



HAL
open science

Reopening the Wounds ? The Parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Question of Bosniak Responsibility

Xavier Bougarel

► To cite this version:

Xavier Bougarel. Reopening the Wounds ? The Parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Question of Bosniak Responsibility. Jean-Louis Fournel; Isabelle Delpla; Xavier Bougarel. Investigating Srebrenica. Institutions, Facts, Responsibilities., New York : Berghahn, pp.104-130, 2012. <halshs-02610514>

HAL Id: halshs-02610514

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02610514v1>

Submitted on 17 May 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



HAL Authorization

« Reopening the Wounds ? The Parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Question of Bosniak Responsibility », in : Isabelle Delpla / Xavier Bougarel / Jean-Louis Fournel (eds.), *Investigating Srebrenica. Institutions, Facts, Responsibilities*, New York : Berghahn, 2012, pp. 104-130.

Xavier Bougarel

“We are not all equally guilty for Srebrenica and that needs to disappear from the agenda, we cannot all be equally guilty and we cannot all decide this question. But we need to ask what are perhaps not really the most attractive questions about what we did on our side.”¹
(Ekrem Ajanović, 1 August 1996)

The July 1995 Srebrenica massacre is unanimously seen by Bosniaks as one of the major symbols of the genocide they experienced during the recent conflict and of the passive – indeed, complicit – attitude of the international community while it was underway. Moreover, the majority of works published in the Federation² concerning the events in Srebrenica consist either of survivors’ testimony or of translations of journalistic inquiries and official reports published abroad that focus on condemning Serb crimes and the passivity of the United Nations. Yet at the same time, the question of possible Bosniak responsibility in the fall of Srebrenica remains the object of heated polemic, mainly concerning the tactical errors that may have been committed by Bosniak military and political leaders and the hypothetical abandonment of the enclave as part of a larger territorial swap. As I will attempt to show in the final part of this chapter, this polemic is indirectly related to larger questions concerning the war aims of Bosniak leaders.

On 1 August 1996, this question was also the subject of debate in the Parliament of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina.³ It is on this parliamentary debate that I would like to concentrate, starting with a reconstruction of the dynamics that lead it to be held and moving on from there to consider its participants and content. The aim of this chapter is thus in no way to determine the degree of Bosniak responsibility for the fall of the enclave – a responsibility which, in any case, does not in the least diminish the blame of those who ordered and carried out the massacre. Rather, the chapter seeks to show how rumors and taboos, street demonstrations and backroom maneuvers, personal attacks and official investigations all contributed to shaping what has since become a persistent doubt.

This haunting doubt matters not only for what it will one day perhaps teach us about certain aspects of the events of Srebrenica. Indeed, the manner in which the question of Bosniak responsibility is debated (or not) within the Bosniak community also reveals certain ways in which power is exercised and public space structured there. Even if it ultimately proves to be based solely on unfounded rumors, the debate over possible Bosniak responsibility in the fall of Srebrenica will thus continue to reflect certain essential realities of post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina and deserves in this respect to be taken seriously.

The Demand for Truth versus the Need for Unity: The Origins of a Debate

Questions concerning possible Bosniak responsibility for the fall of Srebrenica and Žepa first arose in the summer of 1995. Indeed, on 13 July of that year, Bećir Heljić, a representative of the Žepa enclave in Sarajevo, stated that “Žepa, Srebrenica and Goražde are bargaining chips for the world but also for our official policy.”⁴ Heljić’s remarks provoked

immediate protests from the ruling Party of Democratic Action (SDA). Some days later, Naser Orić, the commander of the Srebrenica enclave who had been recalled to central Bosnia in March 1995, told *Ratna tribina* (“War Tribune”), a newspaper with ties to the populations of eastern Bosnia:⁵

“I did not betray Srebrenica, even if many have tried to present me that way. Rather than helping me find weapons and transport them there, they looked in advance for accusations and culprits. I will go before my soldiers when we link up [⁶] and will tell them what has happened here. I will tell them the truth. Let them then say whether I or someone else is guilty.”⁷

These remarks reflect a widespread feeling of abandonment among the combatants of the 28th division who succeeded in reaching the “free territories.” Just after arriving in Tuzla, some of them forced their way into the building housing the 2nd Corps’ headquarters to ask for an explanation. At a late July meeting organized to calm tensions between the representatives of the enclaves, the officers of the 2nd Corps and the authorities of the Tuzla Canton, the former chief of police for the Srebrenica enclave, Hakija Meholjić, requested that an investigative commission be created to look into the responsibility of the UN and the Sarajevo authorities. President Alija Izetbegović, who attended the meeting, opposed this request.⁸

The representatives of the enclaves were not the only ones to raise the question of possible Bosniak responsibility. On 13 July, Nijaz Duraković, the President of the Social Democratic Party (SDP, ex-communist) and sole Bosniak member of the Bosnian collegial Presidency not belonging to the SDA,⁹ wondered “why, despite an extremely difficult context, Srebrenica’s defense has not been better prepared, why have some actions not been better planned and organized in advance.” Duraković expressed his hope that, “when this strong wave of emotion has calmed, these questions will be put on the agenda. The question of responsibility for certain obvious failures has for far too long been passed over in silence”¹⁰. A week later, the SDP stated that it was “unacceptable that the Presidency, as a [collective] organ, has yet to express itself concerning Srebrenica.”¹¹ Though the leaders of the opposition reached an agreement to ask “that the causes of the insufficient efficiency of state, military and political structures in preventing the Srebrenica tragedy be seriously examined and that responsibility be concretely established, where appropriate,”¹² they remained cautious in their interpretation of events. Reacting to Bećir Heljić’s statements, they described them as “a logical consequence of a large number of probably unfounded stories concerning a supposed betrayal [by Sarajevo authorities],”¹³ and emphasized that “we must not kick the ball of responsibility back to the [Bosnian] authorities.”¹⁴

The ruling SDA for its part sought to soften the political impact of the enclaves’ fall. Meeting on 11 July to ratify a number of constitutional amendments, the SDA’s parliamentary group was not informed of Srebrenica’s fall¹⁵ and, on 4 August, this question was not even included on the agenda of the parliamentary session. When addressing public opinion, SDA leaders strove to minimize the magnitude of the catastrophe, speaking of “the provisional occupation [of Srebrenica]”¹⁶ and asserting that “a large part of the men have succeeded in getting themselves out of this region”.¹⁷ Above all, they considered that the question of enclave representatives and opposition parties threatened the unity of the Bosniak nation, categorically rejected the hypothesis of an implicit territorial swap of eastern Bosnian enclaves for Serb-held Sarajevo neighborhoods and postponed considering the question of possible Bosniak responsibility until war’s end. Yet these opinions were not shared by Prime Minister Haris Silajdžić who, finding himself increasingly in disagreement with the leaders of

his own party, announced his resignation on 5 August and conspicuously left for Tuzla to meet with representatives of the opposition and refugees from the enclaves. Questioned about the fall of Srebrenica, he responded:

“I expected this case to be examined during the last parliamentary session. [...] The Government does not set Parliament’s agenda. I agree with you in saying that, after everything that happened in Srebrenica, things could not remain as they were.”¹⁸

In the weeks following the fall of Srebrenica, the emerging debate over the issue of Bosniak responsibility thus took place less in the framework of legal institutions than within the ruling party. Addressing the SDA parliamentary group on 3 August 1995, Haris Silajdžić asked for the resignation of Rasim Delić, chief of the army’s general staff and criticized Alija Izetbegović for having “made the task easier for the Serbs in doing what they had intended to do all along” by announcing in the spring plans to break the siege of Sarajevo – a tragic consequence, in his view, of the existence of parallel power networks controlled by Izetbegović and his entourage.¹⁹ SDA officials, on the contrary, tended to put responsibility for Srebrenica’s fall on the shoulders, not just of the UN and the great powers, but also of the enclave’s political and military leaders. Responding to Silajdžić, Delić thus claimed that Srebrenica “did not fall militarily, but politically, which is to say, psychologically” and accused the leaders of the enclave of not having followed the instructions they had received from Sarajevo.²⁰ Izetbegović, for his part, considered that “it is not right to use a minor army crisis to launch an attack against the army.” For the first time, however, he mentioned the possibility of a parliamentary investigative commission for “if [the enclave] could have defended itself then someone is guilty for the death of several thousand people.”²¹ Addressing SDA leaders who had come together for a special session two days later, he denounced the “disgraceful behavior of some of our own people, cowards who gave in and began to negotiate with the enemy before deciding to flee, convincing the population that it should also flee.”²²

Beginning in the summer of 1995, the major protagonists of the debate over the question of Bosniak responsibility – representatives of the enclaves, opposition parties, the ruling SDA and Haris Silajdžić, who was in conflict with his own party – were thus in position. Similarly, the principal points of contention in this debate were already apparent. In its 31 July issue, for example, *Ratna tribina* reproached Sarajevo authorities for the inadequate quantity of weapons that were delivered to the eastern Bosnian enclaves, the recall of Naser Orić and several other officers in central Bosnia four months before the Serb offensive and the absence of any large-scale military initiative to come to the aid of the column that had departed for the “free territories.”²³ The paper then portrayed the tensions that had always set eastern Bosnian military units against their own hierarchy as part of a “global plan for abandoning the Drina Valley”²⁴ and wondered whether “the population and the army needed to be sacrificed in addition to the territory.”²⁵ *Ratna tribina* thus refused to attribute responsibility for the fall of Srebrenica to the people of the enclave, holding instead that “the generals are guilty” and that “Naser Orić is sacrificed in order to save the generals’ stripes.”²⁶ In the months that followed, however, Silajdžić’s withdrawal of his threat to resign, the discretion shown by the opposition parties, the dispersion of the combatants from the 28th division among different units, the installation of the refugees in housing sites located far away from large urban centers and – last but not least – the NATO air strikes and the victories of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ARBiH) in western Bosnia forced the Srebrenica catastrophe into the background of current events. It would only be with the end of

hostilities that the question of Bosniak responsibility was to resurface at the heart of Bosnian political life.

The Search for the Missing, the Women's Movement and the SDA's Internal Crisis

By attributing the Drina valley to the Republika Srpska and the Serb-held Sarajevo neighborhoods to the Federation, the peace agreements signed at on 14 December 1995, inevitably reignited rumors of a territorial swap to the detriment of eastern Bosnian enclaves. At the same time, the organization of prisoner exchanges under the protection of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) once again raised the question of the fate of the thousands of men who had been missing since the fall of Srebrenica and Žepa. Finally, and more generally, the end of hostilities, the demobilization of combatants, the rise of independent media and the announcement of general elections in September 1996 favored the expression of what had up till then been underlying social and political tensions.

It thus stands to reason that the end of the war coincided with the first demonstrations organized by survivors of the eastern Bosnian enclaves. Indeed, on 29 January 1996, the *Aktiv žena*²⁷ of Srebrenica organized a rally of 2,000 people – mostly women – in front of the ICRC headquarters in Tuzla in order to obtain information about the fate of the missing. Infuriated by the silence of this organization, some protesters vandalized the premises. In the days that followed, events took a turn for the worse for those in power as other themes emerged alongside the fate of the missing. On one hand, the leaders of the Srebrenica municipality and Tuzla Canton were accused of having diverted the funds raised during the summer of 1995. On the other hand, rumors resurfaced that the enclave had been abandoned and, while some protesters demanded that Izetbegović meet with them in Tuzla, others declared their intention to vote for Silajdžić, who had just left his position as Prime Minister and had definitively broken with the SDA. Finally, on 2 February, after the Tuzla canton leaders refused to meet with the protesters, the situation once again worsened, with the windows of the cantonal government's headquarters being destroyed with stones.

These protests, which marked the birth of the Srebrenica women's movement, put the authorities of Sarajevo in a delicate position. On 10 February, Izetbegović thus travelled to Tuzla accompanied by Naser Orić and the governor of Tuzla canton, Izet Hadžić, where they met with between 2,000 and 3,000 Srebrenica refugees in the town's main gymnasium. In his introductory speech, Izetbegović declared that “for thousands of people, there is no hope they are alive; for a few dozen or a few hundred people, there is still hope.” Izetbegović asked his listeners to reject all attempts to “politicize” their demands and announced the creation of a five member committee – including two representatives from Srebrenica²⁸ – responsible for supervising all activities linked to the search for the missing and aid to refugees. During the discussion that followed, Izetbegović was sharply criticized by certain speakers, who asked him among other things: “Was Srebrenica sold and, if so, why were 10,000 people sacrificed?” “Will someone in the Government, in the Presidency or in other bodies, some day be held accountable?” “Are you guilty, too?” Izetbegović responded that “it is difficult to give the right answer to nine out of ten of your questions, as there simply is no answer.” He then added, “we defended Srebrenica as well as we could,” and sought to justify the decision to sign the Dayton agreements.²⁹

Izetbegović's visit to Tuzla, together with the announcement of concrete measures in favor of Srebrenica refugees, allowed an end to be put to the demonstrations. But the question of Bosniak responsibility immediately came up again in Parliament, which was thus led to

debate the events of the summer of 1995 for the first time. Indeed, on 12 February 1996, Amor Mašović, President of the Commission for prisoner exchanges, presented Parliament with a report concerning the activities conducted by the institution he directed in the framework of the search for those missing from Srebrenica and Žepa. On this occasion, Mujo Kafedžić, a deputy of the Bosniak Muslim Organization (MBO³⁰), noted that his party had as early as August 1995 demanded that Parliament examine the circumstances of the enclaves' fall and asserted that "the attempts of some circles to pass over in silence the responsibility of certain local bodies are obvious." SDA deputies countered by announcing that a "neutral" analysis of events was being prepared that would demonstrate that "the concept of safe areas was a death sentence for these territories" and also submitted a ten-point resolution to Parliament concerning Srebrenica.³¹ This resolution, reworked and adopted the following day in committee, provided among other things that:

"[...] 2. The Commission [for prisoner exchanges, renamed the Commission for the search for missing persons] [...] will present at the next meetings of Parliament, except in the case that Parliament decides otherwise, a report on what it achieved between the two sessions; [...] 4. The services in charge of the study of war crimes will devote their attention to the circumstances of the Srebrenica tragedy in order to identify the war criminals who ordered and carried out the crimes [...]; 5. The Parliament of the RBiH commissions the Government and its relevant agencies to carry out a full report on the problem of missing persons, prisoners and displaced persons, including a report on the part of the armed forces of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina regarding the military circumstances of the fall of Srebrenica; 6. The Parliament of the RBiH will ask the relevant Government agencies for a detailed report on the attitude of the international factor [represented by] UNPROFOR, on the responsibility within the United Nations and NATO, on the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UNHCR before, during and after the Srebrenica tragedy [...]."³²

Over the following months, the debate over possible Bosniak responsibility for Srebrenica's fall once again seemed to subside. In fact, however, multiple factors contributed to bringing about a change in the protagonists involved and the form of the debate. On the one hand, following the transfer of Serb-held Sarajevo neighborhoods to the Federation, the SDA encouraged refugees from eastern Bosnia to come and settle there, once again reigniting rumors of a territorial swap and sparking heated tensions between SDA leaders and local political leaders who supported return. On the other hand, the liberation of Žepa men detained in Serbia since July 1995 fed other rumors according to which thousands of men from Srebrenica had been secretly detained in several mines in Serbia. It was in this troubled context that Ibran Mustafić made his appearance. Elected as a SDA deputy from Srebrenica in 1990, Mustafić had clashed with the leaders of the enclave during the war and was liberated from the Batković camp in the Republika Srpska on 21 April 1996.

Ibran Mustafić's return to the Bosnian political scene lent an even more polemical tone to the debate over possible Bosniak responsibility. At a new parliamentary session on 27 May 1996, Mustafić denounced in the same breath the international community, the Sarajevo authorities and the enclave's leaders. The following day, he demanded that a commission be created to investigate the fate of the missing and that a fund be set up to centralize aid for Srebrenica refugees, in keeping with the resolution adopted in February. He strongly suggested, what's more, that he was the best candidate for managing these two organizations. The debate was then interrupted by Dževad Mlačo, President of the SDA parliamentary group, who announced that these questions would be dealt with at an upcoming meeting

between his group and the representatives of Srebrenica. In doing so, he tried to marginalize Mustafić and once again circumvent legal institutions.

Thwarted in his attempt to reoccupy the position of legitimate representative of the Srebrenica population, Ibran Mustafić joined the Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina (SBiH), which had been created shortly before by Silajdžić.³³ On 14 July 1996, he gave an explosive interview to the weekly newspaper *Slobodna Bosna* (“Free Bosnia”). There, Mustafić claimed that “the Srebrenica enclave [...] has been deliberately sacrificed” and that “the Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the army’s general staff have been directly involved in these plots.” He then alternated between relatively precise accusations against the Sarajevo authorities and the enclave leaders – described as a “group of mafioso” who created a regime of terror – with more general considerations concerning the failure to demilitarize the “safe area” and extravagant claims that enclave leaders had safely crossed Serb lines and left propaganda tracts behind them inciting the rest of the column to surrender.³⁴ Yet whatever credit one gives to Mustafić’s comments, their importance is elsewhere: for the first time, a political leader originating from Srebrenica had publicly accused the highest reaches of the state of treason.

Introspection or Diversion? The Parliamentary Debate of 1 August 1996

To understand the impact of Ibran Mustafić’s accusations, one must place them within a larger context. On the one hand, the intensification of the electoral campaign and the appearance of the SBiH as the direct rival of the SDA exacerbated the political divides within the Bosniak community. On the other hand, the approach of the first anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre, the exhumation of the first mass graves and the *in absentia* indictment of Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) contributed to returning the events of July 1995 – and with them, albeit indirectly, the question of possible Bosniak responsibility – to the center of media attention.

The commemorations of the massacre thus took place in a fairly tense context. On 11 July, several prominent Bosnian and foreign figures attended the first commemorative ceremony to be held in Tuzla while Izetbegović prudently remained in Sarajevo. In a speech broadcast on television, he denounced “the indifference and the hypocrisy of the powerful who could have prevented the catastrophe but continually found reasons not to do so.” In response to the question: “who is guilty?,” he answered that “the guiltiest are in any case the assassins and those who gave the orders, but we are all guilty, all of us who survived” for “when something happens as terrible as Srebrenica, there are no innocents.”³⁵ At another ceremony organized by the cantonal authorities in Tuzla the following day, the Governor, Izet Hadžić, and the mayor of Srebrenica, Fahrudin Salihović, were booed by a portion of the audience despite the interventions of Naser Orić and Ejup Ganić, Vice President of the collegial Presidency,³⁶ who called upon Bosniaks to not let themselves be divided into “political enclaves”³⁷ and who presented the vote for the SDA as “the means for returning to Srebrenica.”³⁸ Heated controversy then broke out between the SDA and the opposition: the weekly newspaper *Ljiljan* (“The Lily”), closely aligned with the SDA, accused the Tuzla municipality of having orchestrated the incidents of 12 July³⁹ and the opposition retorted that “the party in power is instrumentalizing the Srebrenica exodus”⁴⁰ and that “those who made the Srebrenica population leave can hardly do anything to get them to return.”⁴¹

With six weeks left before the first post-war elections, the parliamentary debate of 1 August 1996, came to seem like a hasty attempt to defuse the question of possible Bosniak

responsibility for the fall of Srebrenica. Moreover, this debate was organized in the absence of Ibran Mustafić, who was participating in electoral meetings in Germany, Naser Orić was not invited to participate and Šemsudin Muminović, the officer who commanded the operations to link-up with the column⁴² and who was initially supposed to present a report on this aspect of the events of July 1995, was in the end asked to remain silent.⁴³ This debate therefore unfolded in the absence of the elected representatives of Srebrenica and of some of the event's key protagonists.⁴⁴ In addition, it must be noted that the most important Bosniak politicians did not participate in the debate: Izetbegović and Silajdžić were absent from the benches of the Parliament and the leaders of the opposition remained silent.⁴⁵ Introductory remarks were thus made by the chief of the army's general staff Rasim Delić, Vice minister of Foreign Affairs⁴⁶ Hasan Dervišbegović and Prime Minister Hasan Muratović, formerly minister in charge of relations with the UNPROFOR. The debate, for its part, saw certain prominent members of the SDA (Dževad Mlačo, Avdo Čampara, Irfan Ajanović, Safet Isović) face off against former SDA deputies who had joined the SBiH (Ekrem Ajanović, Muharem Cero, Smail Ibrahimpašić), two social-democratic deputies originating from the Tuzla region (Mustafa Šehović, Igor Rajner)⁴⁷ and some representatives of eastern Bosnian populations present in the Parliament.⁴⁸ Finally, the commission in charge of writing the final resolution to be voted by the deputies was composed of representatives from the major parliamentary groups but included only one representative of the eastern Bosnian populations and no deputies from the SBiH.⁴⁹

In his presentation of the military causes of Srebrenica's fall, Rasim Delić noted that there were objective difficulties in defending the enclave, and insisted on the fact that "the main cause of the fall of Srebrenica was the betrayal of the international community" which had "shamelessly wiped it off the map by abandoning it to the murderous hordes of Serbo-Montenegrin aggressors."⁵⁰ This line of argument is also to be found in the presentations of Hasan Dervišbegović and Hasan Muratović, who denounced "the policy of aggression, of ethnic cleansing and of genocide conducted against all of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the Belgrade regime and its [local] quislings,"⁵¹ recounted the chronology of diplomatic activities relating to the Srebrenica enclave from March 1993 to July 1995, justified the choice made by the Sarajevo authorities⁵² and accused Yasushi Akashi and General Bernard Janvier⁵³ of having "sold Srebrenica in exchange for the [blue helmets held hostage by the Serbs in June 1995], presumably with the consent of Mr. Ghali, supreme authority of the United Nations."⁵⁴ But, while Dervišbegović only mentioned in passing the fact that "for our conscience and as a lesson for the future, we should also try to evaluate what we ourselves did,"⁵⁵ Delić devoted the better part of his presentation to the question of possible Bosniak responsibility for the fall of the enclave and the magnitude of the massacre that followed it.

He immediately asserted that, in his view, the enclave had already fallen, militarily speaking, in March 1993 – that is, before his nomination to the head of general staff. He also emphasized that, beginning in April 1994, significant quantities of weapons had been delivered to Srebrenica⁵⁶ and that enclave defense and evacuation plans had been developed in coordination with the local authorities, but that the rapid collapse of the enclave and the failure to comply with orders prevented the army from rescuing the column. Delić thus sought to lay the blame for any failure in defending Srebrenica or protecting its population on the enclave's leaders, citing many malfunctions that affected the enclave throughout the siege⁵⁷ and during the Serb offensive.⁵⁸ As for Naser Orić, Delić asserted that he had been recalled to central Bosnia at his request in order to discuss the internal problems of the enclave and had refused to return to Srebrenica after the helicopter that linked with the enclaves of eastern Bosnia was shot down on 7 May 1995. On this topic, he added:

“When it comes to Naser Orić and some others, I will remind you that we are all, together with the media, very much at fault in thoughtlessly creating legends without taking account of the human weaknesses, and not just a few of them, that everyone has within themselves – including Naser Orić.”⁵⁹

This was, ultimately, the only mistake that Rasim Delić seemed prepared to admit in this affair.

Afterwards, the debate solidified around several points. In the first place, SDA deputies insisted on the “question of crime and genocide against the Bosniaks [of Srebrenica]”⁶⁰ whereas opposition deputies took a greater interest in the circumstances of the enclave’s fall.⁶¹ A second difference of opinion was superimposed on the first regarding the relation between international and local responsibility. In the course of the debate, the denunciation of the massacre and the demand that Serb criminals be judged by the ICTY only constituted a secondary issue as these two points were the object of unanimous agreement. Similarly, all those who intervened accused the international community of having abandoned the population of the enclave and even of being complicit in the massacre, demanding that the main UN leaders appear, either as witnesses or as defendants, before the “Hague international tribunal.”⁶² But while the SDA deputies drew on these consensual elements in an attempt to dismiss the question of Bosniak responsibility, representatives of the opposition and of eastern Bosnian populations insisted on the necessity of also examining this aspect of the fall of Srebrenica. Irfan Ajanović (SDA) thus rejected the “political speculations concerning the fall of Srebrenica, which are now in the service of the electoral campaign.”⁶³ To this comment, Rajner retorted that “obviously, no one wants to assume any responsibility, and [that] that is the best way to avoid drawing any lessons from this tragedy.”⁶⁴ A secondary area of contention then appeared on this basis concerning the respective failures of the army hierarchy and enclave authorities and this time pitted the deputies, whatever their political stripe, against the representatives of the populations of eastern Bosnia.⁶⁵

Lastly, a final division appeared concerning the very status of the ongoing debate. For SDA deputies, this parliamentary session should have closed the parliamentary process that had opened six months earlier, putting an end to the controversies that had shaken the Bosniak community since the summer of 1995. They therefore urged the rapid adoption of a resolution designating the international community as “guilty for Srebrenica, for the fall of Srebrenica, for the genocide against the Bosniak enclave of Srebrenica and, in particular, against its civilian population.”⁶⁶ They also balked at the idea of convening a new parliamentary session in the presence of Srebrenica’s political and military leaders, preferring to confide the work of preparing a report on internal developments in the enclave to independent research institutes. For the opposition deputies, by contrast, this session was merely the start of a long overdue soul-searching. They therefore asked that the debate be continued in the presence of representatives of the enclave, on the one hand, and members of the collegial Presidency, on the other, and that a genuine investigative commission be created in place of the *ad hoc* commission responsible for writing the draft resolution.

As it happened, the resolution presented to the deputies by Irfan Ajanović essentially repeated the positions defended by the SDA. Indeed, it stated that “based on the reports [that have been presented] and the in-depth discussion” during which the Parliament examined “the causes of the genocide against the Bosniak population in Srebrenica and Žepa”, the Parliament had concluded that:

“The international community is responsible for having allowed the Serb aggressor to commit an unprecedented genocide and massacre against the Bosniak population in the protected and demilitarized areas of Srebrenica and Žepa.”

The Parliament also observed that the Sarajevo authorities had given UN representatives sufficient advance warning of Serb military preparations, that the armed forces “could do nothing more to protect and defend Srebrenica” and that “the incomplete information according to which not enough has been done for Srebrenica or Srebrenica has been sacrificed is groundless.” Based on this, the Parliament asked the ICTY to summon Boutros-Ghali and General Janvier as witnesses, asked the UN to examine the responsibility of Boutros-Ghali, Akashi and Janvier for the genocide committed in Srebrenica and Žepa, requested that the Institute for Research of Crimes Against Humanity and International Law as well as the Historical Institute of Sarajevo collect information about this genocide and ordered state agencies to investigate “potential illegal practices” within the Srebrenica enclave.⁶⁷ After a brief discussion, in the course of which the possibility was raised of requesting the Council of Europe’s parliamentary assembly to create its own investigative commission, the resolution was unanimously adopted (with one abstention). Six weeks later, the general elections marked the definitive end of the Parliament of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which would therefore never have the opportunity to meet in session in order to examine the reports that the above research institutes and state agencies were supposed to present...every three months.⁶⁸

Political Responsibility in Wartime

In reviewing the debate over the question of Bosniak responsibility, it becomes clear that all of the participants in it distinguished between criminal, political and moral responsibility, and on this basis sought to establish a hierarchy of responsibility among the various actors in the crisis of summer 1995. This explains why the role of the Serb leaders and, quite often, UN leaders, was treated in terms of guilt (*krivica*) while that of Bosniak leaders was addressed in terms of responsibility (*odgovornost*). In this hierarchy of responsibility, there was at least one point of unanimous agreement: the Serb leaders were criminals (*zločinci*) and must be judged by the ICTY. It only remained to be determined whether this guilt was limited to those who ordered the crime.⁶⁹ The international community was also unanimously condemned, leading to a demand that certain UN leaders be indicted or subpoenaed. Yet it was sometimes described in terms of passivity (*pasivnost*) and failure to comply with the UNPROFOR mandate and at other times in terms of treason (*izdaja*) and superpower conspiracies. Finally, the possible responsibility of Bosniak leaders was always seen as a secondary issue since it concerned the fall of the enclave rather than the subsequent massacre and might give rise to demands for resignation but never to demands for legal proceedings. Their possible responsibility was nevertheless sometimes characterized as consisting of errors (*greške*) due to the incompetence (*nesposobnost*) of the Bosniak military and political leadership, sometimes as treason (*izdaja*), in which case the nature of their responsibility was similar to that of UN leaders.

Be that as it may, all those who wanted the attitude of Bosniak leaders in the summer of 1995 to be submitted to critical examination – a group that included survivors, elected officials and journalists – insisted on the principle of political responsibility. When *Ratna tribina* thus demanded in July 1995 that some of them resign, it was because:

“The population of the Drina Valley also elected them and it would more than a moral act for them to offer their resignations. That would be the only proof that our ‘representatives’ place more importance on the population than on their armchairs.”⁷⁰

At this time, insistence on the political responsibility of Bosniak leaders was also to be found in the remarks of Nijaz Duraković and Haris Silajdžić and the questions addressed to Izetbegović by some Srebrenica refugees in February 1996. It explains the willingness expressed by some opposition deputies on 1 August 1996, “to work in our hearts and minds, as deputies who have taken an oath in this Parliament,”⁷¹ to create a genuine parliamentary investigative commission and convene a new session of Parliament. Implicitly, at least, the question of possible Bosniak responsibility for the fall of Srebrenica was therefore related to a much larger question: what is political responsibility in wartime?

The choice of the frameworks in which this debate should take place depended, among other things, on this question. Indeed, in the months following the fall of Srebrenica, the SDA leaders insisted on the threat that such a debate would represent in a time of war, an argument partly accepted by opposition leaders when they stated, for example, that “we should have confidence in the state in all events.”⁷² The journalists of *Ratna tribina*, on the contrary, countered this “*union sacrée*” by pointing out the need to draw lessons from the Srebrenica tragedy and make the main Bosniak leaders accountable. It is in this context that one must place Hasan Hadžić’s remark that “the Srebrenica tragedy is the most dubious part of the conscience of this state and it is why the state must quickly identify those responsible. If this does not happen, everything will lose its meaning.”⁷³ In addition to the question of the debate’s temporal framework was that of its institutional framework. In July 1995, the daily newspaper *Oslobođenje* remarked for example that the question of Bosniak responsibility “is not and should not be the object of journalistic analysis but rather of the serious work of state agencies.”⁷⁴ At the same period, the local representative of the MBO hoped that a special meeting of the political parties of Tuzla would be “the last at which we accuse others instead of speaking of our own mistakes.” The president of the meeting, an SDP representative, responded that “this assembly does not have the authority to examine these questions.”⁷⁵ Therefore, from August 1995 to August 1996, demands for a parliamentary debate concerning the circumstances of the fall of Srebrenica also reflected a willingness to find a legitimate institutional framework for examining this delicate question and, more broadly, to restore executive oversight to Parliament.⁷⁶

In the course of the debate itself, however, some deputies seemed to doubt the relevance of this choice, highlighting its limits and the risks involved. Ekren Ajanović (SBiH), for example, thus concluded his remarks by stating: “Here, I will interrupt myself and if I judge that certain questions need to be asked, I will ask them in writing elsewhere, because apparently some things can’t be said here in the Parliament.”⁷⁷ Likewise, Igor Rajner (UBSD) held that: “it is perhaps not the right place [to draw the lessons from Srebrenica]. I am even persuaded that this place and this debate amount to pressure and even to reopen a wound of the Bosnian nation that has not yet healed and that, I fear, will never do so.”⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Ekrem Ajanović himself requested that “we convene a session during which we can all say face to face what we did or did not do because we will have to do it sooner or later, today or ten years from now.”⁷⁹ Other deputies, such as Smail Ibrahimpašić (SBiH), also insisted on the necessity of this painful confrontation:

“[Srebrenica] is an open wound for all of us and we who belong to the generation who lived through it will never forget it. [...] We will never know the entire truth, we can

never say the entire truth, it is not historically beneficial to do so. In history, there have always been things that people have never known about. This will also be true in this case. But [...] someone should say the most important things and prove the most important things because if we do not do so then the case of Srebrenica will gnaw away at our generation from the inside, and for the rest of our lives.”⁸⁰

The reluctance of some deputies was not only a reflection of the conflict between moral demands and tactical considerations. It stemmed, more essentially, from the question of the link between political and moral responsibility in wartime. Indeed, the deputies who most loudly proclaimed that the leaders of the SDA should be held accountable also justified their attitude by reference to their own moral suffering and doubts. The mayor of Zvornik, Ćamil Ahmetović (SDA), thus stated, “I want to have a clear conscience,”⁸¹ and Igor Rajner almost seemed to apologize when he announced “I must say what torments me.”⁸² In both cases, the principle of moral responsibility reinforced that of political responsibility. Yet the idea of universal moral responsibility could also dissolve that of identifiable, individual political responsibility. Mustafa Šehović (SDP), for example, remarked that “we are partly to blame, I am partly to blame for Srebrenica as a deputy, sirs, dear friends, you are all in a way partly to blame for Srebrenica.”⁸³ Similarly, in his speech from 11 July 1996, Izetbegović put forward a metaphysical definition of responsibility, stating that:

“When something as terrible as Srebrenica happens, there are no innocents, every man and every woman is guilty for the fact that the world is as it is and that a world can exist in which Srebrenica is possible.”⁸⁴

Finally, and at least implicitly, the debate over the question of Bosniak responsibility was thus a debate about the ways in which power was exercised in territories under Bosniak control. In order to identify those responsible for the fall of Srebrenica, the true centers of power had to be localized and brought out into the open. Furthermore, it is no accident that the debate over possible Bosniak responsibility began within the SDA rather than in the framework of legal institutions or that the conflict pitting Silajdžić against the leading bodies of the SDA over the fall of Srebrenica went hand in hand with his condemnation of the parallel power networks established during the war. Finally, the link between the debate regarding the circumstances of Srebrenica’s fall and disputes over the forms of power established by the SDA could be seen in the reactions of the leaders of this party. Asked to explain themselves – whether to the population of Srebrenica or to the Parliament – they generally endeavored to free themselves of this obligation, whether by remaining silent and unapproachable, indefinitely putting off all examinations of the circumstances of the fall of Srebrenica or entrusting this to commissions on which they themselves sat and which they probably knew would never meet. When the social and political pressure became too strong, their strategy consisted of avoiding every encounter between the population of Srebrenica and the opposition parties – as witnessed by the exclusion of Ibran Mustafić on 27 May 1996, and the absence of representatives from Srebrenica at the 1 August 1996 parliamentary debate. They then tried to defuse the situation by drawing on practices inherited from the war and the communist period. So, it was as the “father of the nation” – incarnated in another time and under different circumstances by Marshal Tito – that Izetbegović met with the survivors of Srebrenica and managed to channel their anger in July 1995 and again in February 1996.⁸⁵ And it was by mobilizing the old reflexes of political unanimism that, six months later, the SDA succeeded in winning the adoption of the final resolution from an (almost) unanimous Parliament.

Srebrenica and the Question of Bosniak War Aims

The adoption of a resolution denying Sarajevo authorities any responsibility for the fall of Srebrenica allowed this question to be defused. In the end, it does not seem to have played a decisive role in Bosniak voters' choices. But the parliamentary debate of 1 August 1996, which the daily newspaper *Oslobođenje* described as "a collective washing of hands,"⁸⁶ did not put an end to the rumors and controversies surrounding the fall of Srebrenica. At the time, it was even accompanied by contradictory new revelations. On 7 August, the weekly newspaper *Ljiljan* published a lengthy study that drew, among other things, on confidential military sources, the aim of which was clearly to ruin the reputation of Naser Orić.⁸⁷ This attempt sparked outraged protests from former enclave officers⁸⁸ and lead *Oslobođenje* to publish the "confessions of Naser Orić" in which he recounts his own version of events.⁸⁹

In the years to come, controversy over the fall of Srebrenica reemerged at regular intervals, particularly on the eve of ceremonies to commemorate the massacre or important elections. But the configurations were no longer the same. In 1996, the question of possible Bosniak responsibility was linked to that of the fate of the missing and was picked up by a part of the enclave's population, as witnessed in the February demonstrations. Associations representing the Srebrenica population later lost interest in this question, preferring to focus, on the one hand, on the identification and burial of victims⁹⁰ and, on the other, on the arrest and trial of Serb war criminals.⁹¹ For their part, most of the former enclave leaders – starting with Naser Orić – took refuge in silence, an attitude which fed new rumors about the manner in which they were "blackmailed" or had been "bought" by those in power. In this context, Ibran Mustafić, who was increasingly isolated on the political scene, and Hakija Meholjić, who had in the meantime become president of the local branch of the SDP, were the only Bosniak figures native to Srebrenica who continued to publicly blame Bosniak leaders of the time for their role in the fall of the enclave.

As it lost its social basis, the debate over the question of Bosniak responsibility became increasingly political. The role played by the independent press in a debate that Parliament had only touched upon in August 1996 and that most politicians carefully avoided from then on is another sign of this politicization. Several former *Ratna tribina* contributors, in particular, continued to investigate the circumstances of the fall of Srebrenica as correspondents for the weekly Sarajevo newspapers *Slobodna Bosna* and *Dani* ("The Days"). In September 1998 – that is, on the eve of new general elections –, a special edition of *Dani* devoted to the fall of Srebrenica was written by Esad Hećimović, an investigative journalist who had worked during the war for the weekly paper *Ljiljan* and the leading bodies of the SDA but later broke with this party.⁹² Just as the proliferation of rumors during the war came to compensate for the absence of reliable information and provided a semblance of public space, the independent press came to replace legal institutions and political parties in the structuring of this same public space. This essential role can easily be explained in a country coming out of fifty years of communism and three and a half years of war and in which institutions do not work, nationalist parties continue to enjoy a strong grip over their respective territories and political life remains dominated by communal conflicts and personal rivalries. But the press itself often repeated unverifiable rumors and willingly used the vocabulary of treason and conspiracy. Obedient at once to certain reflexes inherited from the communist period and the new laws of the market economy, it did not manage to avoid the sirens of invective and sensationalism and consequently turned out to be largely incapable of encouraging a dispassionate examination of certain fundamental debates.

However, many of the recurrent themes that appeared in the Sarajevo press – from the enrichment of political and criminal elites to the place of Islam in post-war society, from the crimes of the ARBiH to the presence of mujahiddin – in fact stemmed from a more profound doubt concerning the true war aims of the SDA. The Srebrenica tragedy is no exception to this rule. Given this context, it is not surprising that the debate over Bosniak responsibility slowly turned away from the tactical errors that may have been committed on the eve of or during the Serb offensive in order to focus on the hypothetical political choices taken by the Bosniak leadership in the framework of peace negotiations. Indeed, as early as August 1996, several former officers from the enclave claimed in the pages of *Slobodna Bosna* that:

“the representatives of Srebrenica at the *Bošnjački sabor* [⁹³] held in fall 1993 returned to Srebrenica with the news that the highest reaches of the Government in Sarajevo had proposed to them an exchange between the Srebrenica territory and certain parts of Sarajevo. Following this, the population was seized with panic, a feeling of betrayal and of the uselessness of all our sacrifices, and it was for this reason that keeping soldiers’ morale at the necessary level and motivating them for new actions has been so difficult.”⁹⁴

This version of events was ultimately taken up in the memoirs of Sefer Halilović, first chief of the army’s general staff from May 1992 until June 1993,⁹⁵ and was confirmed in an interview given to *Dani* in June 1998 by Hakija Meholjić, one of the nine members of the delegation that attended the *Bošnjački sabor*.⁹⁶ In the absence of tangible proof or confirmation from other direct witnesses, however, it remains unverifiable. Moreover, the mention of a possible territorial exchange of eastern Bosnian enclaves for Sarajevo neighborhoods under Serb control during the *Bošnjački sabor* in September 1993 does not necessarily imply the abandonment of these same enclaves in July 1995, especially given that the offensive launched two months earlier by the ARBiH to break the siege of Sarajevo came up against strong Serb resistance and ended in failure.⁹⁷ The fact that the debate came to focus on the meeting between Izetbegović and the Srebrenica and Žepa delegation nevertheless attests to the fact that the question of possible Bosniak responsibility in the fall of Srebrenica remained linked to that of the SDA leadership’s war aims. Indeed, the *Bošnjački sabor*, a body based on the principle of cooptation and representing only the Bosniak nation,⁹⁸ replaced the Parliament elected in 1990 in order to decide on the adoption or rejection of the Owen-Stoltenberg peace plan, and formalized the access of the Bosniak nation to political sovereignty by abandoning the national name “Muslims” for that of “Bosniaks.” Moreover, the first session of the *Bošnjački sabor* on 27 September 1993, remains the moment in which the leaders of the SDA most clearly showed that they were tempted to accept a division of Bosnia-Herzegovina in view of creating a Bosniak national state.⁹⁹ Yet it must be noted that this debate over the SDA’s war aims did not take place and that, for the time being, the debate over possible Bosniak responsibility in the fall of Srebrenica has served no other purpose than to feed the negationist theories of some and the personal quarrels of others.

Indeed, the Serb nationalists and their supporters did not fail to turn the accusations of Ibran Mustafić, Sefer Halilović and Hakija Meholjić to advantage in order to deny the reality of the massacre, present it as a simple act of revenge or the result of an anti-Serb plot. These accusations are to be found on many negationist websites and were used by Slobodan Milošević in the course of his trial. This abuse of the debate over the question of Bosniak responsibility in its turn contributed to its gradual exhaustion. On the one hand, it contributed to giving the debate an even more personal and aggressive tone, as shown by the July 2003 controversy between Sefer Halilović and Alija Izetbegović.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, it doubtless

explains why some protagonists of the events of July 1995 have chosen to remain silent, not wishing to supply grist to the mill of Serb nationalists at a time when the judicial and political sequels to the Srebrenica massacre are far from finished.

Translated from French by Ethan Rundell

¹ *Magnetofonski snimak 20. sjednice Skupštine Republike Bosne i Hercegovine održane u Sarajevu dana 1. avgusta 1996. godine sa početkom u 14 sati* [Tape Recording of the 20th Session of the Parliament of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina held in Sarajevo on 1 August 1996 starting at 14:00], written version, 20/1. The unusual character of the page-numbering is likely due to the fact that the work of re-transcribing the audio tapes was given to more than one person.

² Since the signing of the Dayton agreements on 14 December 1995, Bosnia-Herzegovina has been divided into two constituent entities: the Republika Srpska, a self-proclaimed entity since April 1992 whose existence is legalized by the peace agreement, and the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, created in March 1994 by the Washington agreement.

³ Between March 1994 and September 1996, the institutions of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina and those of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, created in March 1994 (see note 2), coexisted within the territory under Bosniak or Croat control. Therefore, the Parliament elected in 1990 sometimes held sessions as the Parliament of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina and sometimes as the Parliament of the Federation, in which case only Bosniak and Croat deputies convened. In September 1996, the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina disappeared and its Parliament was replaced by a new Parliament elected by the voters of both entities.

⁴ *Oslobođenje*, 13 July 1995.

⁵ *Ratna tribina* was published by the Zvornik municipality in exile and followed closely the activity of the military units originating from the Drina valley.

⁶ Naser Orić alludes to the link-up operation between, on the one hand, the column of soldiers and civilians fleeing in the direction of territory under Bosniak control and, on the other, certain units of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ARBiH) attempting to break through Serb lines in the vicinity of Zvornik. Naser Orić participated in this attempt with a number of volunteers. The link-up with forward elements of the column – mostly soldiers – took place at the front line on 16 July 1995, but several thousand people fleeing with this column were captured by Serb forces and killed.

⁷ “Naser Orić, ekskluzivno: narod će reći ko je izdao Srebrenicu” [Exclusive, Naser Orić: The People Will Say Who Has Betrayed Srebrenica], *Ratna tribina*, 31 July 1995, 7.

⁸ Interview with the author, Tuzla, 3 October 2006. For more on this meeting, see Hasan Hadžić, “Bili, ne vratili se” [They Were, but Did not Come Back], *Dani*, 22 June 1998, accessible at <http://www.bhdani.com>

⁹ According to the Constitution in effect up till the signing of the Dayton agreements in December 1995, the Presidency of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina consisted of seven members: two representatives of each constituent nation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) and one representative of the other Yugoslav nations and national minorities present in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, since 1993, the “Yugoslav” Ejup Ganić (SDA) declared himself “Bosniak” and was elected Vice President of the collegial Presidency, a position which did not exist in the Constitution.

¹⁰ *Oslobođenje*, 13 July 1995.

¹¹ *Oslobođenje*, 20 July 1995.

¹² Press conference of the Union of Bosnian Social Democrats (UBSD), which managed the Tuzla municipality in partnership with the SDP, cited in F.S., “Utvrđiti odgovornost za pad Srebrenice” [Establishing the Responsibility for the Fall of Srebrenica], *Front slobode*, 28 July 1995, 10.

¹³ Gradimir Gojer (SDP) comment as reported in *Oslobođenje*, 14 July 1995.

¹⁴ Ljubomir Berberović (Serb Civic Council) comment as reported in *ibid*.

¹⁵ On 3 August, during a new session of the SDA parliamentary group, deputy Ekrem Ajanović was outraged that “the last time, on 11 July, we received information in this room according to which Srebrenica could defend itself and had sufficient weapons, and when we left the room our chauffeurs told us that Srebrenica had fallen.” (cited in Esad Hećimović, *Kako su prodali Srebrenicu i sačuvali vlast* [How They Sold Srebrenica and Kept Power], Sarajevo, 1998, 62).

¹⁶ Ismet Grbo’s comments at the press conference organized by the SDA on 20 July in Tuzla, as reported in *Oslobođenje*, 21 July 1995.

¹⁷ Izetbegović’s comment on Bosnian television, as reported in *Oslobođenje*, 19 July 1995. It is also in this context that one must set the early August announcement of a review parade of the 28th division – in reality, a few thousand combatants out of the 12,000 men eligible for mobilization in the Srebrenica enclave before its fall

–, an announcement upon which Serb nationalists were later to draw in their attempts to negate the reality of the massacre.

¹⁸ *Oslobođenje*, 6 August 1995.

¹⁹ As cited in Hećimović, *Kako su prodali Srebrenicu*, 63. Regarding the set up of parallel power networks during the war, also see Xavier Bougarel, *Bosnie: anatomie d'un conflit* (Paris, 1996); Marko Hoare, *How Bosnia Armed* (London, 2004).

²⁰ Hećimović, *Kako su prodali Srebrenicu*, 62 and 66.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

²² *Ibid.*, 66-7.

²³ See *Ratna tribina*, 31 July 1995.

²⁴ Mehmed Pargan, "Srebrenica se branila sama a izgubili smo je svi" [Srebrenica Defended Itself Alone but We All Lost It], *Ratna tribina*, 31 July 1995, 4-5.

²⁵ Hasan Hadžić, "Da li su, pored teritorije, morali biti žrtvovani narod i vojska?" [Was It Necessary, in Addition to the Territory, to Sacrifice the Population and the Army?], *Ratna tribina*, 31 July 1995, 6-7. This article is actually a text that Hasan Hadžić was unable to read in front of the Parliament of the Tuzla canton on behalf of the Bosnian Drina Valley Alliance (*Savez bosanskog Podrinja*), which brought together the exiled municipalities and the refugee associations originating from this region.

²⁶ Sead Numanović, "Krivi su generali" [The Generals Are Guilty], *Ratna tribina*, 31 July 1995, 3.

²⁷ The *Aktiv žena* ("women's active") is a structure inherited from the communist period, and played a role similar to civil defense in the enclave.

²⁸ The three other members of this committee would represent the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Tuzla canton.

²⁹ *Oslobođenje*, 11 February 1996.

³⁰ The MBO is a small party created in September 1990, following an internal split within the SDA.

³¹ *Oslobođenje*, 13 February 1996.

³² *Oslobođenje*, 14 February 1996. The other points of the resolution provided for the appointment of one person responsible for representing the Drina valley population before Bosnian institutions, the presence of Srebrenica population representatives within the Commission for the search of missing persons, the dispatch of a Srebrenica women's delegation on the ground, the publication by the finance inspection service of a report on the use of funds collected for the refugees of Srebrenica, the monthly payment of 50 Deutschmarks to school children originating from the Drina valley and, more generally, material assistance for displaced populations.

³³ Amongst the SDA officials who joined the SBiH were several other people who had criticized the Sarajevo authorities for their attitude during the crisis of summer 1995, starting with Ekrem Ajanović and Bećir Heljić.

³⁴ Ibran Mustafić, "Predsjedništvo i generalštab su žrtvovali Srebrenicu!" [The Presidency and the General Staff Have Sacrificed Srebrenica!], *Slobodna Bosna*, 14 July 1996, 6-10.

³⁵ Alija Izetbegović, "Kada se dogodi nešto tako stravično kao što je Srebrenica, tada nema nevinih" [When Something as Dreadful as Srebrenica Happens, Nobody Is Innocent], in *Godina rata i mira. Odabrani govori, intervjui i pisma* [The Year of War and Peace. Selected Speeches, Interviews and Letters] (Sarajevo, 1997), 116.

³⁶ See note 9.

³⁷ *Oslobođenje*, 13 July 1996.

³⁸ As cited in *Oslobođenje*, 26 July 1996.

³⁹ Alosman Husejnović, "11 000 neklanjanih dženaza" [11,000 Non-Accomplished Burials], *Ljiljan*, 17 July 1996, 12-13.

⁴⁰ Sead Avdić (SDP) comment, as reported in *Oslobođenje*, 18 July 1996.

⁴¹ Fikret Jahić (SBiH) comment, as reported in *Oslobođenje*, 16 July 1996.

⁴² See note 6.

⁴³ Interview with the author, Tuzla, 12 October 2006.

⁴⁴ Apparently, the only political leader from Srebrenica present in the Parliament was Zulfo Salihović, who became president of the local SDA chapter during the war. Deputy Ekrem Ajanović (SBiH) protested against this fact, asserting that, "in order that we know everything that happened there and how it happened, it is necessary that Naser Orić, and the deputy Ibran Mustafić, and representatives of Srebrenica, of the population of Srebrenica, elected by the population, be present at this session so that we can then truly ask ourselves as individuals whether we made sufficient efforts to prevent this tragedy." (*Magnetofonski snimak 20. sjednice*, 20/1).

⁴⁵ At the same time, HDZ Croat deputies were gathering in Neum on the Adriatic coast. This attitude is due to the fact, among others, that, since the creation of the Federation in March 1994, the majority of HDZ deputies no longer recognized the Parliament as legitimate when it met as the Parliament of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina (see note 3).

⁴⁶ As a member of the HDZ, the minister of Foreign Affairs Jadranko Prlić did not attend this session of the Parliament of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

⁴⁷ It should be observed that the only non-Bosniak deputy participating in the debate, Igor Rajner, was the president of the Tuzla Jewish community. The fact that he did not belong to any of the three constituent nations of Bosnia-Herzegovina allowed him a certain liberty of speech. It is also interesting to note the manner in which the geographical origin of the deputies influenced their positions. Ekrem Ajanović (SBiH), for example, originates from Tešanj, a city that was also besieged for several months. As he himself emphasized, “I spent eleven months in Tešanj which was besieged and I know what sort of psychological situation it represents and I know that sometimes, even well-intentioned suggestions coming from the outside can do more harm than good on the ground. [...] After all these discussions today, I can say, and the majority of the people of Tešanj would agree, thank God we have had enough force and wisdom at certain moments to not listen to the people from the outside and even to disobey some of their orders and to decide that O[perational] G[roup] 7 would not become a UN safe area, although there had been propositions and requests to do so.” (*Magnetofonski snimak 20. sjednice*, 20/1).

⁴⁸ Apart from Zulfo Salihović, SDA president from Srebrenica, the two other representatives of eastern Bosnian populations intervening in the course of the debate were Čamil Ahmetović, mayor of Zvornik, a SDA member who was nevertheless very critical of the Sarajevo authorities, and Veiz Šabić, a SDA town councilor from Bratunac and brigade commander who spent the war in the Srebrenica enclave.

⁴⁹ The members of the commission were Irfan Ajanović (SDA deputy, Doboj), Avdo Čampara (SDA deputy, Sarajevo, Secretary of the Parliament of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina), Mirsad Đapo (SDP deputy, Brčko), Rasim Kadić (Liberal Party deputy, Sarajevo), Igor Rajner (UBSD deputy, Tuzla), Veiz Šabić (SDA town councilor, Bratunac) and Pero Vasilj (HDZ deputy, Tuzla). Following a question posed by Muharem Cero (SBiH) about a possible report prepared by this commission, the President of the Parliament Miro Lazović (SDP) specified that “we have not had a parliamentary commission charged with preparing [in advance] its position about this point of the agenda. This is a commission responsible for following today’s discussions and proposing a conclusion to the Parliament. It has not finished its work and it is an *ad hoc* commission only for today’s session.” (*Magnetofonski snimak 20. sjednice*, 10/1).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 12/2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Hasan Dervišbegović’s presentation, 1. The presentation by Hasan Dervišbegović is an internal document of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the collegial Presidency, with some minor correction, and whose original title (“Analysis of the causes of the fall of Srebrenica and Žepa and of the ensuing massacre”) has been crossed out. It is inserted as such in the transcriptions of the parliamentary debate and therefore preserves its separate page numbering.

⁵² Hasan Dervišbegović declared for example that “all of us, and not only the safe areas, have been the victims of the great deception which consisted in keeping the political and other consequences of the war under control but not resolutely opposing [Serb] aggression. We knew it but we hardly had the possibility to reveal this in broad daylight or to try to overcome this deception because, at the end of the day, one of its results has been humanitarian aid and the lowering of the intensity of fighting which were important for the survival of Bosnians” (*ibid.*, 3). These comments bring to mind those made by Alija Izetbegović on 11 July 1995, before the SDA parliamentary group concerning the demand presented by certain deputies that the UNPROFOR be expelled from Bosnia-Herzegovina: “A word about the UNPROFOR; no one likes it but it is a sort of necessary evil, you have to understand this. Look at Srebrenica. If we had said ‘out with the UNPROFOR,’ there would not have been these bombings. If it had not been there, NATO would not have been used. The UNPROFOR is a means to get the international community involved. The UNPROFOR is necessary for us as long as we cannot do what they do. They hold the [Sarajevo] airport and in doing this they protect the tunnel [between Sarajevo and Mount Igman], they protect Srebrenica, Bihać, they drive convoys to Goražde [...] The international community also controls the air-exclusion zone above Bosnia-Herzegovina. In this way, 20 to 30 planes and helicopters are kept on the ground. Whatever we may feel, it is necessary to keep this in mind. Let us hope that beginning next November, we will not need to extend their mandate.” (as cited in Hećimović, *Kako su prodali Srebrenicu*, 13).

⁵³ In July 1995, Yasushi Akashi was the special representative of the Secretary General of the UN for ex-Yugoslavia and General Bernard Janvier was the commander of the UNPROFOR for former Yugoslavia (not to be confused with Rupert Smith, commander of the UNPROFOR for Bosnia-Herzegovina).

⁵⁴ *Magnetofonski snimak 20. sjednice*, 16/1. Hasan Muratović specified that “there is no proof that such an agreement has been signed but everything suggests that Akashi and Janvier accepted this agreement.” In this context, he added, “there is a question that remains unanswered. Did Akashi and Janvier have an agreement with Mladić so that the people leaving Srebrenica for Tuzla would be allowed to pass? This question still needs to be investigated. Insofar as it has been written about many times in the western press and UN leaders themselves suggested that all of the people from Srebrenica who wished to peacefully go to Tuzla had to be allowed to leave and that the Serbs would let them pass, it is quite likely that this part of the agreement existed. In my contacts

with certain people from Srebrenica, I tried to find out if they had been informed of this possibility, and the fact is that our people were not fired at when they crossed the front lines surrounding Srebrenica. Therefore, this remains something to be considered, but in this scenario the guilt of the UN is all the greater because [this means that] it entirely oversaw the lead-up to the capture of Srebrenica.” At another point in his presentation, Muratović nevertheless affirmed that “we knew everything that was going to happen if we let the Serbs transport [the inhabitants of Srebrenica] to Kladanj; at this point, the UN could have contributed to providing protection while waiting for the moment when the UN could organize the transport [itself]. If this had been done, it is certain that several thousand fewer people would have been sacrificed.” Finally, Muratović paid homage to the attitude of General Rupert Smith, commander of the UNPROFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina, who “has warned Akashi and Janvier that the Serbs were certainly going to attack the three enclaves [Srebrenica, Žepa and Goražde], that they were going to take them if they did not receive air support and that a serious tragedy would ensue. He said that it was a firm decision on Mladić’s part that he had learned of through the [British] secret services.” (ibid., 16/1 to 18/1).

⁵⁵ Ibid., Hasan Dervišbegović’s presentation, 1.

⁵⁶ Rasim Delić specified that arms deliveries to the Srebrenica enclave began in April 1994, after the end of the Croat-Bosniak fightings had permitted a resumption of the weapons supply and the Serb offensive against Goražde had demonstrated that the international community was not ready to defend the safe areas with the necessary determination. Next detailing the quantity of weapons transported to the Srebrenica enclave, he reckoned that “Goražde did not receive half of these [military] means in the course of the same period, and [that] Sarajevo defended itself with many fewer means in 1992 and 1993” (ibid., 11/2). This evaluation contradicts that of Naser Orić, who held that the low level of arms deliveries contributed to the spread of a defeatist attitude within the enclave (*Oslobođenje*, 26 August 1996).

⁵⁷ Among these malfunctions, Delić mentioned “an unfair fight for power and [political] divisions on this basis; poor relations between the police and the Territorial Defense and, later, the army; the assassination of opponents and political competitors, or attempts on their lives; the use of war for the purposes of personal enrichment and criminal activities; poor organization of the armed forces of the Territorial Defense and, later, the army and a struggle for command posts.” (*Magnetofonski snimak 20. sjednice*, 11/2).

⁵⁸ In regards to the weak resistance of Bosniak forces, Delić stated that “we expected a higher level of resistance, which would have allowed external forces to regroup towards Srebrenica [...]. We were in permanent contact with Srebrenica [until 10 July] but they did not listen to our suggestions and orders, they did not act in accordance with the plans that had been drawn up in advance and by means of which Srebrenica may not have been preserved but the population would at least have escaped. What can one say about the resistance when not a single [Serb] tank was destroyed despite the large quantities of anti-tank weapons. At one point, three tanks were directed from Zeleni Jadar towards the city and if just one had been destroyed, the Chetniks would not have entered the city, but not a single one was destroyed.” (ibid., 12/1).

⁵⁹ Ibid., 12/1.

⁶⁰ Dževad Mlačo (SDA), ibid., 19/2.

⁶¹ From this point of view, Dževad Mlačo (SDA) and Igor Rajner’s (UBSD) questions concerning the nature of the massacre played a pivotal role. Dževad Mlačo emphasized that “we have had cases where cities have been captured by the aggressor but the crimes against the population have not been committed to a comparable extent, not even close to [what happened in] Srebrenica and Žepa,” and concluded from this that “this is truly completely calculated, from start to finish set up with the support of the international community which did nothing to protect, not the area, but the civilian population.” (ibid., 19/2 and 20/1). Igor Rajner was more hesitant about the singular character of the massacre, not knowing if it was “the greatest [Bosnian] defeat” or a defeat “similar to April and May 1992, when the Bosnian population suffered terrible losses.” Above all, he relied on Mlačo’s comments to raise different questions: “This gentleman from Bugojno made a very good observation about one thing. [The Serbs] occupied and captured other cities, but with a lot less bloodshed. What hardened them so much? For they had certainly become hardened. Think about it, they let the women and children go, they let the elderly go, but they mercilessly killed the soldiers. Without mercy. Why? What does it mean? I say it again, it is perhaps not a question for this place or for public opinion but it is a question from which we must draw lessons.” (ibid., 23/2) Lastly, Mevludin Sejmenović, SDA deputy from Prijedor, a western Bosnian town where several thousand Bosnian civilians had been killed at the beginning of the war, opposed this presentation of the Srebrenica massacre as a singular case and asked that the Parliament also devote a session to the western Bosnian case (ibid., 25/2 and 26/1).

⁶² Dževad Mlačo (SDA), ibid., 19/2. It is not always clear whether the deputies are referring to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) or to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), both based in The Hague, and some deputies seem to confuse the two institutions.

⁶³ Ibid., 22/2 and 23/1.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 23/2.

⁶⁵ In a general way, the representatives of the eastern Bosnian population asserted that a longer resistance would not have changed the ultimate fate of the enclave and its population, and that the use of the evacuation plans prepared by the general staff would have led to an even larger catastrophe. By contrast, the opposition deputies shared a certain number of doubts with SDA deputies concerning the conduct of civilian and military authorities in the enclave. Igor Rajner declared for example that “all of us who spent the war near Srebrenica know that there were problems” (ibid., 24/1), rejecting the idea that a longer resistance would not have changed the final outcome for the enclave: “I accept, with no reservations, [the idea of] the international community’s responsibility; it is so powerful that it could have done a lot more, had Srebrenica defended itself for three more days, it could have perhaps saved the population of Srebrenica. You know how much time they need to react but once they do react, it works. This automatically means that I do not accept the idea that resistance was useless” (ibid., 23/2).

⁶⁶ Irfan Ajanović (SDA), ibid., 23/2.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 29/1 and 29/2.

⁶⁸ Between 1998 and 2000, the Institute for research of crimes against humanity and international law published three edited volumes devoted to the Srebrenica massacre. These include the proceedings of an international conference organized in July 1997, the ICTY’s indictments of Radovan Karadžić, Ratko Mladić, Radislav Krstić and Dražen Erdemović, an annotated translation of the UN report on the fall of Srebrenica as well as various documents and testimonies, but none of these addresses the question of Bosniak responsibility.

⁶⁹ During the 1 August 1996 parliamentary debate, the deputy Safet Isović (SDA) was shocked by “the inertia of our institutions in identifying and publishing the names [of war criminals] and transferring war crimes documentation to The Hague. In the end, it will turn out that the only guilty people are Mladić, Karadžić and Dušan Tadić [sic! Safet Isović is probably thinking of Dražen Erdemović here –translator’s note], and that they killed all of these people by themselves. I beg this parliamentary commission and I beg this Parliament as the supreme organ of power to order this commission or to the government and, through it, all institutions responsible for collecting information about war crimes, to send proof as quickly, efficiently and completely as possible concerning the enormous number of people who took part in war crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina.” (*Magnetofonski snimak 20. sjednice*, 28/2).

⁷⁰ Pargan, “Srebrenica se branila sama.”

⁷¹ Muharem Cero (SBiH), *Magnetofonski snimak 20. sjednice*, 26/2.

⁷² Alija Behmen (SDP) comment as reported in *Oslobođenje*, 14 July 1995.

⁷³ Hadžić, “Da li su pored teritorije.”

⁷⁴ *Oslobođenje*, 16 July 1995.

⁷⁵ B. Skoković-Tomić, “Parlamentarne stranke Tuzle i pad Srebrenice: ne dozvoliti anarhiju” [The Parliamentary Parties of Tuzla and the Fall of Srebrenica: Not Tolerating Anarchy], *Front slobode*, 28 July 1995, 2.

⁷⁶ On the role of the Parliament during the war, see for example Senad Slatina, “Da li je Skupština vlast ili alibi za vlast?” [Is the Parliament the Power or An Alibi for the Power?], *Slobodna Bosna*, 29 December 1995, 10-11.

⁷⁷ *Magnetofonski snimak 20. sjednice*, 21/1.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 23/2.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 21/1.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 24/2 et 24/3.

⁸¹ Ibid., 25/2.

⁸² Ibid., 23/2.

⁸³ Ibid., 19/1.

⁸⁴ Alija Izetbegović, “Kada se dogodi nešto tako stravično,” 116. The metaphysical guilt about which Izetbegović spoke in his 11 July 1996 speech reminds that evoked in 1946 by Karl Jaspers, for whom “each finds himself co-responsible for all injustice and all evil committed in the world” and the simple fact “that I still live, after such things have happened, bears down on me like unpardonable guilt” (Karl Jaspers, *La culpabilité allemande*, Paris, 1990, 47). It is likely that Izetbegović’s speech was inspired by his philosophy readings in the 1980s, including Jaspers and other Christian philosophers (see Alija Izetbegović, *Moj bijeg u slobodu. Bilješke iz zatvora 1983-1988* [My Flight into Freedom. Notes from the Prison 1983-1988], Sarajevo, 1999).

⁸⁵ It is also in this context that Izetbegović’s capacity to prevent any act of revenge against the Serb population of Sarajevo must be situated. Miro Lazović, President of the Parliament, recounted in an interview to *Radio Free Europe* that, in July 1995, “we received a threatening letter from a group of people from Žepa and Srebrenica who then lived in Sarajevo, saying that the Serb population of Sarajevo would suffer if Žepa or Srebrenica fell. Mirko Pejanović [a Serb member of the collegial Presidency] and I both received this letter and, worried about the situation of Srebrenica and Žepa as well as what could happen in Sarajevo, we met with Izetbegović and informed him of the letter’s contents, and I must say that during our meeting with the representatives of Žepa and Srebrenica, he clearly said that not a single hair of a Serb or a Croat from Sarajevo should be touched. He was really firm on this point and I must say that, after that, the anger shown by this group subsided” (“Miro

Lazović: utopisti i buhe” [Miro Lazović: Utopians and Fleas], in *Svjedoci raspada* [Witnesses of the Breakdown], Prague, RFE/RL, accessible at <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org>).

⁸⁶ *Oslobođenje*, 7 August 1996.

⁸⁷ Nedžad Latić, “Svjedoci tvrde da ljudi Nasera Orića stoje iza 19 atentata u Srebrenici,” [Witnesses Claim that Naser Orić’s People Stay Behind Nineteen Assassination Attempts in Srebrenica], *Ljiljan*, 7 August 1996, 18-22.

⁸⁸ “Zlatni ljiljani brane istinu i Nasera Orića” [Golden Lilies Defend the Truth and Naser Orić], *Slobodna Bosna*, 25 August 1996, 37-38.

⁸⁹ “Ispovijest Nasera Orića” [The Confessions of Naser Orić], *Oslobođenje*, from 24 August to 29 August 1995. These “confessions” are, in fact, a transcription of a conversation recorded shortly after the fall of the enclave between Naser Orić, Sefer Halilović, the first chief of the army’s general staff, and Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, former Minister of War Industry who broke with the SDA during the war. *Oslobođenje* presented this document as a third version of events in Srebrenica, after those presented by Ibran Mustafić in *Slobodna Bosna* and Rasim Delić before the Parliament, but did not specify whether it had been published with the consent of the interested party.

⁹⁰ See for example Creg E. Pollack, “Intentions of Burial: Mourning, Politics, and Memorials Following the Massacre at Srebrenica,” *Death Studies* 27, no 2 (February 2003): 125-42; Isabelle Delpla, “Incertitudes publiques et privées sur les disparus en Bosnie-Herzégovine,” in *Crises extrêmes. Face aux massacres, aux guerres civiles et aux génocides*, eds. Marc Le Pape, Johanna Siméant and Claudine Vidal (Paris, 2006), 287-301.

⁹¹ See for example Isabelle Delpla, “In the Midst of Injustice: The ICTY from the Perspective of some Victim Associations,” in *The New Bosnian Mosaic. Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-War Country*, eds. Xavier Bougarel, Elissa Helms and Ger Duijzings (Aldershot, 2007), 211-34.

⁹² Hećimović, *Kako su prodali Srebrenicu*. In this well-documented dossier, Esad Hećimović minutely reconstitutes the attitude of the SDA leadership during the crisis of summer 1995, then uses the former to reveal the informal practices thanks to which the SDA established its hegemony in the territories under Bosniak control.

⁹³ The *Bošnjački sabor* (Bosniak assembly) brought together the major political, intellectual, religious and military leaders of the Bosniak nation. Its first session, on 27 September 1993, was mostly devoted to the examination of the Owen-Stoltenberg peace plan and its second session, on 18 July 1994, to the examination of the Contact Group peace plan.

⁹⁴ “Zlatni ljiljani brane istinu.”

⁹⁵ Sefer Halilović, *Lukava strategija* [A Cunning Strategy], (Sarajevo, 1997), 109.

⁹⁶ In this interview, Mehiljić asserted that “President Izetbegović received us and, immediately after greeting us, asked: ‘What do you think of an exchange between Srebrenica and Vogošća?’ There was a silence, then I asked to speak and I said: ‘President, if you called us to present us with a fait accompli then it wasn’t worth the trouble because you have to present yourself before the population and carry the weight of this decision concerning us.’” (Hadžić, “Bili, ne vratili se”).

⁹⁷ For a critical discussion of the various conspiracy theories surrounding the fall of Srebrenica, including those blaming Bosniak authorities, see, among others, David Rohde, *Endgame. The Betrayal and Fall of Srebrenica, Europe’s Worst Massacre since World War II* (Boulder, CO, 1997).

⁹⁸ See note 93.

⁹⁹ On the national project of the SDA leadership, see, for example, Xavier Bougarel, “L’islam bosniaque, entre identité culturelle et idéologie politique,” in *Le Nouvel Islam balkanique. Les musulmans, acteurs du post-communisme (1990-2000)*, eds. Xavier Bougarel and Nathalie Clayer (Paris, 2001), 79-132.

¹⁰⁰ In early July, Izetbegović accused Halilović of having made remarks before the ICTY which could have helped Milošević develop his own version of events. A few days later, Halilović counter-attacked, claiming that “Milošević unfortunately has enough material to establish the ‘betrayal’ of Srebrenica on the basis of many public declarations by protagonists in the events and secret agreements that you yourself signed.” (*Oslobođenje*, 11 July 2003). The following day, Izetbegović stated that “one of my greatest mistakes had been to name Halilović chief of the general staff” and then left his readers free “to believe Milošević and Halilović or to believe me” (*Oslobođenje*, 12 July 2003). Halilović then once again upped the stakes by declaring that his own mistake had been to negotiate Izetbegović’s liberation in May 1992 while he was detained as a prisoner by the Yugoslav People’s Army. Eight years after the Srebrenica massacre and four months before the death of Izetbegović, the debate over the question of Bosniak responsibility thus found itself reduced to a pathetic settling of personal accounts.