

Mladic was the link between the graves and the Serbian (Milosevic's) palace

Excerpts from an exclusive interview with Florence Hartman (done by Maja Kassa, her associate) for the Bosnian-American Genocide Institute and Education Center (BAGI). The complete interview in Bosnian can be found on the Bosnian library's website, www.bosnianamericanlibrarychicago.com.

Mladic's flight is the story of an accused who wishes to escape responsibility for tens of thousands of victims, but also a story of the politics of a segment of Serbia's ruling structure, which demands that the country's facing the past be prevented at all costs.

Mladic was extradited when Serbia's EU candidacy came into question, so it could not have been postponed any further. Also, his physical condition was well known, which meant that he would not be able to resist neither the arrest nor the process of the proceedings. Brussels had no option but to carry out an international, moral, and legal responsibility and to ensure that Serbia honors it. International non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and even more so Amnesty International (AI) have been continuously publicly pressuring the EU to persist and not give up its mediating role in the process of realizing this responsibility, or more precisely, to not give up its politics of establishing conditions in this process. Without pressure from the public and citizens in Mladic's case, the EU would have continued to relax its conditions and with that, the process of Mladic's arrest would have been further delayed. Additionally, Tadic's politics of waiting for events to take their natural course, meaning that Mladic would die a free man, would accomplish all goals. The pressure put on the EU has spoiled that calculation.

I met Mladic on several occasions in eastern Bosnia and in Pale between 1992 and 1994. He is a key individual from the field who personally ensured that an order was executed and that his associates worked efficiently. At the same time, he was also the individual who personally went to the top (of military headquarters) to take orders or to discuss important directions of war politics.

This means that he was the link between the graves and the palace, and especially between the graves and the Serbian (Milosevic's) palace. As an active officer of the Yugoslavian Army, Mladic was sent to Bosnia to command a segment of that army's forces distributed in Bosnia. Thus, his military headquarters was in Belgrade, but because of Serbia's claim that it was not at war, a provisional, or superficial, headquarters was created in Pale.

The proceedings against Mladic will shed new light on the involvement of Slobodan Milosevic's regime in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Great strides have been made towards that goal during the proceedings against Perisic, though indiscernibly. That this happened comes as no surprise as it is well known that Perisic was a part of Yugoslavian Army command structures. The case presented to the ICTY did not focus solely on Perisic's personal responsibility, as new facts were discovered in the process of building the case, facts that have potentially created new future possibilities for legal proceedings against responsible parties. I am convinced that additional undiscovered evidence exists, as we have seen in the case against Perisic. The new materials will aid the rapidness of Mladic's trial, unless it is delayed by his physical condition.

Of utmost importance, however, is that the tribunal takes the responsibility to insist that the trial adheres to adjudicated facts as many of the crimes (or aspects of them) have already been proven, so Mladic's trial must not focus on the proving of the genocide in Srebrenica and the identity of forces that took part in it, as this has already been legally established. The same goes for other crimes that have been proven, e.g., Sarajevo, Omarska, Foca, etc.. It is absolutely unacceptable that Mladic's trial becomes a platform for denials of legally proven crimes. Mladic has the right to deny his involvement or his execution of orders, to offer and provide his arguments and evidence, but he does not have the right, as he has already begun doing, to deny the Srebrenica genocide and to lead us on a months-long path of disproving something that has already been proven, repeatedly, in some fifteen cases related to Srebrenica in The Hague.