



# Weekly Briefing

**Bosnia-Herzegovina social briefing:  
Funeral for Srebrenica victims:  
Commemoration, reconciliation, politics**  
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## **Funeral for Srebrenica victims: Commemoration, reconciliation, politics**

### **Summary**

*As in previous years, July 11 is the day when a commemoration and burial is organized in Srebrenica for the people of Srebrenica and other Bosniaks from Eastern Bosnia who found themselves in that enclave protected by the United Nations in the summer of 1995. Two international courts, the United Nations' International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), characterized the war-crime that took place in those few July days as genocide. In the Memorial Center "Srebrenica - Potočari" near Srebrenica, every July 11, the burial of those whose remains are found in primary, secondary and even tertiary graves in this area is organized. The commemoration in Srebrenica, unfortunately, does not pass without various controversies. This example shows how much BiH is a society with special needs and untreated war traumas.*

### **Introduction**

6,671 victims were buried in the "Srebrenica - Potočari" Memorial Center until July 11, 2022. In addition to them, after this year's funeral, which is held on the day when the members of the Army of Republic of Srpska, led by the then supreme military commander Ratko Mladić<sup>1</sup>, entered Srebrenica and occupied that United Nations Protected Zone, another 50 identified victims found eternal rest.

The most victims were buried in 2003, 989 of them. That year, on March 31, 600 identified bodies were buried at the first collective funeral. At the commemoration on July 11 of the same year, 282 victims were laid to rest, and on September 20, when former President of the United States Bill Clinton officially opened the Potočari Memorial Center, another 107 remains were buried. Since then, July 11 has been fixed as the date of the funeral for the victims

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<sup>1</sup> Ratko Mladić was the military commander of the Army of Republika Srpska during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The ICTY sentenced him to life imprisonment for the genocide in Srebrenica. Bosnian Serb civilian leader Radovan Karadžić was also sentenced to life imprisonment. More at <https://www.icty.org/en/press/radovan-karadzic-and-ratko-mladic-accused-genocide-following-take-over-srebrenica>, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210608-un-court-upholds-conviction-of-former-bosnian-serb-military-chief-ratko-mladic-on-war-crimes-charges> and <https://www.rferl.org/a/bosnia-karadzic-life-sentence-british-prison-srebrenica/31251791.html>

of Srebrenica. Since official opening of the Center, the largest funeral was held seven years later, on July 11, 2010. The most bodies were buried, 775 of them.

### **Organized covering up**

The remains of genocide victims were found in 150 locations. 81 graves were found in Podrinje region, others in wider areas. That includes primary, secondary, and even tertiary mass graves (which means that the remains were found in a second or third location compared to the location of the murder, which leads to conclusion that the traces of the crime were covered up). Among those identified are 440 minors, and 22 women. In addition to the 6,671 victims buried so far, 225 remains were, according to the wishes of the families, buried in other locations, in local and family graves<sup>2</sup>.

The youngest victim who was buried on the 27th anniversary of the genocide is Salim Mustafić, who was killed when he was 16 years old, while the oldest is Husejin Krdžić, who was 59 years old at the time of his death. Forces of the Army of Republika Srpska in and around Srebrenica in Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina killed 8,372 men and boys of non-Serb nationality. More than 25,000 women, children and the elderly were expelled from the then protected zone of the United Nations<sup>3</sup>.

### **Established rituals**

According to established practice, the remains of the victims of Srebrenica were sent with tears and prayers from the town of Visoko, which is close to the capital, Sarajevo, to the Memorial Center in Potočari. On the way to Potočari, the truck with coffins stopped in front of the BiH Presidency building, where numerous citizens paid their respects to the victims. As in previous years, the company "City Cemeteries (*Gradska groblja*)" Visoko was involved in the organization of the commemoration of the anniversary. Since 2003, this company has been

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<sup>2</sup> So far, 21 funerals have been held in Potočari: Eternal peace found 6,671 victims of genocide. <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/756786/do-sada-odrzana-21-dzenaza-u-potocarima-vjecni-smiraj-nasla-6-671-zrtva-genocida>

<sup>3</sup> On the 27th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica, another 50 victims were buried. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/ukop-zrtve-genocid-srebrenica-2022/31934865.html>

exhuming bodies from mass graves and preparing them after identification for a collective funeral<sup>4</sup>.

In the week before the funeral, numerous markings and commemorations were held all over Europe and the world, and the media in BiH especially noted those in Germany, Austria, Great Britain, Australia and Croatia. Srebrenica was remembered in city administrations, parliaments, libraries, cultural institutions, on city squares, and numerous resolutions were adopted in parliaments<sup>5</sup>.

Numerous representatives from the public and political life of BiH, Europe and the world spoke at the commemoration, and the religious ceremony itself was led, as usual, by Reisu-l-ulema Husein Kavazović, the leader (Grand Mufti) of the Islamic community in BiH. The commemorative part was opened by the president of this year's Organizational of the committee for commemorating July 11, 1995, Hamdija Fejzić, otherwise himself a Srebrenica survivor. He mentioned the victims but also those who are still being searched for, those who were killed as well as those who survived. He said that in Srebrenica, the children who are born in that city are growing up, and that they are the hope for a better tomorrow. Fejzić said that those children should be given a dignified life regardless of their national and religious affiliation, and that only the recognition of the genocide leads to reconciliation<sup>6</sup>.

### **Dutch apology and European words**

Given that the forces of the Dutch Battalion of the United Nations ("Dutchbat") were deployed in Srebrenica in 1995, the address of the Minister of Defense of this country, Kasje Ollonger, was also described as important. She said that Srebrenica has been keeping a terrible memory for 27 years that she herself aware, and that is the memory of the complete helplessness of the UN soldiers who tried to help preventing genocide, and for which the only culprit is the Bosnian Serb army. The minister said that the international community failed, that the

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<sup>4</sup> Tribute to the victims of genocide in Srebrenica, for the first time in front of the city mosque.

<https://balkans.aljazeera.net/news/balkan/2022/7/8/kamion-s-tabutima-50-zrtava-genocida-polazi-iz-visokog-ka-potocarima>

<sup>5</sup> Funeral service and burial of 50 victims of the genocide in Srebrenica.

<https://radiosarajevo.ba/metromahala teme/uzivo-tuga-u-srebrenici-jecaji-odjekuju-dolinom-bijelih-nisana-u-potocarima/462777>

<sup>6</sup> Hamdija Fezić: Only recognition of genocide leads to reconciliation.

<https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/hamdija-fezic-samo-priznanje-genocida-vodi-ka-pomirenju-774758>

Government of the Netherlands recognizes the failure and therefore offers its deepest apologies to the families of the victims<sup>7</sup>.

Joseph Borrell, the EU's High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, spoke in Potočari via video link. At the beginning of his address, he pointed out that it is everyone's duty to remember the genocide in Srebrenica. Borrell said he shares his grief with those who were killed and the families whose lives were changed forever. He also said that he cannot come without reconciliation without recognizing the genocide in Srebrenica<sup>8</sup>.

High Representative in BiH Christian Schmidt was also in Srebrenica and addressed the audience. He called the place holy and his burden upon his arrival heavy. He also said he felt the burden of the international community's failure to protect those who were under threat of being killed<sup>9</sup>. His compatriot and vice-president of the German Bundestag, Aydan Ozoguz, said that this legislative body is dedicated to defending the foundations of Europe and not allowing the atrocities of genocide to be forgotten<sup>10</sup>.

Every genocide deserves to be remembered, and every denial of genocide puts us in a situation where history is distorted, which none of us must allow, said one of the speakers, Vice President of the World Jewish Congress Meachem Rosensat. Therefore, he added, anyone who tries to deny the genocide in Srebrenica is distorting history<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Minister of Defense of the Netherlands: There is only one culprit for the genocide, and that is the Bosnian Serb army <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/ministrice-odbrane-nizozemske-samo-je-jedan-krivac-za-genocid-a-it-is-an-army-of-Bosnian-Serbs-774819>

<sup>8</sup> Borrell: We share the grief with all the victims, there can be no reconciliation without acknowledging the genocide. <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/borrell-mi-dijelimo-tugu-sa-svim-zrtvama-ne-moze-doci-do-pomirenja-bez-priznanja-genocida-774839>

<sup>9</sup> Schmidt: Every time I come here I feel the burden of the failure of the international community. <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/schmidt-svaki-put-kad-dodem-ovdje-osjecam-teret-neuspjeha-medunarodne-zajednice-774755>

<sup>10</sup> Aydan Ozoguz: Remembering the victims is our duty. [www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/aydan-ozoguz-sjecanje-na-zrtve-nas-je-dug-774814](http://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/aydan-ozoguz-sjecanje-na-zrtve-nas-je-dug-774814)

<sup>11</sup> 27th anniversary: Noon, Afternoon and funeral prayers performed. <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/gradani-pristizu-u-potocare-u-srebrenici-ce-danas-smiraj-naci-jos-50-zrtava-genocida-iz-jula-1995-774744>

## **Insult to the victims**

Johann Sattler, the head of the EU Delegation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the EU's special representative in our country, was in Srebrenica, but he was not one of the speakers. However, a day later, on his blog, which was reported by numerous media, he wrote that, among other things, political leaders must be the bearers of change and do everything necessary to achieve reconciliation, but also that it is understandable that after so much inhumanity in Srebrenica, the words such as reconciliation sound vain, or even insulting to the victims<sup>12</sup>.

Milorad Dodik, a Serbian member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, reacted to Sattler's statements. He told to RS TV that Sattler for a longtime support only Bosniaks and that if the head of the EU delegation visited a Serbian execution site, he would not have said what he said. Dodik claimed if there cannot be reconciliation in BiH, then BiH cannot even exist, adding that it is difficult to provide reconciliation because of the history we have, but that understanding can be provided. By the way, Dodik also said that a great and serious crime took place in Srebrenica, but that politicization is unacceptable<sup>13</sup>.

Otherwise, on the road Bratunac-Potočari, which is located in the territory of the entity RS, on the eve of the funeral, photos of 3,267 Serbian civilians and soldiers from Central Podrinje region who were killed and died in the last war in BiH were posted. The local authorities from Bratunac participated in the installation action, expressing their regret that none of the embassies and international organizations responded to their commemorations to mark the Serbian suffering<sup>14</sup>. The District Prosecutor's Office of Bijeljina ordered the removal these photos, which the families of the victims did, moving the photos to their properties, next to the fences of the houses<sup>15</sup>.

Two days after the commemoration, associations that gather mothers from Srebrenica were forbidden to enter the building of the Agricultural Cooperative in location Kravica on the

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<sup>12</sup> Sattler: Europe learned painful lessons from Srebrenica, that's why we unwaveringly support Ukraine. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/sattler-evropa-je-naucila-bolne-lekcije-iz-srebrenica-zato-nepokolebljivo-podrzamo-ukrajinu/220712084>

<sup>13</sup> Dodik for RTRS: Sattler has long been in a position of support for the Muslim side; BiH non-functional. <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=479900>

<sup>14</sup> Photographs of murdered Serbs along the Bratunac - Potočari road. <https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/bih/Fotografije-ubijenih-Srba-uz-put-Bratunac-Potocari/726234>

<sup>15</sup> The photos were ordered to be removed on the road from Bratunac to Potočari, the locals placed them in their yards. <https://mondo.ba/Info/Drustvo/a1153623/Fotografije-ubijenije-Srba-na-putu-Bratunaca-Srebrenica.html>

territory of Bratunac Municipality, where more than 1,370 Bosniak men and boys were killed on July 13 and 14, 1995. Only a few of them survived this massacre and testified in The Hague processes. RS police did not allow them to enter<sup>16</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

Srebrenica is the most famous place of suffering in the Bosnian 1992-95 war. The story of Srebrenica is a painful wound not only for the Bosniaks who were victims, but also for others involved, such as the international factor whose conscience is unclean. Most of Serbian community and leadership, who are now the majority both in Srebrenica and in surrounding municipalities such as Bratunac, do not recognize the characterization of the crime as genocide, but this often turns into the denial of the crime as such. Even after numerous verdicts in various courts for war crimes throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, including those described in detail in Srebrenica, there was no catharsis. The issue of reconciliation permeates politics. Probably because, in the minds of many, the war is not over yet, unfortunately.

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<sup>16</sup> Shameful: The mothers of Srebrenica were forbidden to honor the victims of the genocide in Kravica.  
<https://www.faktor.ba/vijest/sramotno-majkama-srebrenice-zabranili-da-odaju-pocast-zrtvama-genocida-u-kravici/169190>