

# Should we hold trials for war crimes

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Should we agree to forget? Rely on the selectivity of the human mind to remember only the good and forget the bad things so that we can stay normal in abnormal times? Maybe it is a good idea to sweep the dust under the carpet and keep the skeletons in the cupboard, after which our living space would put on a façade of carefree, everyday life in which the world begins and ends solely with us? Let us choose a blessed feeling of ignorance and fill our lives with cheap activities and shallow programmes which turn us into observers of our own lives, and leave our decisions to the centres of power that play down the scale of the crimes, equalising the blame, looking for the causes of wars in everything but ourselves! Let us turn things upside down! Let from now on truth be a lie and let victims suddenly become perpetrators of crimes. Or let us try to bring back the time when newspaper obituaries spread from the back page to front page? Let us be the main news, take the first seconds of world news from Syria. Or maybe, for a change, try to be human again.

To be human means, above all, to walk upright on the path we have paved with our own moral principles. It is a path where all people are equal and their human rights are the same as ours. To be human means to have a conscience and that makes us very different from animals. Apart from the fact that we are among the few living creatures on the planet who find that killing members of their own species makes sense. Our

entire past is, in effect, a chronicle of senseless wars in which the stronger destroyed the weaker and the victors wrote history.

My generation was born after the war. It would be logical to expect that we should not concern ourselves with something in which we did not take part. We should say, "Peace, peace – nobody's to blame!" and forget that a war raged across the whole region in the 1990s, destroying many human lives and having destructive consequences which are still felt.

That is precisely why we have to face the consequences of war. Other people's past is our present, and to have a normal future, we must go through a complete social catharsis. The past of war is like a weight tied to our legs, slowing our normal development and good life. Unless we face the crimes and learn lessons from our recent past, I am afraid that there will be no normal life in these parts for a long time to come.

That is why, for a start, war crimes trials are needed. Let us be realistic. None of the communities had enough strength to bring to justice those of its own kind responsible for the crimes committed. Criminals were hailed as heroes and victims became mere numbers, where the difference between a hundred and a thousand victims is "only one zero". That is why the Hague Tribunal was needed. Because we were not ready to take responsibility for such an important task,

the consequences of which will be lived by many future generations.

We need institutions that will openly say that the commission of war crimes is not allowed and that those who commit them will receive long prison sentences. We need trials to find out what really happened before we were born; somebody objective enough to establish the real perpetrator and recognise the victim on the basis of many documents and witnesses. They are our voice, society's cry for respect for justice and the creation of conditions for the rule of law.



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Courts are needed, but they are by no means enough. They cannot be some remote institutions which become an end in itself. Courts are not there only for criminals or victims. Courts are there for us. They are a social reaction to someone's unacceptable conduct. We should learn the lesson that war crimes must never be

# committed during an armed conflict?

repeated: not only here, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also in the world at large.

That is why war crimes trials are so important for our generation - a generation that did not take part in, but lives with all the consequences of a bloody war. Few families around me have been unscathed by its destructive effect. Some lost their fathers, a part of their body or home, and others, whose houses were burned down, lost their photo albums in the fire, which were the only memories of their previous normal life. And we are all victims. If we turn a blind eye, we will all become the perpetrators of a terrible crime which is not criminally punishable, but is much more dangerous – the crime of forgetting.

Nobody has the right to forget victims of crimes. And victims are the same, regardless of their ethnic background. They share great pain and irreparable suffering. That is why we should not rub salt into their wounds, push them aside, inundated with daily bad news and economic problems. They live through the war of years ago every day in their minds and they have no end of working hours or a holiday season.

Nobody has the right to forget the perpetrators of crimes. Their names must be clearly said, as a reminder that they committed crimes in their own name, and not in the name of those of us who deeply feel the consequences of their crimes today. They will serve

their sentences in prison, and we will be punished to live with the consequences of their crimes.

We will be to blame, we will be co-perpetrators of a crime if we do not speak about it aloud. “War is bad, violating the rights of others is unacceptable.” I am absolutely sure that this short sentence sounds equally good in any language of the world.

That is why I hope that this is the last of the many wars that have raged in these parts, and that, like the Swiss, we will learn a lesson from a bloody war of long ago which will prevent us from repeating the same mistakes.

This will help the young generation restore the broken inter-ethnic links and lead the whole of society towards normalising relations. Only in this environment is it possible to develop the creativity of young generations, who will build their relations on respect and acceptance of diversity. Let us not forget that the longest journey begins with a single step. May our own facing of our past be that step on the path of reconciliation across the whole of the Balkans.



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