

Lost in Translation: Srebrenica, an interpreter, a secret deal and a conference in The Hague

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Members of *Marš Mira* / Peace March for Srebrenica (marsmira2013@gmail.com) arrive at the 20th Srebrenica commemoration in The Hague, 11 July 2015.

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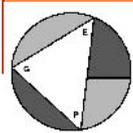
In The Hague, the Netherlands, in late June this year, an international conference on Srebrenica took place at the 'The Hague Institute for Global Justice'. Invited were several dozen politicians, civil servants and military officers who played a key role before, during and after the fall of Srebrenica on July 11, 1995, during which Bosnian-Serb and Serbian forces killed more than

8,000 Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) despite the presence of the Dutch UN peacekeeping contingent commonly known as 'Dutchbat'.

Among the conference's participants were former Dutchbat Commander Thom Karremans and former Dutch Defense Minister Joris Voorhoeve. Muhamed Durakovic was the sole Srebrenica survivor allowed to attend this gathering, which largely took place behind closed doors.

However, Hasan Nuhanovic, a former interpreter for Dutchbat, was not allowed to attend the conference. He recently won a lawsuit against the Dutch State along with other relatives of Rizo Mustafic and Ibro and Muhamed Nuhanovic who died in this genocide. The Supreme Court of the Netherlands ruled on September 6, 2013, that these three men had been wrongly evicted from the Dutchbat compound after the fall of the enclave and so went to meet certain death.

Hasan Nuhanovic was initially invited to the conference (Jurje van den Berg, Dutch daily *de Volkskrant*, June 29, 2015), but his invitation was withdrawn at the last minute, apparently because of Hasan's long legal struggle for compensation. This is strange, if only because an agreement on compensation by the Dutch government has recently been reached. And Defense Minister Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert also made, on behalf of the Netherlands, an apology: "The State regrets that Mr. Mustafic and Messrs. Nuhanovic had to leave the compound."



During the public part of the conference a Belgrade student asked for clarification about Hasan's absence. Moderator and investigative journalist David Rhode then pressed the organizers among the attendees on this issue. Alas, no explanation was offered by anyone present.

Cameron Hudson of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, one of the organizers, denies in *de Volkskrant* that any of the speakers have put pressure to ban Hasan. Then why was he not welcome? Why was his initial invitation revoked? Through a reliable and confidential source, we learned that Hasan was indeed not refused by any of the participants themselves. In reality, the organization represented by one participant reportedly objected to the presence of the former Dutchbat interpreter.

Clearly this particular organization is so influential that the conference's organizers felt compelled to cancel Hasan's invitation. We are not going to speculate here about which organization exactly lies behind this. However this incident as reported by our source, alarms us greatly.

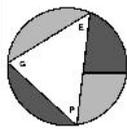
We appreciate the initiative of The Hague Institute for Global Justice and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum to organize this conference and to make public the contributions of the participants later this year. But such a high concentration of political, civil and military top brass who wish to speak quietly and confidentially about Srebrenica and their role in this tragedy, is inevitably lopsided, one-sided, elitist and isolated from the outside world.

Conferring like this behind closed doors is exactly what has raised criticism and controversy, especially when an invitation of a prominent, articulate and very critical survivor of Srebrenica is revoked.

The seclusion of this conference prohibits survivors as well as the general public to be properly informed regarding the Srebrenica disaster. It was only after we together talked with one of the Dutch participants in person, that the following shocking news emerged confirming persistent rumors about an outrageous deal, and giving more details about how this deal was actually communicated to the Bosnian Serbs:

On June 4, 1995, French General Bernard Janvier, Supreme Commander of the UN troops in Bosnia, talked for hours in Mali Zvornik directly with General Ratko Mladic, Commander-in-chief of the Bosnian-Serb forces—amongst other things about the French blue-helmets being held hostage by Mladic's army (see Yves Beigbeder, *Judging War Crimes and Torture*, Martinus Nijhoff, 2006, p.316).

This is extremely dubious as Janvier was not just responsible for the captured (mostly French) UN-soldiers, but was also responsible for all the other UN troops under his command—including Dutchbat—and especially for the safety of the Bosnian Muslims in the enclaves that had been declared 'UN safe areas'.



Moreover—and this is at least as dubious—secret documents discussed at the conference in The Hague apparently show that Janvier informed Mladic at that June 4th, 1995, meeting of the secret deal the US, the UK and France had made a few days earlier to suspend each possible use of air strikes.

The truth is hard to stomach. Apparently, Dutchbat Commander Karremans and Defense Minister Voorhoeve were not informed about this secret deal. However, the Bosnian Serbs definitely were. General Mladic was basically assured by the United Nations that he had free rein to capture Srebrenica and murder its male population.

On July 11, 2015, both authors were present at the 20th commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide in The Hague. We realize there still is a long way to go before the United Nations, the Netherlands and all the other nations involved (particularly the US, the UK and France) recognize and take full responsibility for their part in this tragedy, and cease prioritizing the concerns of their military officers and policymakers at the expense of the Srebrenica victims.

Caspar ten Dam (executive editor of this journal) is chairman of the Political Committee 'Stari Most', that co-organizes the annual Srebrenica commemoration in The Hague on the 11th of July. See www.srebrenica-herdenking.nl.

Edwin Giltay is author of De doofpotgeneraal (English: The Cover-up General). See www.dedoofpotgeneraal.nl/english.htm.

An earlier version of this article can be found on the website of the International Committee for Humanitarian Intervention (of which Caspar ten Dam is also chairman). See www.ichuminterv.org.

20th Srebrenica commemoration in The Hague, 11 July 2015



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