

## Justice in Bosnia after Mladić

**Author: David Pettigrew**

*David Pettigrew is Professor of Philosophy at Southern CT State University in New Haven, CT. His report on the exhumations in Višegrad can be found on his website:*

<http://home.southernct.edu/~pettigrewd1/Visegrad.html>

The arrest of General Ratko Mladić is a profoundly important step on the long path to justice for the victims and the survivors of the genocide against Bosnia's Muslims (Bošniaks) that was perpetrated from 1992 to 1995 by Serbian and Bosnian Serb forces. However, the expectation that Mladić's arrest will "close a chapter" –as stated by Serbian President Tadić– on the war of aggression, or open a "new chapter" for Serbia, fails to recognize that Mladić's genocidal legacy lives on in the form of the political entity known as *Republika Srpska*.

Between 1991 and 1992 Radovan Karadžić's nationalistic Serbian Democratic Party brought about the creation of *Republika Srpska* in response to the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina was preparing a referendum on independence as a multicultural nation. The name *Republika Srpska* literally means a Republic *of* or *for* Serbs. Unfortunately, the area in which this "Republic for Serbs" was declared was within the borders of Bosnia and included eastern Bosnia where the Bošniaks constituted, in most locations, the majority of the inhabitants. The creation of *Republika Srpska* was to entail the forcible displacement of the Bošniaks from within its self-declared territory through terror, rape, and murder, which in some cases included wanton mass murder. In July 1995 alone, over 8,000 men and boys were murdered at Srebrenica in an act that has been declared genocide by two international courts.

Srebrenica was not the only place where Bošniaks were targeted as such and murdered *en masse*. Additional atrocities and murders occurred throughout eastern Bosnia, between 1992 and 1995 in towns such as Višegrad. On two separate occasions in June of 1992 (on Pionirska Street and in the Bikavac neighborhood) women and children were forced into houses that were set on fire. They perished in the flames. Further, an estimated 3,000 were murdered on and around the Ottoman bridge in Višegrad and thrown into the Drina River. In August of 2010 I accompanied the Bosnian government's exhumation team to Višegrad. Work on a nearby dam caused the river level to drop and it was finally possible to exhume the bones of the victims from the riverbed. We found the remains of many of the victims and identification is in progress.

In addition, hundreds of villages in eastern Bosnia were destroyed as part of the Bosnian Serb strategy, making return and repopulation by the Bošniaks virtually impossible. Approximately 1,000 mosques were destroyed in *Republika Srpska*, and in some cases, Serbian Orthodox churches were constructed directly upon the ruins. In one case, a Serbian Orthodox church was constructed on a Bošniak woman's land without her permission and it still remains to this day. More than 350 mass graves that hold the remains of the Bošniak victims have been discovered within *Republika Srpska*. The perpetrators tried to hide their crimes by moving the remains to

new locations. In the process, the bodies were dismembered, making the process of exhumation and identification tragically difficult.

Indisputably, the entity Republika Srpska was founded upon a genocidal ideology, maintained through the barbarity of genocidal acts and ultimately legitimized by the Dayton Peace Accords 1995. The surviving founding members of Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadžić, Biljana Plavšić, and Momčilo Krajišnik, are either on trial –having been charged with genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of the laws and customs of war– or have already been convicted and sentenced for their role in the war crimes. However, the current President of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik denies the genocide at Srebrenica and speaks openly of secession from Bosnia. In other words, in spite of the arrest of Mladić, Republika Srpska continues to be, for Bosnia’s Muslims, a dehumanizing zone of exclusion. Mladić’s legacy –Republika Srpska– remains intact.

One of Ambassador Richard Holbrooke’s greatest regrets, as the architect of the Dayton Peace Accords, was the recognition and the naming of Republika Srpska. He feared throughout the process that such recognition and such a name would legitimize –if not reward– their genocidal aggression. Hence, to do justice to victims of the genocide against the Bošniak civilians (Bosnian Muslims), the arrest of Mladić must serve as a reminder to the European and international diplomatic community that it is time to reunify Bosnia through constitutional reform. It is indeed unseemly for President Tadić to reduce Mladić’s arrest to the final step in Serbia’s strategy for its entrance to the European Union. The Copenhagen Criteria of 1993 call for those seeking membership in the European Union to respect human rights and the rule of law not only in their own countries but also in association with others. Serbia must now be called upon to denounce President Dodik’s rhetoric of genocide denial and secession and to fully support the reunification of Bosnia.

#### **David Pettigrew's Report on Višegrad August 4, 2010**

<http://home.southernct.edu/~pettigrewd1/Visegrad.html>

#### **Selected Books**

Clea Koff, *The Bone Woman: A Forensic Anthropologist's Search for Truth in the Mass Graves of Rwanda, Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo* (New York: Random House, 2005).

<http://www.thebonewoman.com/>

#### **Selected Bibliography**[LINK](#)

#### **Selected Films**

[Welcome to Sarajevo \(1997\)](#)

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120490/>

[Grbavica \(2006\)](#)

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0464029/>