

FOREWORD

Rare are those who do not share a general sentiment that we, citizens of the former Yugoslavia, had undergone some terrible, unimaginable things in the last fifteen years. As for the understanding of their reasons, the picture is quite different: it is hard to find two individuals who would have identical views on the causes of the big Yugoslav tragedy. It is, of course, quite certain that these causes (as well as the causes of so many other well-known man-made tragedies) are not simple or unambiguous. This, along with astonishing mental differences among individuals, explains the huge differences of ideas about the reasons of our tragic past. However, we do not pretend here to unravel the causes of the Yugoslav tragedy, but only *inform*, or more likely, *remind* the reader of one particular episode of the grand Yugoslav tragedy, or rather, *try to provoke him into thinking about it and its meaning*.

The episode we will talk about is the compulsory conscription of refugees from Krajina in the summer of 1995 – action that took place in the erstwhile Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – and their transfer to “mobilization training camps”, especially the one in Erdut. Certainly, the events happening in Erdut do not belong to the most gruesome and bloodiest chapters of the Yugoslav tragedy, not because this experience was not terrible and unimaginable, but because of the very hard competition of other, even more terrible and unimaginable happenings in the Yugoslav wars. However, Erdut events remarkably reveal two elements: *first*, the cold brutality of Milošević's regime under which even the mobilization of ethnic Serbs had to be carried out savagely, and *second*, the predominant indifference of the majority of citizens of Serbia towards the unheard-of manhunt that occurred in the summer of 1995, which made us think that this equanimity perhaps concealed a tacit approval. The aforementioned goals of this monograph stemmed from the editors' basic conviction that the willing ignorance of the silent, passive majority, their turning of a blind eye to unsettling scenes and information and their hasty acquiescence to simplified, partial and banal interpretative *clichés* of understanding of the ongoing events was a more terrible, sinister and thorough destruction than the one caused by the canons of a noisy and active minority. In a way, the dark, fifteen-year-long destruction “stole the show” from the sinister experience from Erdut that did not attract any substantial media attraction nor disturbed the indifference of the majority of Serbian citizens. In virtue of all existing domestic and international legal conventions that bound Serbia by that time, those sent to Erdut *had* to be protected from war and not pushed into it, and

especially not after being humiliated and tortured. Accused of being cowards and traitors, they were sentenced beforehand and denied any possibility of defending themselves; they were hunted down like criminals in houses and streets, while the very ones who were supposed to fight crime handed them over to former or active criminals. In fact, they were those ordinary, simple men without political power or influence who, in a time of the breakdown of all civilized institutions and values, could not expect anything else but to become canon fodder and fall prey to the ambitions of cold and ruthless political predators. Therefore, this book aims to offer basic information on the events in Erdut in 1995 or serve as a reminder of them, and especially a reminder of the consequences these events left on at least 7 000 individuals and members of their families whose destinies are interwoven in the tapestry of the big Yugoslav tragedy. In this sense, the editors judged it worthy to include the following eight papers (dealing with different aspects of “Erdut events”) into a book.

The aspects we deal with can conditionally be divided into sociological (the first paper), psychological (papers 2-6) and legal ones (papers 7-8).

The paper ““They’ wanted them, and ‘He’ didn’t: about the context, organization and form of the forcible conscription of refugees in Serbia in 1995”, written by Borislav Radović, contains a sociological analysis of the context of Erdut experience. The paper convincingly defends the thesis that these events were by no means an excessive and unusual instance of the violation of human rights in the period considered but rather a regular consequence of a political system characterized by “indifference towards the value of individual life and dignity, contempt of the law and legality and reliance on dubious ‘contractors’: amoral, brutal, criminal structures concealed and covered by a patriotic discourse”.

Goran Opačić, Vladimir Jović and Goran Knežević performed an analysis of the types of torture carried out in Erdut camp and presented their results in the paper entitled “Torture or training? - Types of torture in a group of refugees forcibly conscripted in Serbia in 1995”. The paper highlights the fact that, although the treatment of the forcibly conscripted in Erdut did not have the frequency and destructive quality comparable to the one experienced by ex-prisoners of camps in Croatia and Bosnia, it, nevertheless, largely surpassed any reasonable drill or rigorous military training and, therefore, undoubtedly represented torture, be the one that the authors labeled “Type A” (“police” or “lighter” torture) or, sometimes, the “Type B” (“sadistic” or “heavier” torture).

The work of Mina Mitić and Stanislava Vuković (“The psychological profile of the forcibly conscripted”) directly answers the question of psychic consequences of Erdut experience by comparing the intensity of psychopathological symptoms in a group of forcibly conscripted, a group of our clients who underwent torture in prisons or concentration camps in Croatia or Bosnia and a group of refugees with no experience of torture. It was established that the tortured had a considerably higher lifetime prevalence of posttraumatic

stress disorder (PTSD), but that there was not a significant difference in current PTSD, although the tortured, on average, had a worse clinical picture of PTSD. As for the intensity of psychopathological phenomenology, the group of forcibly conscripted was much closer to the group of tortured than to the group of non-tortured refugees, which highlighted the fact that the forcible conscription in 1995 perhaps had consequences similar to those produced by any other clearly defined form of torture.

Radomir Samardžić's paper "Forcible conscriptions of refugee veterans as a risk of additional psychic decompensation" also deals with the psychic consequences of "Erdut experiences". The author presents seven cases and the characteristic symptoms that made some of these clients ask for assistance. Aided by his previous clinical experience as well, the author established that Erdut camp was a theatre of psychic and physical abuse that can be qualified as torture. He concluded that additional research is necessary in order to see if the forcible conscription was the main factor of development of posttraumatic symptoms and disorders or just an additional factor that, along with previously accumulated experiences, produced the disorders studied.

"Group psychotherapy of patients with the experience of torture and forcible conscription", written by Jovanka Cvetković, Biljana Đorđević and Sandrina Špeh, analyzes clinical work with these particular clients. The paper describes the characteristics of group analytical work, i.e. the difficulty, uncertainty and complexity of that very gradual, often painful and toilsome process of the patient's confrontation with his own mental contents and recognition of their meaning, which is a process that leads to a better self-understanding, increased freedom of choice of the ways of acting and reacting and, consequently, enhanced control over one's life.

In his paper entitled "A psychoanalytic retrospect on the issue of compensation of forcibly conscripted refugees", Vladimir Jović exposed some elements of a psychoanalytic interpretation of the current Serbian political and social understandings of what we have called "Erdut experience". The author demonstrates a way in which the psychoanalytical method can shed light on deep, often unconscious sources of individual and group attitudes, convictions and actions concerning some precise social, or, in our case, legal issues, such as the one of compensation of forcibly conscripted refugees.

Mojca Šivert's paper "Compensation in cases of forcibly conscripted refugees" criticizes the current Serbian legal treatment of the right to compensation of forcibly conscripted individuals. She invokes the basic legal rule that equal cases must be treated equally and stresses that the legal position previously adopted by the Civil council of the Supreme court of Serbia (i.e. its prolongation of the period of limitation for compensatory claims of the members the Yugoslav National Army members who suffered immaterial damage in conflict with paramilitary formations), must also be applied in cases of forcibly conscripted refugees

(especially if we know that the Court's position has recently been supplemented by its new statement on the responsibility of the Republic of Serbia for the unlawful behavior of its police).

"Forcible conscription of refugees – unlawful motives and acts and their legal consequences", written by Bojan Đurić, contains an analysis of the domestic and international legal institutes and guaranties which were violated in the action of forcible conscription. A special attention was paid to the international treaties and other legal instruments that were most seriously infringed in that action: prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the right to freedom and security of person, and the right to fair trial.

The editors