

# THE SOUL OF EUROPE

## DEDICATION

We dedicate this book to Anel Alisic, Zoran Djukic, our advisors and helpers, Emir Muhic, our translator, and Misha Stojnic, our driver.

## PREFACE

### GRAHAM DAY

Former Deputy High Representative and Head of Office, Banja Luka,  
Republika Srpska, Bosnia, 2003 - 2006

I was in former Yugoslavia for much of the period covered by this book. At that time almost all the 'outsiders' could feel the same mixture of pathos and insane barbarity which is recorded here. To fit ones own experience all one had to do was to change the location, time and family names concerned. Even though it deals only with one specific area, to me this book is valuable on two levels: it is important because it stands as testimony, not simply against those named for the horrors of that time and place, but also against all those 'outsiders' who knew and did nothing or made excuses for inaction.

The white house is a simple non-descript building which amply demonstrates the banality of horror. It speaks, however, to a lot more than that, during the recent war all over Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), schools, factories even grain silos were used as extempore places of detention. Within all places of detention atrocities took place. No

one ethnic group was any more criminally insane than any other, but opportunity was unevenly divided and hence there is an asymmetry in the number of victims by ethnic group. As we have seen today in Iraq, victories provide a sometimes irresistible opportunity to commit atrocities.

During the war in BiH approximately a hundred thousand people died; the great majority of them civilians. Within this number approximately seventy thousand were Muslims who in the 1991 census were 44% of the population; approximately twenty thousand were Serbs who were approximately 31% of the population and about ten thousand Croats and others who were 25% of the population. These numbers for victims are being constantly refined but as of 2006 the order of magnitude is fixed. Many inside BiH wish to dispute these figures, those who claim more must produce compelling evidence that even more victims exist. Time and again they simply cannot do it except by bizarre double counting. Some wish to say that these numbers are too big; they fall in the same category as holocaust deniers, subjectively convinced but objectively completely outgunned by the growing weight of empirical evidence. Here I should acknowledge the pioneering work of the Research and Documentation Center in Sarajevo which of all the myriad agencies playing with this kind of numbers post war has consistently lead the way in informed and scholarly methodology. They have been a clear and consistent light in an otherwise dark place.

The Muslim community has the grievance of bearing many more victims proportionately than their pre war census figures would indicate. Sadly they have also been the loudest in decrying the figure of only a hundred thousand deaths, many of them clinging to the wartime propaganda figure of two hundred and fifty thousand dead. This puts me in mind

of the riposte given by the former President Izetbegovic when accused that the Muslims in Sarajevo had deliberately bombed themselves in order to force the international community to act. He is supposed to have replied in an exasperated voice: “The international community has stood by and watched ten thousand Muslims die here in Sarajevo, why should the death of sixty more force them to act? Similarly, why make exaggerated claims for two hundred and fifty thousand deaths in a war when a hundred thousand can be proved. Are a hundred thousand not enough?”

Conversely the Serb community has had its share of either those who wish to deny the atrocities or to equate them to the many pogroms and massacres of World War Two. Both these reactions while human are essentially simply making more trouble for the future. Deniers are fortunately being slowly whittled down as the accumulating weight of empirical evidence makes denial more an act of deep personal trauma than any kind of defensible position. The equivalency arguments are essentially about revenge for former grievance. Revenge faces the time old problem of how much is enough? And where does it stop? Can a grandson really be held accountable for the crimes of the grandfather? I sincerely hope not.

There is not a lot of comment about the Croats in this book because from a demographic point of view in north-west Bosnia they were essentially by far the smallest community. During the war and subsequently they have been lead by a spiritual leader Bishop Komarica, who is acknowledged in the book. The bishop has been loud in condemning the International Community for not doing more to bring the small but important Croat Community back to North West BiH. It is, however, sadly true that most of this

community who left have been given better prospects in neighbouring Croatia and will never return permanently.

These simple facts in themselves should start to caution the casual observer about drawing hasty conclusions about the Bosnian conflict. There are no simple answers to even apparently simple questions such as; was this a civil war? Answer: yes and no. Was this a war of aggression? Answer: yes and no. Were there understandable historical root causes and hence some form of twisted justification of this violence? Answer: yes and no. Who then was responsible for the war? (A case can be made for blaming both Stalin and Tito whose unmistakable historical legacies drove certain key individuals and institutions). These questions continue to swirl around today in Bosnia, with the paradoxical and ambiguous answers clouding politics and traumatizing families.

In each community in Bosnia historical grievances are maintained over the generations. In the 1960s and 70s the urbane and sophisticated city Yugoslavs appeared to have broken away from this essentially peasant phenomenon. Some succeeded, but within the leadership cadre of each community there were experts at resurrecting and enflaming these historical grievances. In World War Two there had been vicious pogroms of Yugoslav against Yugoslav. These were remembered. Tito had suppressed certain areas and groups; this was remembered. The communist party had suppressed religion of all forms and this was remembered. There was no need for any individual to cling to one chosen trauma when a veritable smorgasbord of trauma was on offer in only the last fifty years.

The single most important residual issue of the deaths during the war is the fact that in 2006 there are approximately eighteen thousand persons still unaccounted for. It is

beyond reason to suggest that these missing persons are anything other than dead; yet loved ones and family have no body and no closure of the trauma. This would be a tragic enough event for the individuals concerned but in the context of deeply fractured BiH it is a political issue as well. In each election fiery rhetoric about missing persons is used to inflame passions on all sides, to the misery of the victims' families and general detriment of BiH as a struggling emerging state. In the book you will meet people who know the whereabouts of many of these bodies but will not come forward. This grievance alone if unresolved is a seed of future conflict.

Approximately two million people were driven or fled from their homes (half the population). Ten years after the war ended we can now see that there has been an historic population shift and that most of the two million are not back in their pre war homes. The reasons for not returning are much more complicated than just fear of return, but they surely would not have left in the way that they did without being driven by fear. This fact of displacement on the ground has prolonged the ugly and potentially conflictive, post war trauma, as it does in every incidence of partition, a fact often glossed over by real-politik partition advocates.

Why is this important context for *the white house*? About thirty thousand people were driven from their homes in the Prijedor region of BiH during the war. Three thousand were detained and approximately one thousand bodies remain unaccounted for. *The white house* as a book is a micro-cosm of the war. The war was about ethnic cleansing. It was a war to delineate territory which could from then on be „living space“ for one ethnic group or the other. Ethnic cleansing was not an accidental bi-product it was an aim or

objective in itself. Populations are made to move by fear, it is the rational use of terror.

*The white house* describes a present day manifestation of the rational use of terror.

Where can BiH go from here? Books like *the white house* point the way without polemic or prejudice. First the people of BiH must get together and talk. They must admit the truth about what happened village by village. They need a peoples history. NGOs like the Research and Documentation Agency have already gathered much of the raw data.

Books like *the white house* have pioneered the way. What is needed now is a national dialogue, national truth telling and where possible national forgiveness. Where forgiveness is not possible, and this is quite often the case, then national public acceptance of the right of the other community to existence in dignity and safety.

Patterns of repeated violent conflict all over the world require the root causes to be addressed. The key to starting this process is the truth. The truth is never enough just in itself but it is an unavoidable first step. Without the truth, there can be no dialogue, no trust and no possibility of a future. The path to eventual reconciliation after violent conflict is always generations not just decades. It requires the truth to be accepted by all sides and then a dialogue of understanding and getting to know the 'other'.

*The white house* can be a small first step in the direction of reconciliation if the people of BiH and more particularly North West BiH want it to be.

MAP

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Soul of Europe would like to thank the present owners of the mine. It was they who invited and paid us to bring together Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims in the dispute about a memorial to those who lost their lives in Omarska.

We owe a special thanks to Kemal Pervanic, *The Killing Days* (Blake Publishing) and to Rezak Hukanovic, *The Tenth Circle of Hell* (Little Brown Book Group).

We would like to thank Anel Alisic, Andrew Barr, Kate Goslett, Dan Gretton, John Paul Lederach, Bishop Holloway, Simon Goodenough, and Jeremy Seabrook for their sustained encouragement and friendly criticism.

We thank John Hunt, publisher of 'O' books for his patience and advice.

We drew on the considerable wisdom and experience of Graham Day, the Former Deputy High Representative and Head of Office, Banja Luka, Republika Srpska. We consulted him at every stage and we are grateful to him for his solidarity with the Soul of Europe.

We have omitted the names of the participants employed by the mine. The present owners acquired the mine in 2004. The events described in this book took place under different management in 1992.

Boris Danovic is a pseudonym for the former mine manager who became a significant participant of the process.

The main body of the book was written by Peter Pelz. Donald Reeves wrote the Foreward and Afterward.

We have tried to be as accurate as possible. If there are any inaccuracies, they are unintended and the fault is ours and ours alone.



## FOREWORD

In April 2004 a new mining company acquired the iron ore mine at Omarska, near Prijedor in north western Bosnia. The acquisition was part of the company's policy to buy up and then invest in dilapidated state owned mines in central and southeastern Europe.

Omarska (1) was used as a killing camp from May to August 1992 during the Bosnia War. Bosniaks (2) and Croats had been brought to the camp to be exterminated.

The new mine owners' acquisition provoked demands from the survivors of Omarska for a memorial to be established in the mine complex.

It was realized that if these demands were not met the region could be destabilized and this could harm the mine's potential profitability. Survivors demanded a memorial. Serb management and mine workers would have none of it.

The Soul of Europe (3) was commissioned to bring Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats together to agree on a proposal for a memorial.

We were invited because we had demonstrated it was possible to gather together former adversaries in Bosnia. In 2001, at our invitation, senior politicians, religious leaders and business people from Banja Luka, the administrative centre of the Republika Srpska, together with the mayor of Banja Luka and his cabinet, traveled to the International Centre for Reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral for four days of intensive discussion.

Our success had been noted in Bosnia by the international community.

*Though this be madness yet there is method in it*

Hamlet, William Shakespeare

‘Many witnesses speak of good inter-communal relations, of friendships cross ethnic and coincident religious divides, of intermarriages and of generally harmonious relations’, write the judges of the ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia) in the trial of Dusko Tadic, the first individual from Prijedor to have been tried and sentenced at The Hague for ‘acts of persecution, murder and inhuman treatment committed in 1992 against Bosniaks at Omarska.’

Those witnesses were referring to life at Prijedor in the 1980’s.

But on April 30<sup>th</sup> 1992 life changed there for ever. A meticulous program of ethnic cleansing began. For six months a group of Serbs, known as the ‘Crisis Staff’ had been preparing for this day. Non-Serbs were sacked. Bank accounts were frozen. Bosniak leaders and professional people in Prijedor were rounded up and taken to Omarska, teachers, lawyers, shopkeepers, religious leaders, accountants, local politicians and officials. Travel within Prijedor was almost impossible. Communication with the outside world was suspended. Following an incident when two Serbs were killed, all non-Serbs were required to wear white arm bands and display white flags. In all, forty three thousand people, all non-Serbs – and about half of the population fled, disappeared or were driven into exile or taken to Omarska and other camps to be tortured and killed. The precise number of those who died is still unknown, but there were certainly more than three thousand and less than four thousand.

The purpose of this barbarism was to create a pure and greater Serbia. It was orchestrated from Belgrade and was the major political impulse behind the war in Croatia and Bosnia. Western governments, initially, were reluctant to intervene, giving the excuse that these

conflicts were merely stirring up ancient tribal hatreds. Serbs often told us: ‘This was a civil war.’ We firmly contradicted them.

When the war finally came to an end in December 1995, Bosnia was divided into two entities, the mainly Bosnia/Croat entity whose capital is Sarajevo, and the Republika Srpska, the predominantly Serb entity, whose administrative centre is Banja Luka. The Republika Srpska had been proclaimed in January 1992, but the Dayton Accord did not allow it to have the status of an independent state. But both entities had the trappings of independence: presidents, prime ministers, various ministries, separate flags, different national anthems and coats of arms.

The international community required the entities to work together to create a modern European state. Under their constant pressure a structure has been created for a single police force, a joint army, a state border and customs service, a single judiciary and much more. But there is a marked reluctance by Bosnian politicians of all the ethnic groups to inhabit the structure, because of the enduring strength of nationalism on all sides.

Prijedor, the second city after Banja Luka in the Republika Srpska, received special attention from the United Nations and a range of international agencies to encourage the return of those driven from their homes. Prijedor is geographically closer to the Federation while Srebrenica for example is close to Serbia. Moreover, the Bosniak villages and settlements around Prijedor had long been homogeneous. Better to return to a ruined village and rebuild there than to return to an ethnically mixed area. Some of the Bosniaks and survivors of Omarska whom we would meet in the following pages were returnees to these villages. Twenty thousand are said to have returned, but the figure is now lower. There was no attempt by the UN and its satellites to integrate the returnees

into Serb Prijedor. Intimidation, discrimination and a completely inadequate school system led many to leave. Certainly driving through some of these villages in an early winter evening is to be struck by the darkness, little if any street lighting and most houses standing empty.

This broad perspective omits one significant factor: the mistrust and suspicion that many Bosnians, especially public figures and officials had for ‘westerners’. Five years in Bosnia had prepared us for this. Serbs believe the West want to demolish the entities, so the Republika Srpska would cease to exist (and with it their identity as Serbs). Bosniaks feel betrayed by the West for not preventing the massacre at Srebrenica and failing to capture Radovan Karadjic and General Mladic. The Croats, the smallest ethnic group in Bosnia, feel ignored and marginalized.

Moreover as we learnt from many Bosnian friends, there was palpable anger at the swarms of NGOs and agencies, large and small, which parachuted into Bosnia after the end of the war. Indiscriminate interaction, far from being welcomed, was often interpreted as a lack of respect.

Therefore as well as trying to bring Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats together, we had to convince them of our commitment to being of use. We were like a ground bass. If the note sounded firm and clear, then their trust in us as mediators could develop, and the discordant notes had some possibilities of resolution.

In this we did have some success. After an early meeting with Serb and Bosniak women, one of them, a Serb manager at the mine headquarters, thanked us for coming: ‘You show human qualities; and you keep on coming back.’ Six months later after a difficult meeting, noticing the look of anxiety on our faces, she asked: ‘Why are you looking so

sad?’ I replied: ‘I was not sure if we had done enough, and if we should have done more.’ She put her hand on my arm encouragingly and said: ‘It will be all right. You’ll see. It will be all right.’

We devised a plan. We had to discover if any Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats would be ready to meet and engage in serious conversations about the past. Finding this was indeed so, we then gathered people together and finally set up meetings for Bosniaks and Serbs to develop plans for the memorial. These were presented at a conference in Banja Luka in December 2005 before the local and international media. From April 2005 to February 2006 the Soul of Europe spent half of every month in Prijedor.

There is now a mass of expertise and wisdom in mediation, conflict resolution and processes of reconciliation, some of which we drew on (4). Practitioners and academics produce a steady flow of sophisticated approaches to facilitation, negotiation and all manner of group work.

But at its heart the road towards reconciliation is a long, hard and profoundly human activity. These are not always realized by techniques, although they can help. And the journey never ends. It is never completed. Politics and history are not like that. There is always more to be done. But without reconciliation, even partial reconciliation, there is descent into barbarism and never-ending violence.

So from our experience we knew we had to be ready to hear the raw memories of Bosniaks and Serbs (Croats had mostly left the area, so they hardly figure in our story).

We knew we would need to be patient and to listen well. We knew humility would be required of us, for we were after all visitors in a country not our own. We realized we would need all our own wisdom to interpret what we were being told. We had to be alert,

so nothing was missed. We knew we would have to be prepared to take risks, that the outcome of tense and awkward meetings might be unpredictable. We knew from the day we arrived in Prijedor that there would no short cuts, no quick fixes and no instant solutions.

This is the story of what happened.

## NOTES

- 1 For more information about the Prijedor region during the Bosnia War:
  - a) The Prijedor Report – final report of the United Nations Commission of Experts. S/1994/674/Add.2 (Volume 1)
  - b) *Raw Memory – Prijedor, Laboratory of Ethnic Cleansing* by Isabelle Wesselingh and Arnaud Vaulerin, Saqi Books. ISBN 086356528X
- 2 BOSNIAK – Bosnian Muslims are invariably described as Bosniaks, in order to separate their identity from religion. The word Bosniak means Bosnian and was once used for all inhabitants of Bosnia, regardless of faith. The other main ethnic groups in Bosnia are Serbs (Orthodox Christian) and Croats (Catholics).
- 3 THE SOUL OF EUROPE – see [www.soulofeurope.org](http://www.soulofeurope.org)

For the memorial project we had a team of six. This was made up of two project managers: Anel Alisic (Bosniak) and Zoran Djukic (Serb Croat), an interpreter, Emir Muhic (Bosniak), a driver, Misha Stojnic (Serb), Peter Pelz and Donald Reeves, directors of the Soul of Europe. Kate Goslett,

psychotherapist and chair of the Soul of Europe's Advisory Council, joined the team for one visit.

- 4 The writings of John Paul Lederach, Professor of International Peacebuilding at the Joan B Kroc Institute of International Peace Studies at Notre Dame University, particularly *The Moral Imagination*, Oxford University Press 2005 ISBN 0-19-517454-2

*Democracy and Deep Rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiations*, published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. ISBN 91-89098-22-6. A most useful handbook.

*The Moral Imagination* by Donald Reeves, available on the Soul of Europe's website.

This lecture given at Lambeth Palace in May 2006 is a reflection on the Omarska project, incorporating the insights of John Paul Lederach.

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

### PRIJEDOR

#### SURVIVORS

Kemal Pervanic	Author, survivor of Omarska, living in England
Kasim Pervanic	Survivor of Omarska, living in Kevljane
Rezak Hukanovic	Author, survivor of Omarska
Mirsad Duratovic	Community leader, survivor of Omarska
Nusreta Sivac	Judge, survivor of Omarska
Muharem Murselovic	Local and National Deputy, survivor of Omarska
Mirsad Islamovic	Councillor, survivor of Omarska

Sadko Mujagic	Survivor of Omarska, living in Rotterdam
Emsuda Mujagic	Director of the Kozarac Peace Centre
Dr Azra Pasalic	Doctor and Speaker of the Municipal Assembly
Mirjana Vehabovic	Croat delegate of the Council of People
Seida Karabasic	Izvor, organization for missing persons
Edin Ramulic	Izvor, organization for missing persons
Jasmina Devic	Bridges for Peace, organization of women survivors

#### THE MUNICIPALITY

Marko Pavic	Mayor of Prijedor
Biljana Malbasic	Financial Advisor to the mayor.
Dusan Tubin	Chairman of the mayor's cabinet
Zeljko Skondric	Secretary of the Municipal Assembly
Mladen Grahovac	Engineer, member of SDP, Social Democratic Party
Zeljko Kantar	Social Worker
Zarko Gvozden	Member of the SDP, Social Democratic Party
Djordje Jez	President of the Association of Displaced Persons
Jeff Ford	Head of Office in Prijedor, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE

#### THE 'ROUND TABLE'

Katerina Panic	Journalist, SRNA (Srpska Republic News) Agency
Vedran Grahovac	Post graduate student of Philosophy
Aleksander (Sasha) Drakulic	Journalist ESPRIT Radio
Tijana Glusac	Student, Philosophy Faculty Banja Luka

Zoran Ergerac	Marketing Consultant
Nino Jauz	Councillor, Alliance of Independent Social Democrats SNDP

### BANJA LUKA

Graham Day	Office of the High Representative in Banja Luka
Giorgio Blais	Director of OSCE Regional Centre in Banja Luka
Bishop Franjo Komarica	Catholic Bishop of Banja Luka
Episkop Jefrem	Orthodox Bishop of Banja Luka

### THE OMARSKA PROJECT TEAM

Anel Alisic	Project Manager
Zoran Djukic	Project Manager
Emir Muhic	Interpreter
Misha Stojnic	Driver
Kate Goslett	Consultant to the Soul of Europe
Donald Reeves	Director of the Soul of Europe
Peter Pelz	Director of the Soul of Europe

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Former Deputy High Representative and Head of Office,

Banja Luka, Republika Srpska, Bosnia, 2003 – 2006

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