

Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation

Conclusions from the Conference in Golubić (near Obrovac), Croatia

“Croatian-Serbian Relations: Political Cooperation and National Minorities”

August 26-27, 2009

An international conference entitled “Croatian-Serbian Relations: Political Cooperation and National Minorities” took place August 26-27, 2009 in Golubić, near Obrovac in Croatia, bringing together 20 historians and sociologists as well as politicians from Croatia and Serbia. After presenting and discussing their papers, the scholars concluded the conference on the second day, noting that politics and politicians of these two countries do not have the legitimacy or mandate to interpret the past; instead, these tasks should be given to scholars. The position of those present was that, in order to strengthen political relations, an effort should be made to reach a joint interpretation of the topics relating to the history of political relations between the two countries and nations, especially the topics addressed at the conference, including the beginning and development of Croatian-Serbian political cooperation; the attitude of the media towards the past; ideology and the position of minorities and their political organizations; and an analysis and revision of the history textbooks. The assembled scholars concluded that it would be beneficial for the improvement of Croatian-Serbian relations to find resources and good will to research the Yugoslav break-up. Of particular importance in this respect would be the availability of archival material from the Hague Tribunal. The scholars prioritized this issue. There are no longer any major obstacles in accessing the archival material in Serbia and Croatia; rather, the problem can be traced to a lack of resources and political will from governmental institutions in both countries which would enable such a research project.

In his opening speech, Darko Gavrilović, CHDR Director, pointed out that peaceful coexistence between Serbs and the Croats is necessary, not only because joining the European Community is their common goal, but also because it is impossible to develop culturally and socio-economically as long as two nations with similar and overlapping geography, culture, history, religion, etc. decide to live next to each other instead of living with each another. A shared

Laan van Meerdervoort 70 | 2715 AN | The Hague | The Netherlands

Tel: + 31 (0) 70 361 5530 | Fax: +31 (0) 70 361 7792

info@ihjr.org | www.historyandreconciliation.org

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existence does not mean enforcing the creation of a joint state, but showing appreciation and respect for all cultural, historical, state and national distinctions developed and fostered by the nations throughout their histories.

The scientists greeted the fact that the conference was attended by political representatives of the Serbs in Croatia, Milorad Pupovac and Vojislav Stanimirović, as well as political representatives of the Croats in Vojvodina, Serbia, Petar Kuntić and Duje Runje. At the end of the politicians' meeting, Prof. PhD. Milorad Pupovac offered a short summary of the agreements made at this meeting: 'After a discussion about the political experiences of the Serbs in Croatia and the Croats in Serbia, PhD. Vojislav Stanimirović and PhD. Milorad Pupovac on behalf of the Independent Democratic Serbian Party (IDSP), and Petar Kuntić and Duje Runje on behalf of the Democratic League of Croats in Vojvodina (DLCV), agreed on a collaboration between their political parties and other minority institutions. The governments of the two states, Croatia and Serbia, are expected to realize the agreement on making the property located at 21 and 23 Preradovićeve Street in Zagreb available for use to the Serbian Cultural Association 'Prosvjeta' as well as the houses of Ban Jelačić in Petrovaradin to the Croatian People's Party. We also expect a Mixed Supervising Committee for the realization of the agreement on Minority Rights to meet as soon as possible. Finally, the representatives of the IDSP and DLCV, as well as the Croatian People's Party and the Serb National Council decided to meet during the fall to talk about other concrete modalities of cooperation which would serve the best interests of their communities and parent states.'

Although the scholars emphasized that the politicization of historical inquiry is unacceptable, and that the problem of historians with politically colored views is still common, they underlined that the presence of the politicians at the conference did not imply that the meeting in Golubic was influenced by politics. The politicians were hosted and given a chance to establish political cooperation to improve the status of national minorities in Serbia and Croatia, and the gathered scholars wholeheartedly supported this laudable initiative.

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The conference was organized by the Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) from the Netherlands and the Novi Sad-based Center for History, Democracy and Reconciliation (CHDR) with assistance from the Dialogue from Zagreb, City of Novi Sad, the Town of Obrovac, the Secretariat for Refugees of Serbia, the Ministry for Diaspora of the Serbian Government, the Serbian National Council from Croatia, the Balkan Fund, and the Sigrid Rausing Trust.

Darko Gavrilović

Dinko Gruhonjić