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***WAR CRIMES IN SERBIA***  
**SANDZAK CASE**



## ETHNIC CLEANSING OF SANDZAK — CRIME WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY

Up to 1999, there were no armed conflicts on the territory of Serbia. The Serbian authorities claimed that Serbia was not at war, even though thousands of young men were mobilized and forced to participate in wars in the neighboring countries. The area of Sandzak was the target of various armed formations, both from Serbia and Montenegro, and the neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Bosnians were subject to systematic terror and intimidation, which resulted in ethnic cleansing and significant decrease in the Bosnian part of the population. In Serbia, the worst off was the border municipality of Priboj. It encompasses the territory at the three border point of Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Before the war, Priboj had 35,951 inhabitants, 10,927 of which were Muslims. According to the 2002 census, there are only 6,994 Bosnians and Muslims left. The number of Serbs

remained almost the same. Why was the number of Bosnians in Priboj so massively reduced?

The first serious crime on the territory of Sandzak was committed on 22 October 1992. The members of the Serbian armed force called “Avengers” (“Osvetnici”), on 22 October 1992, took 15 men and one woman off the bus on the Priboj-Rudo-Priboj bus line (all of them Bosnians), identified them and afterwards took them to Visegrad, motel “Vilina Vlas”, where they were abused physically, and then killed at the bank of the Drina river. At the Municipal Court in Belgrade, Milan Lukic, Oliver Krsmanovic and Dragutin Dragicevic were sentenced to twenty years in prison for this crime, and Djordje Sevic received a sentence of fifteen years.

At the Strpci station of the Belgrade-Bar railway line on 27 February 1993, the members of the same unit abducted 18 Bosnians and one Croat from

train 671, took them by truck to Visegradska banja, where they were later tortured and killed. Through the decision of the Supreme Court in Bijelo Polje, Nebojsa Ranisavljevic was sentenced to 15 years in prison for the abduction of the passengers.

At the trial, a railway worker testified that he had sent a notice to the management about the preparations for this abduction. The railway management informed the high state and army officials of Serbia and Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) on this, but no actions were taken to prevent the crime. The Commander of the Visegrad brigade of the Republika Srpska Army (RSA) Luka Dragicevic, admitted at the trial that the "Avengers" unit belonged to these armed forces. After the war, Dragicevic was transferred to the position of an officer in the FRY Army. At the trial, he stated: "I am a professional soldier, and everything I did was to follow the orders of my superiors. Therefore, I was ordered to be a member of the Republika Srpska Army, and now I am a member of the FRY Army".

Milan Lukic was sentenced with a first-degree verdict at the Hague Tribunal to a sentence of life in prison for war crimes against Bosnians in Visegrad. The crimes in Sandzak were not included in the indictment.

On 18 February 1993 in the village Kukurovici in the Priboj Municipality, an infantry and artillery attack was performed by the Yugoslav Army. On this occasion, three persons were killed and a large number of houses and additional objects were destroyed. On 11 April 1993, eight more houses in the same village were burned. The Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) had filed a criminal suit for this crime against unknown perpetrators from the Uzice Corps of the Yugoslav Army to the District Public Prosecutors Office in Uzice in 2006. The Uzice Prosecutors Office informed the HLC that the case had been referred to the War Crimes Prosecutor. There has been no reply on this issue so far. The inhabitants of Kukurovici, as well as 20 other villages in this area have never returned to their homes, since they have not been rebuilt yet. The Republic of Serbia never took responsibility for what their uniformed officials did, nor have they given any financial or other means of support to these families.

According to the data obtained by investigators of various human rights organizations, during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina there was a massive police action in Sandzak aimed at finding weapons hidden

by the Bosnians. On this occasion several hundred people were detained, and tortured by the police. None of these cases have been finalized in court. The members of the Republika Srpska Army entered the territory of Serbia without any problems, armed, with military equipment and vehicles. The Yugoslav Army, which was at the time in charge of borders, did nothing to prevent them. Commanders of brigades of the RSA deployed in the Drina region were officers of the Yugoslav Army. Both the Serbian Army and the Police participated in actions of intimidation, police torture over Bosnians and armed attacks on Bosnian villages. The whole state and military top of FRY and Serbia knew about the preparations for the crimes. All these facts did not raise any suspicion with the authorities, and no investigation was started against those people from the state and military top of Serbia and FRY who are the most responsible.

The Prosecution in Serbia did not investigate if there was responsibility of the former President of FRY Dobrica Cosic, the Federal Prime Minister Milan Panic, President of Serbia Slobodan Milosevic, Minister of Defense of Serbia Marko Negovanovic, the Chief of Armed Forces General Staff Zivota Panic, Commander of the Uzice Corps Dragoljub Ojdanic and his Deputy Dusan Loncar, Commanders of the Visegrad, Gorazde and Rudo Brigades of the RSA, Police and Judicial officials who participated in obstructing court proceedings against Milan Lukic, and eventually in his release from prison in 1994 in Belgrade. The silent conspiracy is still at force about the crimes in Sandzak. The ethnic cleansing of Sandzak Bosnians was organized, and carried out under the cover of war in the neighboring country. Traces were covered by perpetrating the crimes on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or by the participation of members of the RSA.

The indictments for the crimes in Sjeverin and Strpce, filed by appropriate prosecutors from Serbia and Montenegro, also avoid mentioning whose soldiers committed the crimes, and who they were taking orders from. The court documents lead to an inevitable conclusion — the direct superior of Milan Lukic's unit was the Officer of the Yugoslav Army Luka Dragicevic.

Dragan Popovic,  
Program Director of Youth Initiative  
for Human Rights - Serbia

# CRIME AND IMPUNITY

Seventeen years have passed since the members of the Serbian unit “Avengers” (“Osvetnici”), commanded by Milan Lukic, with the logistic support of the Republic of Serbia, abducted a group of passengers from the train “Lovcen” – 671 traveling from Belgrade to Bar. At the Strpci village near Priboj, the “Avengers” had, on 27 February 1993, forcefully abducted off 19 citizens of the republic of Serbia and the Republic of Montenegro — 18 Bosnians and one Croat.

According to the text of the indictment, the abducted passengers were taken to the village Prelovo near Visegrad. There, at a local primary school, they robbed and physically abused them. Then they were restrained with wires, put into a truck and driven towards Visegrad, where they were killed in a garage of one of the burned village houses, near the river Drina. Of approximately 30 suspects for this crime, only Nebojsa Ranisavljevic was convicted for this crime at the Supreme Court in Bijelo Polje in 2002, and sentenced to 15 years in prison. Most of the murdered people were from Priboj, Prijepolje, Belgrade and Podgorica. Their remains have not been found. According to the records of the “Belgrade” Railway Company, the representatives of Serbia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and the Railway Company knew about the plan to abduct passengers of non-Serbian ethnicity, citizens of the FRY.

“As soon as we were over the pass in New Belgrade, the driver, followed by two police officers, came to check our tickets. Not only that, he asked for our names and wrote them down on the tickets. . . . What is this? Since when do you write names on tickets, I asked. Don’t be afraid, the driver said, there’s nothing to it, there’s a big smuggling operation so we have to check. The police officers did not say anything. The horror started some five or ten minutes before the train stopped in, as we later saw, Strpci near Priboj. While the train was still moving, the military was pacing the corridors with their weapons. As soon as the train stopped, three army officers were standing outside of every coupe. First they identified the people in the corridors and took the Muslims away, and crammed the other into the coupes”, said one of the witnesses, a passenger on train 671, published in the article “Abduction in Strpce” on 19 February 2009 et the “E-novine” web portal.



One more witness had anonymously, on 5 March 1993, several days after the abduction, spokem for the Montengrin weekly “Monitor”.

“It was all as if on film. The train stopped for the red signal light at the very entrance to the tunnel. The abductors had uniforms, except for one who had a beard and a black hat with a Serbian cockade. When they asked for identification papers it all seemed as routine control, and until they started taking people away it seemed as if they were looking for someone specific. There were comments that they were looking for some fugitives, and to others it was clear that their target were the Muslims. From the tavern, one of the passengers ran out into the snow in a t-shirt yelling ‘Slaughter them!’ The most horrific thing was there were actually no fuss. No one protested, everything took place in ominous silence. All that lasted for about half an hour. As if nothing had happened, the train just carried on. You arrive from Strpci to Priboj in ten minutes, and we stopped there just for the passengers to get off and on. No one was informed about anything, no police showed up, no military, there was no mention of taking statements from passengers or anything like that”.

Slobodan Milosevic visited Prijepolje in early March 1993, and promised that everything will be done in order for the abducted passengers to be found and returned. On that occasion, Milosevic stated that the crime was obviously politically motivated — with the intention of transferring the war into Serbia and bringing unease among Serbs and Muslims which had “until yesterday lived together in peace”. General Ratko Mladic, at a Belgrade press conference held on 9 April 1993, according to “Monitor”

stated that there was a possibility that the abduction was a game played by the Muslim forces on the territory of FRY, which wished to impose their presence in the public:

“The Republika Srpska Army has nothing to do with the incident. I wish the fate of those people to be discovered, and that such incidents never occur anywhere in the world, let alone at the territory of Republika Srpska.”

Members of the families of the abducted passengers gathered on 20 May 1993 outside of the Federal Parliament building. ‘Slobodan, free our loved ones.’ ‘Cosic, you have my son as a soldier, and my husband as a hostage.’ ‘Where are the passengers from train 671, Strpci, 27 February.’ ‘Slobodan, bring back my son Zvezdan. Mother.’ ‘Karadzic, show us where you keep the abducted sons, brothers and husbands.’ These were some of the lines written on banners held by the people, mostly from Prijepolje, gathered outside the Assembly building. The newspaper “Republika” published in 1993 a testimony of a person named Abdic, a passenger of the “phantom” train, who fortunately managed to avoid being taken off the train. He stated that the military was present on the train since Belgrade, in uniforms, with Serbian cockades and tricolor flags on their heads.

“They were taken to the right, in the direction of Strpci, there was a valley, and then a small forest, and further away you could see the green woods. There was a truck there, and they forced two groups of people into and towards the truck. Behind the truck there was a building. The army was forcing them. People started screaming, panic spread among the people; some were mourning a brother, some a husband, others mourned other people, it was very disturbing. I stayed there and survived. They passed by two or three more times. They looked, and found no one.” In August 1996, the Belgrade weekly magazine “NIN” published a text in which an alleged crown witness of this incident, a volunteer in the Republika Srpska Army Dusko Petrovic, who declined Lukic’s invitation to participate in the action of attacking the train, claimed that all the passengers were killed outside Visegrad. Petrovic stated for “Dnevni Telegraph” daily, and “NIN” reported: ‘We arrived at the hill next to the dam. I saw seven men lined up, with their heads down... I stood in front of them, at a distance of about one meter. Suddenly, Crni came from the left-hand side and fired a round of bullets at them, killing them. Their bodies were thrown into the Drina river. Later on, I found out that Lukic’s men killed the rest of the passengers.’

“According to the opinions of various collocutors, the abduction in Strpci cannot be viewed



On the occasion of sixteen years from the abduction and murder at the Strpci station, a memorial for the victims of this crime was uncovered in Prijepolje. The memorial, situated next to the old bridge over the Lim river, says “Those in Serbia who forget 27 February 1993 and the Strpci station, are giving up on the future”.

The construction of the memorial complex, which cost three million dinars, was financed by the Municipal Assembly of Prijepolje, and after the uncovering of the memorial, numerous citizens and the relatives of the abducted people traditionally laid flowers on the Lim river. However, the Municipality had inscribed only the names of nine citizens of Prijepolje in the memorial, and not the names of all the victims.

separately, without connecting it to the abduction case in Sjeverin in October 1992, and a series of smaller abductions in Montenegro. The common denominator of the abductions in Sjeverin and Strpci, except for Milan Lukic, is also the inefficiency of the Federal Police and the Republic organs in conducting the investigation, and reporting the relevant results related to the kidnappings. In both cases commissions were formed whose achievements were not worthy of attention, because none of them had any real operative possibilities or authorizations. Also, in both cases, the members of the commissions faced closed doors of the authorized services”, “NIN” wrote in 1996.

Four years later, Miodrag Perisic, who was the Minister of Information at the time of the crimes, told journalist Jasna Jankovic in a show on Radio B92: “I think that specific event (Strpci –auth. remark) marked the dirty role of this state in all the following events. It is the substance which showed both how to commit, and how to hide a crime. I don’t believe the state initially participated in it, I don’t think that the people who did those things were encouraged by the State organs, but when they had already done that, took innocent people off public transportation, those who tried to cover for them, and not take them

to court, those are the real accomplices in this whole Balkan tragedy. I remember Momo Grubac (former Minister for Human Rights –auth. remark) as a silent man who tried to accomplish so much, he traveled to Kosovo at that time, he was a member of the commission and whenever we asked him if there was anything new about the case, the mild expression on his face, a kind expression, showed his desperation for not being able to do anything, and this was evidence of the value of the state organs. Strpci are a crime committed in the presence of the authorities, but we later witnessed some criminal actions and had no way to influence their outcome. That means that the authorities are committing crimes right before our eyes”.

The documents of the Railway Transport Company (RTC), strictly confidential No. 4-1-93, form 1 February 1993, it is evident that Mitar Mandic, the director of the Sector for defense preparation and protection of the RTC, had sent a letter on 1. February 1993 to the director of the RTC Milomir Minic, in which he stated that he was informed on the intention of the “members of the Serbian Army from the Rudo Municipality to stop a train and abduct passengers. The whole action would take place at the part of the Belgrade-Bar line which goes through Bosnia and Herzegovina, probably at the Strpci junction or the Goles station”. Mandic informed the high professional collegiate council of the RTC about this, held a meeting with representatives of the police and the Office for State Security of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Serbia, and talked to the assistant of the Defense Minister of Serbia, General Kuzmanovic. It was concluded that General Kuzmanovic should inform the Defense Minister about the above mentioned plan, and that the Defense Minister of the Republic of Serbia should inform the Yugoslav Army, as well as that the RTC should stop their activities regarding this case, since they had fulfilled their obligation in a timely fashion. The same document states that on 2 February 1993, a meeting was held at the Police station in Uzice, in which the Director of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Bosko Petric, Commander of the Uzice region Police Djordje Keric, and Mitar Mandic, Drago Tadic and Vuko Mulina from the RTC were present. The conclusion of the meeting was: “The information on the intention of abducting passengers from the train has been confirmed, and it is added that this is a strategic operation of the Serbian Army in order to create the conditions for the exchange of prisoners and the dead. It is concluded that such an action of the Serbian Army would be unacceptable for several reasons. The solutions should be found deep in the Bosnian territory, stated the Police in Uzice”.

Considering the fact that there are no clear intentions for those who committed the crimes in Strpci to be brought to justice through war crimes trials, and the fact that the bodies of the passengers have not been found yet, the only possibility for the relatives of the victims is to start a process for compensating material and immaterial damages. This possibility is derived from the verdict given to Nebojsa Ranisavljevic, through which the families of the victims were referred to lawsuits for redressing proprietary and legal demands. Only one such procedure has taken place so far. The Civil Council of the Main Court in Prijepolje had, in February 2004, based on the suit filed by Ifeta Topuzovic, whose husband Dzafer was a victim of this crime, reached a verdict on the compensation of material damage in the amount of 16 million dinars, or 16,300 euros, which is half the sum demanded.

## PARTIAL JUSTICE

The Supreme Court in Bijelo Polje had, in March 1997, raised an indictment against Nebojsa Ranisavljevic from Despotovac, for the criminal act of committing crimes against the civilian population. According to the indictment, on 27 February 1993, Ranisavljevic had, as a member of a military formation — a group of approximately 25 armed men under the command of Milan Lukic from Visegrad, participated in making the executive decision about the attack on a passenger train of the Yugoslav Railway, and in the abduction of civilians — passengers on the train. The indictment states that Ranisavljevic was a member of the “Avengers” formation, who entered the railway station and with threats ordered the dispatcher to stop train 671 on the Belgrade-Bar line. After stopping the train, two members of the group went in, identified the passengers, and forcefully abducted 19 civilians, citizens of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Although the trial in Bijelo Polje started in 1998, the main hearing was started over three times, due to interruptions which lasted for more than 30 days. The last time, the hearing started on 5 September 2002, and Ranisavljevic was soon convicted to a prison sentence of 15 years. The Montenegro Supreme Court confirmed this verdict in April 2004. During the trial, Nebojsa Ranisavljevic denied the statement given earlier to an investigative judge that he had participated in the abduction in Strpci,

claiming that his confession was coerced through “torture by the Montenegro State Security Office”. In the explanation of the verdict, Council President Vukoman Golubovic pointed out that during the trial no evidence was presented which would confirm the direct participation of the defendant in committing the crime, nor its planning, as the indictment stated, but that the Judiciary Council concluded without a doubt that Ranisavljevic belonged to the armed group which committed the crime. The Humanitarian Law Center believes that the State Prosecutor in Bijelo Polje omitted to state in the indictment that the abductors were the members of the Visegrad brigade, which is a regular unit of the Republika Srpska Army, in order for this crime not to be related to the high military and state officials of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Ranisavljevic’s guilt was established in court, but those who organized, ordered and others who indirectly participated in this crime were not held accountable. The issue of the responsibility of Milan Lukic, who planned the action and personally killed the passengers, was never investigated in court. Immediately after the abduction, the Montenegro Parliament formed a Commission for gathering information on this event. During its work, the Commission gathered a large number of important documents, made mostly immediately after the abduction and taken from the Railway, the Prosecutors Office and Internal affairs organs from Priboj, Uzice and Belgrade. According to the opinion of Dragoljub Todorovic, the representative of the victims in this process, the documentation represented an excellent, valid and first-class evidence material for undertaking a serious and encompassing court investigation. However, such an investigation was never started. In the meantime, during 1993 and 1994, Milan Lukic spent a total of 10 months in Serbian prisons, for misdemeanors of not having reported his place of residence, and unauthorized carrying of weapons. After this sentence had been served, an investigation was started in the Belgrade Regional Court for the abduction in Strpci, and the crime was qualified as illegal deprivation of freedom (not as a war crime). The investigation was lead by the former President of the investigative department of the Belgrade Regional Court Dragoslav Rakic, and it lasted for 20 days. Judge Rakic did not use the findings of the Commission formed by the Montenegro Parliament, and never interviewed the witnesses proposed by the Prosecutor. The investigation was finally stopped, and Republika Srpska asked for Lukic’s extradition, in order for him to face trial for plundering. The court in Serbia acted on the demand for extradition of an internationally unrecognized state,

and transferred Lukic to Republika Srpska. There he was immediately released from custody, and later decorated by the authorities of Republika Srpska. The representatives of State organs of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia who, according to the documentation of the Railway Transport Company (RTC) delivered to the court and proved authentic during the court process, had the knowledge of a plan to abduct Muslim passengers at the Strpci station, were never criminally prosecuted. The RTC had informed the authorities on the existence of the plan right after they learned about it, but no actions were taken to prevent the abduction, and it was carried out with no disturbances.

By: Jasmina Lazovic  
Dusan Lopusina

### THE PERSONS ABDUCTED IN STRPCI WERE:

Esad Kapetanovic, 19 years of age, employed at the “Rad” company, Belgrade, father of one.  
Ilijaz Licina, 43 years of age, employed at “Ratko Mitrovic” company, Belgrade.  
Fehim Bakija, 43 years of age, employed at “Planum” company, Belgrade, father of three.  
Seco Softic, 48 years of age, employed at RTC, Belgrade.  
Rifet Husovic, 26 years of age, employed in Bijelo Polje.  
Sead Djecevic, 16 years of age, student from Bar.  
Ismet Babacic, 30 years of age, employed at “Wall Street” company, Podgorica, married.  
Hail Zupcevic, 49 years of age, refugee from Trebinje, father of two, escaped to Rozaje with his family.  
Adem Alomerovic, 59 years of age, employed at “Raketa”, Prijepolje, father of four.  
Rasim Coric, 40 years of age, employed at “Limka”, Prijepolje, father of three.  
Fikret Memetovic, 40 years of age, employed at RTC Belgrade, father of two.  
Favzija Zekovic, 54 years of age, store owner in Kraljevo, father of three.  
Nijazim Kajevic, 30 years of age, employed at the post office, Priboj.  
Muhedin Hanic, 27 years of age, employed at “Zmaj” company, Belgrade.  
Safet Preljevic, 22 years of age, employed at a private store in Belgrade, father of one.  
Dzafer Topuzovic, 55 years of age, employed at “Planum” company, Prijepolje.  
Jusuf Rastoder, 45 years of age, employed in Belgrade.  
Zvezdan Zulicic, 23 years of age, student, refugee from Sarajevo .  
Tomo Buzov, retired military officer, Belgrade.

DOCUMENT: PUBLIC RAILWAY TRANSPORT COMPANY "BELGRADE" SECTOR FOR DEFENSE PREPARATIONS AND PROTECTION

Strictly confidential No. 4/1 - 93

Date: 1 February 1993

Belgrade, Nemanjina 6

TO THE GENERAL DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Confidential information

Recently, on 28 January 1993, I was informed by the Chief of the section of Uzice Transport Company Zivanic, that the members of the Serbian Army from the Rudo Municipality plan to stop a train and abduct passengers. The whole action is to take place at the part of the Belgrade-Bar railway line which goes through Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I have taken the following actions about this information: informed the high professional collegiate council of the RTC; held a meeting with representatives of the police and the Office for State Security of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Serbia; talked to the assistant of the Defense Minister of Serbia General Kuzmanovic, where we concluded that: (1) General Kuzmanovic should inform the Defense Minister on the above mentioned plan, (2) that the Defense Minister of the Republic of Serbia should inform the Yugoslav Army, (3) and that RTC "Belgrade" should stop their activities regarding this case, since they had fulfilled their obligation in a timely fashion.

#### II ACTIVITIES WITHIN RTC "BELGRADE"

Concerning the information we received from the Chief of the section of Uzice Transport Company, consultations were held with all the deputies of the General Director, where it was decided that we should meet with the Directors of the Exploitation Sector. In these meetings, we concluded that RTC "Belgrade" had done everything in its power. At the meeting with the sector directors it was concluded that the Uzice junction should be checked during next week, that meetings should be held with the railway dispatchers and the representatives of the Internal Affairs Ministry and the Army, and based on that Directions for procedure and actions of the workers of RTC "Belgrade" should be created.

#### III MEETING AT THE ARMY GENERAL OFFICE OF THE YUGOSLAV ARMY

We have been informed that a meeting is to take place at the Army General Office of the Yugoslav Army with the Defense Minister of the Republic of Serbia and the General directors of the four large and complex technical systems, whose objects are of special importance for the defense of the Republic (RTC "Belgrade", "Electric power industry of Serbia", "Petroleum Industry of Serbia" and Postal traffic service of Serbia). It is expected that this meeting will concern vital objects and their protection, the rights and obligations of the Company, i.e. the ability of the Army to personally protect the most vital objects in the system.

DIRECTOR OF THE SECTOR FOR DEFENSE PREPARATIONS AND PROTECTION  
MITAR MANDIC, transport engineer.

# WAITING FOR JUSTICE

More than seventeen years ago, in Mioce, on a part of the road going through Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 22 October 1992, the inhabitants of the Sandzak village Sjeverin were abducted, who had been on their way to work on a bus to Priboj. The bus from Rudo was stopped near the burned tavern “Amfora” by Milan Lukic and the members of his unit “Avengers” (“Osvetnici”). They ordered the Muslims to step off the bus.

Mevlida Koldzic, Mujo Alihodzic, Mustafa Bajramovic, Esad Dzahic, Ramiz Begovic, Zafer Hadzic, Medo Hadzic, Alija Mandal, Mehmed Sebo, Ramahudin Catovic, Dervis Softic, Midhad Softic, Ediz Gibovic, Medredin Hodzic, Sead Pecikoza and Hajrudin Sajtarevic were taken to “Vilina vlas” motel near Visegrad, where they were brutally beaten. Then they were killed, it is assumed, somewhere on the banks of the Drina river. Their bodies were never found.

One day before his brother Ramahudin was abducted in Mioce, Sabahudin Catovic was abducted from his front yard in Sjeverin, and nothing has been heard of him since.

The ruined building of the former “Amfora” tavern still stands as a bitter reminder to the place from which the “Avengers” took 16 Bosnians from Sjeverin. A memorial with the names of the abducted and murdered men has not yet been erected. The local authorities in Priboj are against it.

“What hurts the most is that all the perpetrators of this crime have not been prosecuted yet, and that the state in which we live in and build our lives did not help the families of the victims in any way. We feel abandoned”, Omer Hodzic, whose father Meredin was abducted on Omer’s 10th birthday, said at the commemorative gathering on 22 October 2009.

“We have been waiting seventeen years for justice which would alleviate the sadness at least a little. Instead of a present for my tenth birthday, on that day I saw tears in the eyes of the people who came to see if there were any news about their relatives”, Hodzic said.

Four people have been held accountable for the abduction and murder of 16 Serbian citizens, even



*motel Vilina Vlas*

though it was determined during the trial that more people participated. The principal defendant was the leader of the “Avengers” — Milan Lukic. For the criminal act of war crimes against civilian population committed on 16 Bosnians in Mioce, Milan Lukic and Oliver Krsmanovic were sentenced in absentia to 20 years in prison each, at the War Crimes Council of the Belgrade Municipal Court on 29 September 2003. The same sentence was given to Dragutin Dragicovic, while Djordje Sevic was sentenced to 15 years. The verdict was then overturned and re-tried. Two and a half years passed before the court, on 18 May 2006, reached a first-degree verdict which confirmed the initial prison sentences. While the court process was taking place in Belgrade, Milan Lukic was in exile.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in the Hague had in 1998 raised an indictment against Lukic for war crimes against Bosnians in the vicinity of Visegrad, but the indictment did not include the abductions in Sjeverin and Strpci. In August 2005 he was arrested in Argentina and transferred to the Netherlands. In July 2009, he was given a first-degree verdict, sentencing him to life in prison. The decision of the Appeals council is still pending.

Justice for the families of the victims has not been satisfied in the sense of reparation either. The First Municipal Court in Belgrade, in April 2009, declined the request of the Humanitarian Law Center to provide reimbursements for the families of the murdered men. Behudin Hodzic, the son of the abducted Medo Hodzic, said on that occasion that this was their “fourth execution: the first was when they were taken and murdered, the second was the first trial, the third was the re-trial, and this is the fourth.”

D.L./J.L.

# ATROCITIES (IN THE NAME) OF THE STATE

The village Kukurovici in the Priboj Municipality, inhabited mostly by Bosnians, was attacked on 18 February 1993. According to witness accounts, during the afternoon of that day an infantry and artillery attack was carried out from three positions of the Yugoslav Army, which was positioned around the village. In this attack three people were killed, two were severely wounded and nine houses were set on fire.

The inhabitants of the village, some of them children, ran for their lives into the woods, towards Pljevlje and Priboj. While on the run, some of them could see their houses burning. When some of them returned to the village two days later, they found burning remains and slaughtered cattle. Inside the burned houses they found the bodies of Uzeir Bulutovic, Musan Husovic and Fatima Sarac, who did not manage to leave the village during the attack.

“We heard violent explosions, machine guns, automatic weapons. I managed to escape with my family to the creek. I saw our houses burning, and there was a man screaming, you could hear it everywhere. At dawn I arrived in Pljevlja. On the third day I returned to the village. Everything I had had been burned. I came to Uzeir’s house and saw him with no head and no legs, and his insides were still burning. At the burning site of Musan Husovic’s house, there were two or three bones which used to be his. Fatima, his wife, was laying in a shed completely naked. She had bullet holes all over her chest and stomach. Her arms were broken. While I was in Kukurovici, Milan Simovic used to come to my house often and say ‘This is Serbian land, you should vote for Milosevic, not Ugljanin’. The army used to ask me: ‘Is your wife young? If you cannot handle her, we will’. They asked if there were any girls in the village. All of them were from the Yugoslav Army, and there was no other army present. There was no army of the Bosnian Serbs, and the closest Muslim army was 40 kilometers away, near Gorazde. Since that day, 18 February, I have been living in Pljevlja. No one wanted to help me. I do physical work in order to survive”, Dzafer Kaltak from Kukurovici stated for “Sandzacke novine”.



On 11 April 1993, when everyone had left the village, eight more houses and their adjoining objects were burned.

The Kukurovici village is situated near the state border between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. From 8 May 1992 until the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Kukurovici and other border villages, a large number of reserve forces of the Yugoslav Army from the Uzice Corps were put up. The inhabitants of these villages were abused daily by the members of the Yugoslav Army, who also conducted illegal searches just because of their ethnicity.

The investigative judge had inspected the scene of the crime, but none of the inhabitants of Kukurovici were ever interrogated, nor have any other investigative actions taken place.

The Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) had filed a criminal suit for this crime against unknown perpetrators from the Uzice Corps of the Yugoslav Army to the District Public Prosecutors Office in Uzice on 23 October 2006. The Uzice Prosecutors Office informed the HLC on 27 October 2006 that the case had been referred to the War Crimes Prosecutor. The HLC had, in the name of 20 inhabitants of the Kukurovici village, Priboj Municipality, on 20 March 2007 filed a Request for settlement against the Republic of Serbia to the Republic Public Defenders Office, for its responsibility in the destruction homes by the unidentified members of the Uzice Corps of the Yugoslav Army on 18 February and 11 April 1993. Because of the inability to repair their homes themselves, the inhabitants of Kukurovici have not yet returned to the village, and the state never gave them the status of internally displaced persons, or help of any kind.

By: D.L.