby avoiding viewing victims merely as statistics or as members of the "other" or "enemy" group. Learning about the past through getting to know the fate of an individual can greatly awaken empathy for their suffering and foster solidarity with the victims.
- **Promoting positive stories:** Programs that focus on promoting positive stories from the war have also proven successful—stories about individuals who, despite being aware of the dangers to themselves and their families, saved members of the other ethnic group, and in some cases sacrificed their own lives. These examples provide an excellent opportunity for young people to learn about solidarity and ethical behavior during difficult times through positive role models from the past.



- **Encouraging educational programs for history teachers and professors:** In addition, programs should not focus solely on young people but also create space for the education and training of history teachers and professors about the wars of the 1990s. As with youth education, such programs should include a strong regional component, so that through cooperation with teachers and professors from across the region, multi-perspectivity in interpreting the events from the 1990s can be promoted.

