

Annual Theme

The Yugoslav Wars and the Year 1995: Reflections. Resilience. Reverberations

Article

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The United Nations General Assembly Resolution on Srebrenica and the Struggle Against Genocide Denial

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Abstract: The adoption of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/78/282, designating 11 July as the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Srebrenica genocide, embodies a significant effort in combating genocide denial. However, the Resolution generated substantial preemptive and reactive backlash, sparked by a global network of actors committed to revising the history of the 1990s. This article provides a detailed account of the resolution's contextual history within the UN, as well as an analysis of the geopolitical and ideological underpinnings of Srebrenica genocide denial as a tool of regional nationalist and revisionist agendas. As a salient example, the article explores the coordinated campaign led by Serbia and Republika Srpska to undermine the resolution, utilizing it to mobilize nationalist tropes, discredit international institutions, and reinforce denialist narratives.

Keywords: United Nations; Bosnia-Herzegovina; Srebrenica; genocide; Serbia; The Yugoslav Wars and the Year 1995

Introduction

Above a bustling plaza on the tourist-filled Knez Mihailova Street in central Belgrade, a large block of white text is sprawled across a building's facade. The graffiti, which appeared in late May 2024, declares that “the only genocide in the Balkans, [sic] was

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against the Serbs”.¹ This piece of nationalist “street art” offers a generative glimpse into Serbia’s reaction to the United Nations General Assembly’s (UNGA) adoption of Resolution A/RES/78/282, which designates 11 July as the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica (hereinafter: the Resolution).²

Passed on 23 May 2024, the Resolution condemns Srebrenica genocide denial and the glorification of figures convicted of crimes in former Yugoslavia. It was sponsored by the delegations from Germany and Rwanda, as well as 32 cosponsors that included the United States, France, Britain, and Italy, in anticipation of the 30th anniversary of Srebrenica in 2025. The Resolution also requested that the UN Secretary-General provide resources to promote education and awareness about the genocide, amid a climate of nationalist revisionism.³

The victims of the Srebrenica genocide received the Resolution enthusiastically. Nura Begović, president of the Mothers of the Enclaves of Srebrenica and Žepa (*Majke enklave Srebrenica i Žepa*), lauded the effort, stating: “With the vote, they [the UN] corrected the[ir] part of blame for what happened in 1995 to us. They could have prevented this from happening, and we would have our loved ones today. We want to hail the vote and to tell the world that this is how you seek justice and truth.”⁴

Notably, the Resolution’s text never mentions the words “Serb”, “Serbia”, or “Serbian”, maintaining its focus on the genocide’s victims. It goes so far as to explicitly individualize genocide, and does not employ the language of collective responsibility. Nonetheless, according to the governments of Serbia and the Republika Srpska, the latter being one of the two entities that make up Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Resolution embodied an attack on the dignity of the Serbian people by labeling them a “genocidal nation”. In a speech addressing the UN General Assembly ahead of the 23 May vote, the President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić decried the Resolution’s alleged political divisiveness, asking: “Why is the resolution being adopted if we are talking about individual legal responsibility?”⁵

1 “Grafit koji negira genocid u Srebrenici u centru Beograda.” *Radio Slobodna Evropa*. 4 June 2024. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srebrenica-grafit-genocid-srbija/32979146.html> (accessed 17 February 2025).

2 United Nations General Assembly. General Assembly (G.A.) Resolution (Res.) 78/282, United Nations Document (U.N. Doc.) A/RES/78/282. 30 May 2024.

3 G.A. Res. 78/282, U.N. Doc. A/RES/78/282. 30 May 2024.

4 Stojanović, Milica, Borislav Višnjić, Katarina Baletić and Azem Kurtić. “Srebrenica Survivors Hail UN Genocide Resolution, Serbs Question Vote’s Legitimacy.” *Balkan Insight*. 21 May 2024. <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/05/23/srebrenica-survivors-hail-un-genocide-resolution-serbs-question-votes-legitimacy/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

5 “UN Approves Srebrenica Genocide Resolution, As Some Serbs Remain Defiant.” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*. 23 May 2024. <https://www.rferl.org/a/un-srebrenica-resolution-bosnia-genocide/32960943.html> (accessed 15 February 2025).

However, contrary to the sentiments expressed by Vučić, the Resolution did not arise out of thin air, nor is its purpose obscure and contradictory. In accordance with the UN's mission to combat impunity and promote accountability through the paradigms of institutionally administered memory and awareness, similar resolutions were passed to honor the victims of the Rwandan genocide of 1994. In 2015, the UNGA also passed a resolution that established 9 December as the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime, and in 2022 it condemned Holocaust denial through a similar measure.⁶ Therefore, a UNGA vehicle honoring the memory of Srebrenica and condemning the denial of its classification as genocide is a consistent expression of UN action, and reflects a general trend in its memory and human rights regime.

Yet, at the UN, efforts to memorialize Srebrenica have faced unprecedented political resistance relative to other mnemonic resolutions (Mehler 2017), and denial has continued. Genocide survivors, international institutions, human rights and transitional justice practitioners, lawyers, and memory scholars, among others, have widely documented this phenomenon. Meanwhile, the Srebrenica Memorial Center has published five annual reports tracking incidents of denial within Bosnia, Serbia, and the wider region. The most recent report captured a concerning, but perhaps to be expected trend – denial of the genocide in Srebrenica increased again, coinciding with the debate and adoption of the Resolution.⁷

There has been little scholarly coverage of the Resolution since its adoption in May 2024. Dragan Dakić wrote about its potential legal implications and possibilities for its external implementation (Dakić 2024). This work, however, enlists the Resolution as a point of departure to analyze the global dimensions of Srebrenica denial and the nationalist agendas shaping the Serb backlash to genocide remembrance. In the following, we work toward providing a comprehensive account of the Resolution's political and mnemonic context and aftermath.

The Specter of Srebrenica Denial

The denial of what happened in Srebrenica began immediately after the crime was committed in July 1995. The Bosnian Serb authorities framed the operation in the town as being focused purely on military and resistance targets, not civilians. These

6 G.A. Res. 69/323, U.N. Doc. A/RES/69/323. 11 September 2015; G.A. Res. A/76/L.30, U.N. Doc. A/RES/76/L.30. 13 January 2022.

7 Nikolić, Maja. "Srebrenica Genocide Denials Rise Amid Lack of Prosecutions: Report." *Balkan Insight*. 20 September 2024. <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/09/20/srebrenica-genocide-denials-rise-amid-lack-of-prosecutions-report/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

pretextual justifications for the application of violence were clearly employed to appease UN officials and assuage the fears of the genocide's eventual victims. Constructing the capacity for widespread denial and equivocation after facilitating the genocide, Bosnian Serb military personnel later dismembered the victim's bodies and scattered their remains across dozens of graves in eastern Bosnia. The bodies were difficult to identify, enabling continued doubt as to the legitimacy of evidence linking the victims, who were eventually exhumed, to the killings in Srebrenica. This narrative pervades into the present, despite the successful and revolutionary technological advances made in accurately identifying the remains of the genocide's victims.⁸

Since 2020, the Srebrenica Memorial Center in Potočari has documented annual incidents of Srebrenica genocide denial.⁹ In 2021, the Center documented 234 instances of genocide denial in regional public and media discourse.¹⁰ The following year, 693 acts of genocide denial were identified, marking a substantial increase in recorded incidents.¹¹ While the Center's 2023 report measured a significant decline in traceable acts of genocide denial,¹² the most recent report revealed a threefold increase in incidents from 2023, with a specific escalation in the months during which the UNGA was considering the Srebrenica commemoration resolution.¹³ Aligned with the disconcerting trends identified by the Center, Srebrenica denial's worrying proliferation has attracted significant political and academic attention.

Geographically speaking, Srebrenica denial is most prevalent across Republika Srpska and the Republic of Serbia. In both of these entities, denial of the genocide in

⁸ Cf. the concise overview "Facts About Srebrenica." International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Outreach, n.d. https://www.icty.org/x/file/Outreach/view_from_hague/jit_srebrenica_en.pdf (accessed 15 February 2025).

⁹ Hanson Green, Monica. "Srebrenica Genocide Denial Report 2020." Srebrenica Memorial Center. May 2020. <https://srebrenicamemorial.org/en/investigations/genocide-denial-report-2020/4> (accessed 19 February 2025).

¹⁰ Cvjetičanin, Tijana, Edin Ikanović, Adem Mehmedović, and Kadira Šakić. "Srebrenica Genocide Denial Report 2021." Srebrenica Memorial Center. June 2021. <https://srebrenicamemorial.org/en/investigations/srebrenica-genocide-denial-report-2021/8> (accessed 19 February 2025).

¹¹ Mehmedović, Adem, Kadira Šakić, Edin Ikanović, and Nikola Vučić. "Srebrenica Genocide Denial Report 2022." Srebrenica Memorial Center. December 2022. <https://srebrenicamemorial.org/en/news/srebrenica-genocide-denial-report-2022/97> (accessed 19 February 2025).

¹² Džananović, Muamer, Adem Mehmedović, Nikola Vučić, and Edin Ikanović. "Srebrenica Genocide Denial Report 2023." Srebrenica Memorial Center. July 2023. <https://srebrenicamemorial.org/bs/istrazivanja/srebrenica-genocide-denial-report-2023/18> (accessed 19 February 2025).

¹³ Nikolić, "Srebrenica Genocide Denials Rise Amid Lack of Prosecutions: Report."

Srebrenica is essentially tantamount to official policy and is a well-established and entrenched cultural norm. It is fomented and orchestrated by elites – collaboratively by leading members of both governments – and embraced and reproduced among certain right-wing and nationalist political groupings. Denial as a nationalist political project is uplifted and supported institutionally, with a constellation of government programs, laws, funding streams, and events constructed to perpetuate genocide revisionism. All the while, on the streets of Belgrade and along roadways in Republika Srpska, murals celebrate the genocide's perpetrators and demean its victims. Troublingly, the specter of genocide denial and perpetrator glorification is present among certain groups of young people for whom the memory of Srebrenica has been suppressed or erased in school.¹⁴

Since the Dayton Accords ended the Bosnian War in November 1995, significant bureaucratic resources in Republika Srpska have been deployed to produce alternative knowledge which contradicts the judicially established facts of Srebrenica. In 2002, the Republika Srpska Government Bureau for Relations with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) published a document titled “Report about Case Srebrenica” [sic] which denied that *any* massacre occurred in the town in 1995.¹⁵ In 2004, a different report was adopted which condemned the massacre at Srebrenica and affirmed the number of those killed.¹⁶ However, this report was revised in 2010 and disavowed in 2018 in a resolution by the National Assembly of Republika Srpska.¹⁷ The following year, the government of Milorad Dodik established the Independent International Commission for Investigating the Sufferings of all Peoples in the Srebrenica Region in the Period from 1992 to 1995, which has been criticized by 31 international experts on the conflict for disseminating falsehoods in denial of the genocide. The

14 Cf., among others, the assessments by Đureinović, Jelena. “Memory Politics of the 1990s Wars in Serbia: Historical Revisionism and Challenges of Memory Activism.” Humanitarian Law Center. 26 October 2021. <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?p=38176&lang=de> (accessed 20 February 2025); and Ristić, Katarina. “Media and Revisionism about the 1990s’ Wars in Serbia.” Humanitarian Law Center. 18 April 2023. <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?p=38773&lang=de> (accessed 20 February 2025).

15 Trifunović, Darko. “Report about Case Srebrenica: the First Part.” September 2002. Banja Luka: Documentation Center of Republic of Srpska for War Crimes, Bureau of Government of RS for Relations with International Tribunal for War Crimes in the Hague.

16 Republika Srpska Government. Commission for Investigation of the Events in and Around Srebrenica Between 10th and 19th July 1995. “The Events in and Around Srebrenica Between 10th and 19th July 1995.” June 2004.

17 Lakić, Mladen. “Bosnian Serb Assembly to Annul Report on Srebrenica.” *Balkan Insight*. 23 July 2018. <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/07/23/bosnian-serbs-to-annul-report-on-srebrenica-07-23-2018/> (accessed 17 February 2025).

Commission's report denied the genocide, framing the Bosniaks as the primary aggressors in the conflict, and claiming that the victims of the Srebrenica genocide were not innocent civilians.¹⁸

In 2021, widespread genocide denial in Republika Srpska led the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina Valentin Inzko to introduce criminal penalties for both the genocide denial and perpetrator glorification into Bosnia's Criminal Code. While rarely enforced, the law against denial signifies the urgent need to mitigate denial in Bosnia. In reaction to the anti-denial amendments, Dodik precipitated a major political crisis in which he openly called for Republika Srpska's secession from Bosnia (Barton Hronešová and Hasić 2024). Dodik himself is one of the most prominent purveyors of Srebrenica denial, despite having once said: "I know perfectly well what happened: genocide happened in Srebrenica. That was the ruling of the Hague tribunal, and this is an undeniable legal fact."¹⁹ But just over a decade later, dozens of complaints have been filed against him under the law banning genocide denial.²⁰ He has claimed that the genocide "did not happen", is part of a core "fabricated myth" constructed by Bosniaks, and "the greatest deception of the 20th century".²¹ While sometimes using his platform to perfunctorily lament the wrongdoing in Srebrenica, Dodik remains adamant that the massacre was not a genocide, while venerating the Bosnian Serb officials convicted at the ICTY and the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT). He has even gone

18 "Press Release on the Adoption of the Report of the Independent International Commission on the Suffering of All Peoples in the Srebrenica Region 1992–1995 by the National Assembly of Republika Srpska." Centre for Socio-Political Research of the Republic of Srpska. 18 April 2024. <https://cdpirs.org/en/press-release-on-the-adoption-of-the-report-of-the-independent-international-commission-on-the-suffering-of-all-peoples-in-the-srebrenica-region-1992-1995-by-the-national-assembly-of-republika-srpska/> (accessed 17 February 2025); Gordy, Eric, Edin Hajdarpašić, Jasmin Mujanović, Marijana Toma, Florian Bieber, Srđan Vučetić, Kurt Bassuener, et al. "Truth and Revisionism in Bosnia and Herzegovina." https://balkaninsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/RS_Comission_FINAL_II.pdf (accessed 17 February 2025).

19 "Dodik: U Srebrenici je bio genocid!" *Prati FACE TV*. 9 July 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSkdl8ASd_Y (accessed 17 February 2025).

20 Grebo, Lamija. "Bosnia's Genocide Denial Law: Why Prosecutors Haven't Charged Anyone." *Balkan Insight*. 28 February 2023. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/02/28/bosnias-genocide-denial-law-why-prosecutors-havent-charged-anyone/> (accessed 17 February 2025).

21 "Bosnian Serb Wrongly Calls Srebrenica Massacre a 'Myth'." *AP News*. 13 April 2019. <https://apnews.com/general-news-ba3e3d6495c545bab2592b8e197be030> (accessed 17 February 2025); Bart, Katharina, and Maja Zuvela. "Bosnian Serb Leader: Srebrenica Was 20th Century's 'Greatest Deception'." *Reuters*. 25 June 2015. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bosnia-serbia-arrest/bosnian-serb-leader-srebrenica-was-20th-centurys-greatest-deception-idUSKBN0P51OL20150625/> (accessed 17 February 2025).

so far as to dedicate a student dormitory to Radovan Karadžić.²² Thus, as Bosnian Serb scholar Olivera Simić notes, “Dodik has created [the] political and social space in which genocide denials are normalized” (Simić 2024, 6).

The extent of denial in Republika Srpska stretches well beyond the work of a single individual. As noted above, significant administrative effort is invested in working to counter Srebrenica’s judicially established history, and bring about deeper ethnic divisions. The entity of Republika Srpska has also begun efforts to physically erase the memory of Srebrenica from space, and therefore public conscience. A telling example of this phenomenon is efforts to revitalize the infamous Kravica warehouse – where more than 1,000 executions took place during the genocide – and transform it into an entrepreneurial hub.²³ The direct erasure facilitated by this renovation indicates a commitment to purge the remnants of Republika Srpska’s culpability.

In the neighboring Republic of Serbia, Srebrenica denial constitutes an essential element of political nationalism. To this day, no Serbian government has accepted the ICTY’s classification of Srebrenica as a genocide. In 2010, the Serbian Parliament narrowly passed a resolution condemning the “crime” committed in Srebrenica and apologizing to the victims for not preventing the massacre. This resolution did cite the 2007 ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which affirmed Srebrenica’s genocidal nature. It was adopted under pressure from the EU and represented a targeted domestic effort on the part of then-President Boris Tadić to improve Serbia’s prospects for EU accession (Dragović-Soso 2012).

Nonetheless, explicit genocide denial has been widespread among members of the current Serbian government under President Aleksander Vučić and the Serbian Progressive Party (*Srpska napredna stranka*, SNS). Under their leadership, in 2016, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia amended its criminal code to provide legal cover to those denying the Srebrenica genocide.²⁴ The amendments criminalized denial of genocides affirmed by the International Criminal Court (ICC), implicitly excluding denial of the Srebrenica genocide, as perpetrators had been convicted in the ICTY and elsewhere. The government also refuses to remove denialist graffiti,

22 “Student Dorm Named after War Crimes Suspect Radovan Karadžić.” *The Guardian*. 20 March 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/21/student-dorm-named-after-war-crimes-suspect-radovan-karadzic> (accessed 17 February 2025).

23 Džaferagić, Nejra. “Tenderom za rekonstrukciju zadruga u Kravici predviđeno uklanjanje tragova zločina.” *Detektor*. 29 April 2022. <https://detektor.ba/2022/04/29/tenderom-za-rekonstrukciju-zadruga-u-kravici-predvidjeno-uklanjanje-tragova-zlocina/> (accessed 17 February 2025).

24 Pantović, Milivoje. “Serbia to Punish Genocide Denial, Says Minister.” *Balkan Insight*. 16 November 2016. <https://balkaninsight.com/2016/11/16/serbia-to-punish-genocide-denial-says-minister-11-16-2016/> (accessed 17 February 2025); see also “Zakon o izmenama i dopunama krivičnog zakonika.” Član 387, Sec. 5. 15 November 2016. Belgrade: Narodna skupština Republike Srbije.

and has deployed resources to protect street art which honors Srebrenica's perpetrators (Moskovljević 2022, 24 and 31). Multiple members of government have used their public appearances to malign claims of genocide in Srebrenica as a conspiracy against the Serbian people, while other legislators, including the president of the Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska radikalna stranka*, SRS) Vojislav Šešelj, author state-funded books promoting denial of the genocide.²⁵

Scholars have observed that the denial of genocide has expanded to encompass open celebration of the crime. The term "triumphalism", coined by scholar Hariz Halilović, captures this dimension of the denial, which extends into the glorification of perpetrators and appreciation of the impact of their violence. The tropes of this phenomenon are as clear as they are disturbing. For example, soccer hooligans in Serbia have chanted "knife, wire, Srebrenica" (*nož, žica, Srebrenica*) in celebration of the genocide.²⁶ Serbian lawmaker Vladimir Đukanović described the massacre as a "brilliantly conducted military operation" which resulted in "liberation".²⁷ Popular folk songs mock the genocide's victims and call for further violence against Bosniaks, and other ethnic groups.²⁸ Celebrations were also organized in Republika Srpska to coincide with commemorations of Srebrenica on 11 July. At these celebrations, posters of perpetrators and racist chants were omnipresent (Karčić 2022). A week before the passage of the Resolution in May 2024, members of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina were photographed saluting a monument to Ratko Mladić.²⁹

25 Grebo, Lamija. "Disputed Truth: How Genocide Deniers Contest the Facts about Srebrenica." *Balkan Insight*. 15 May 2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/15/disputed-truth-how-genocide-deniers-contest-the-facts-about-srebrenica/> (accessed 17 February 2025); Biserko 2023, 157-66. <https://www.helsinki.org.rs/doc/Report2022.pdf> (accessed 20 February 2025); Lakić, Mladen, Anja Vladislavljević and Filip Rudić. "State of Denial: The Books Rewriting the Bosnian War." *Balkan Insight*. 19 October 2018. <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/10/19/state-of-denial-the-books-rewriting-the-bosnian-war-10-18-2018/> (accessed 17 February 2025).

26 Stojanović, Milica. "Football Fans Disrupt Match in Serbia with Srebrenica Chants." *Balkan Insight*. 9 August 2021. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/08/09/football-fans-disrupt-match-in-serbia-with-srebrenica-chants> (accessed 17 February 2025); "Serb Hate Speech Brings Bosnia Match to Halt." *Balkan Insight*. 12 March 2014. <https://balkaninsight.com/2014/03/12/bosnia-serbia-match-stopped-over-nationalistic-slogans> (accessed 17 February 2025).

27 "Srebrenica Genocide Denial Report 2020", 29.

28 For example, see Tang, Isaac Chakyan. "Echoes of a Turbulent Past: Turbo Folk War Music in Serbia." *Harvard International Review*. 22 April 2022. <https://hir.harvard.edu/turbo-folk-war-music-in-serbia/> (accessed 17 February 2025).

29 Kurtić, Azem. "Bosnian War Victims Protest Army Personnel 'Tribute to Mladic'." *Balkan Insight*. 16 May 2024. <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/05/16/bosnian-war-victims-protest-army-personnel-tribute-to-mladic/> (accessed 20 February 2025).

As denialism has expanded to include glorification and outright triumphalism, victims are subject to more extensive humiliation. The incendiary rhetoric of genocidal celebration, paired with the effects of genocide denial, heighten the risk of further violence.

Denial of the Srebrenica genocide has a significant international dimension. The Srebrenica Memorial Center's reports have documented extensive revisionism from politicians in neighboring countries, including Croatian president Zoran Milanović.³⁰ Acts of denial are also often observed in neighboring Montenegro.³¹ Several scholars of the Holocaust were enlisted by the Serbian government or Republika Srpska to publish work that undermines Srebrenica's classification as a genocide, including Gideon Greif, Raphael Israeli, Ephraim Zuroff, and Yehuda Bauer (Subotić 2022). Their work was effectively co-opted in service of a nationalist political project which advances Srebrenica denial. Austrian writer Peter Handke, a notorious Srebrenica denier who claimed that Bosniaks brought about the massacres at Srebrenica themselves, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature (Paul 2024). The Nobel Committee voraciously defended their decision to honor Handke despite his undisguised Islamophobia and overt sympathy for Slobodan Milošević.³²

Srebrenica remembrance has been a challenging endeavor amid these conditions of erasure and the lack of coherence in Bosnia's memory landscape (Duijzings 2007). Remembrance of Srebrenica is deemed "divisive" and political, but it is the project of genocide denial which has disrupted reconciliation and furthered ethnic division. Put differently, those who deny degrade the genocide's memory in favor of a revanchist, nationalist politics.

UN Failure to Commemorate Srebrenica

The UN bears significant responsibility for failing to prevent the genocide in Srebrenica. As noted in a Human Rights Watch Report issued after the massacre, UN peacekeepers "were unwilling to heed requests for support from their own forces stationed within the enclave, thus allowing Bosnian Serb forces to easily overrun it and – without interference from UN soldiers – to carry out systematic,

³⁰ "Srebrenica Genocide Denial Report 2022", 32.

³¹ "Srebrenica Genocide Denial Report 2020", 28, 40; "Srebrenica Genocide Denial Report 2021", 29-30; "Srebrenica Genocide Denial Report 2022", 22, 25, 29-30, 32, 38; "Srebrenica Genocide Denial Report 2023", 19.

³² Franklin, Ruth. "Literature's Most Controversial Nobel Laureate." *The New Yorker*. 14 March 2022. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/03/21/literatures-most-controversial-nobel-laureate> (accessed 19 February 2025).

mass executions”.³³ Just before the UN’s failure to prevent the Bosnian Serb offensive in Srebrenica, the UNSC-authorized ICTY began prosecuting those accused of committing atrocities across the former Yugoslavia. Beyond the obligation to hold the perpetrators of major international crimes accountable, the ICTY’s work was informed by didactic aspirations. Constructing a historical account of mass atrocities would, in the imagination of those who supported the tribunal’s establishment, “bring an end to pernicious forms of denialism about wartime atrocities, which had been pervasive during the 1990s conflict itself and have persisted long after the conflict ended” (Orentlicher 2020, 315). As denial has endured beyond the end of the ICTY’s mandate, so too have attempts by the UN to shoulder the responsibility to combat denial and commemorate the Srebrenica genocide.

In 2007, the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina Christian Schwartz-Schilling urged the body to establish an “International Day of Srebrenica”.³⁴ His intervention followed the ICJ’s ruling in *Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro*, which affirmed that the Srebrenica massacre was a genocide and held in plurality that Serbia had breached the Genocide Convention’s mandate by failing to prevent the atrocity.³⁵ Schwartz-Schilling was concerned about the “radical rhetoric” in reaction to the Court’s opinion, which “poisoned the political environment”.³⁶ He warned of the “ruthless political manipulation [of Srebrenica] by irresponsible politicians” and the continued denial of the genocide despite verdicts classifying the atrocity as such, which threatened to undermine Bosnia’s fragile postwar peace and stability.³⁷ However, the UN did not heed Schwartz-Schilling’s request. For nine years, the institution did not consider a commemorative resolution marking Srebrenica and specifically affirming the ICTY’s findings.

It was not until 2015 that the UN re-engaged in the work of passing a Srebrenica-focused resolution, in anticipation of the genocide’s 20th anniversary. It is likely that this was imagined as the “logical follow-up” to the commemorative resolution marking the Rwandan genocide of 1994 (Mehler 2017, 618). The United Kingdom (UK),

33 “The Fall of Srebrenica and the Failure of UN Peacekeeping.” Human Rights Watch. 15 October 1995. <https://www.hrw.org/report/1995/10/15/fall-srebrenica-and-failure-un-peacekeeping/bosnia-and-herzegovina> (accessed 17 February 2025).

34 “Bosnian Leaders Must ‘Seize This Moment’ for Reforms, UN Envoy Says.” UN News. 16 May 2007. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2007/05/218942> (accessed 17 February 2025).

35 “Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.” *Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro*. I.C.J. 140. 26 February 2007.

36 “Schwarz-Schilling Urges United Nations to Establish UN Day of Srebrenica to Pay Respect to Genocide Victims and Families.” Office of the High Representative. 16 May 2007. <https://www.ohr.int/schwarz-schilling-urges-united-nations-to-establish-un-day-of-srebrenica-to-pay-respect-to-genocide-victims-and-families/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

37 “Schwarz-Schilling Urges United Nations to Establish UN Day of Srebrenica to Pay Respect to Genocide Victims and Families.”

with the support of Jordan, Lithuania, Malaysia, New Zealand, and the United States, drafted Resolution S/2015/508 at the UNSC. The initiative sought similar objectives to those in the document which would eventually be passed by the UNGA in May 2024, but also focused on the UN's shortcomings and particular responsibility to learn from Srebrenica. Foregrounding transitional justice aspirations, the UNSC initiative recognized the plight of the victims on all sides of the conflict in Bosnia, including in Srebrenica. This provision was responsive to Serbian concerns that the resolution "singled out" Serbia and erased recognition of Serbian victims in the war. Additionally, the resolution described the "acceptance of the tragic events at Srebrenica as genocide" as "a prerequisite for reconciliation". It also condemned genocide denial, couching its harms in terms of the distress denial levies on victims, and urged states to develop educational initiatives on the Srebrenica genocide.³⁸

Russia proposed an alternative resolution at the UNSC, which contained no mention of Srebrenica as a genocide, instead advancing a broad condemnation of all crimes committed in Bosnia. Negotiations proceeded between Russia and the UK, as well as other sponsoring nations, prior to the vote on 8 July 2015. These fraught conversations caused a multitude of delays before the text's final consideration.³⁹

The governments of Serbia and Republika Srpska launched an aggressive campaign against the vote. As they had in 2024, here too they promoted a narrative whereby the UNSC resolution declared Serbs to be a "genocidal people", maligning the Serbian community writ large.⁴⁰ Serbian president Tomislav Nikolić sent letters to UNSC member state leaders personally requesting that they oppose the initiative due to its potential consequences (Mehler 2017, 618). The trope of political divisiveness featured prominently among those opposing the resolution, who warned of its potential detriment to reconciliation in Bosnia and the absence of local unanimity as to the legal status of Srebrenica as an international crime. Russian newspapers, for example, promulgated this narrative, as state outlets ran headlines such as "Serbs

³⁸ "Jordan, Lithuania, Malaysia, New Zealand, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America: Draft Resolution." United Nations Security Council. S/2015/508. 8 July 2015. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2015_508.pdf (accessed 19 February 2025).

³⁹ Ristić, Marija. "UN Postpones Srebrenica Genocide Resolution Vote." *Balkan Insight*. 8 July 2015. <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/07/08/un-postponed-srebrenica-resolution-vote/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

⁴⁰ Stojanović, Milica, and Samir Kajošević. "In Serbia and Montenegro, Srebrenica Is Still Politically Toxic." *Balkan Insight*. 8 July 2021. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/07/08/in-serbia-and-montenegro-srebrenica-is-still-politically-toxic/> (accessed 17 February 2025); "Nikolić: Izbeglička kriza je najveći izazov danas." *Vijesti*. 30 September 2015. <https://www.vijesti.me/svijet/balkan/161608/nikolic-izbjeglička-kriza-je-najveci-izazov-danasnjice> (accessed 17 February 2025).

are a genocidal nation and Serbia must admit it – this is the latest monstrous resolution on Srebrenica from London.”⁴¹

It is unclear whether these efforts resulted in abstentions or rejections of the resolution, but the support of Russia was sufficient to foreclose the initiative’s success. Russia’s UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin described the resolution as “not constructive, confrontational and politically motivated”.⁴² Aligned with the framing embraced by Vučić and Nikolić, Churkin spoke of concern that the resolution “would be counterproductive and lead to greater tension in the region”.⁴³ Absent from Churkin’s statements, or the Russian counter-resolution, was condemnation of genocide denial, perpetrator glorification, and revisionism. Nor was nationalist denial cited as a possible catalyst for social division and reparative regression. Predictably, Russia deployed its veto power to prevent passage of the resolution. The resolution received ten affirmative votes, with four other state parties to the Security Council abstaining.⁴⁴

In the aftermath of the resolution’s defeat, Serbian president Nikolić celebrated the allyship of Russia, claiming that the Russian government had prevented “a stain being put on the whole Serbian nation in an attempt to declare a genocide”. “Russia has shown and proved that it is a true and honest friend”, he said.⁴⁵ When Russia’s UN Ambassador Churkin died suddenly in February 2017, the newly elected Serbian president Vučić, while on a visit to Moscow, awarded Churkin a posthumous medal for preventing Serbs from being declared a genocidal people by the UN.⁴⁶ And during a Russian state visit to Belgrade in 2019, Vučić commended Putin for preserving

41 Miroslavljević, Igor. “The Myth of Russian Veto on the UN Resolution on Srebrenica: How Russia Saved the Serbs from Non-Existent Accusations of Being ‘Genocidal People’.” *European Western Balkans*. 13 July 2023. <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2023/07/13/the-myth-of-russian-veto-on-the-un-resolution-on-srebrenica-how-russia-saved-the-serbs-from-non-existent-accusations-of-being-genocidal-people/> (accessed 16 February 2025).

42 “Russia Vetoes UN Genocide Resolution on Srebrenica.” *Al Jazeera*. 9 July 2015. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/7/9/russia-vetoes-un-genocide-resolution-on-srebrenica> (accessed 19 February 2025).

43 Džidić, Denic. “Russia Vetoes UN Srebrenica Genocide Resolution.” *Balkan Insight*. 8 July 2015. <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/07/08/russia-vetoes-un-srebrenica-genocide-resolution/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

44 “Security Council Fails to Adopt Resolution on Srebrenica Massacres.” UN Photo. 8 July 2015. <https://media.un.org/photo/en/asset/oun7/oun7202380> (accessed 17 February 2025).

45 Džidić, Denic, and Saša Dragojo. “Russia’s Srebrenica Veto ‘An Insult to Victims’.” *Balkan Insight*. 9 July 2015. <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/07/09/russia-s-srebrenica-veto-an-insult-to-victims/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

46 Miroslavljević. “The Myth of Russian Veto on the UN Resolution on Srebrenica: How Russia Saved the Serbs from Non-Existent Accusations of Being ‘Genocidal People’.”

Serbia's public image.⁴⁷ In 2024, Serbia would once again rely on Russia's international leverage to undermine the UN's recognition of the Srebrenica genocide.

The UN General Assembly Resolution of 2024

Against all these odds, Bosniak organizations have long called for the UN to affirm Srebrenica as a genocide through a formal resolution. The US Congress and Senate recognized the Srebrenica genocide by resolution in 2005; the EU Parliament in 2009; and other national parliaments worldwide have done the same.⁴⁸ In a memory landscape steeped in nationalist contestation and equivocation, and with the continued degradation of Bosnian Muslim victims, affirmations of Srebrenica's history possess meaningful normative possibilities. Accordingly, the organization Mothers of Srebrenica in particular has advocated such an initiative. They first called for the UN to establish an International Day of Remembrance of the Srebrenica Genocide in 2019, during a visit to the Council of Europe.⁴⁹ Similarly, in April 2024, the Srebrenica Memorial Center called for this international organization to pass a commemorative document.⁵⁰

47 Miroslavjević. "The Myth of Russian Veto on the UN Resolution on Srebrenica: How Russia Saved the Serbs from Non-Existent Accusations of Being 'Genocidal People'."

48 "House Resolution 199: Expressing the Sense of the House of Representatives Regarding the Massacre at Srebrenica in July 1995." U.S. Congressman Chris Smith. 27 June 2005. <https://chris.smith.house.gov/lawsandresolutions/hres199.htm> (accessed 19 February 2025); "Senate Resolution 134: Expressing the Sense of the House of Representatives Regarding the Massacre at Srebrenica in July 1995." US Congress. 9 May 2005. <https://www.congress.gov/bills/109/congress/senate-resolution/134/amendments> (accessed 19 February 2025); "European Parliament Resolution of 9 July 2015 on the Srebrenica Commemoration (2015/2747(RSP))." 9 July 2015. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015IP0276#:~:text=Condemns%20in%20the%20strongest%20possible,3>.

(accessed 19 February 2025). For examples of other commemorative resolutions, see Isufi, Perparim, and Milica Stojanović. "Kosovo Parliament Adopts Resolution Recognising Srebrenica Genocide." *Balkan Insight*. 7 July 2021. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/07/07/kosovo-parliament-adopts-resolution-recognising-srebrenica-genocide/> (accessed 17 February 2025); "Austria Parliament Unanimously Adopted Resolution on Srebrenica Genocide." *Sarajevo Times*, 7 July 2022. <https://sarajevotimes.com/austrian-parliament-unanimously-adopted-resolution-on-srebrenica-genocide/> (accessed 17 February 2025).

49 Stojanović, Milica. "Council of Europe Urged to Back Srebrenica Remembrance Day." *Balkan Insight*. 26 June 2019. <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/26/council-of-europe-urged-to-back-srebrenica-remembrance-day/> (accessed 20 February 2025).

50 "Adoption of the Srebrenica Resolution at the United Nations General Assembly." Srebrenica Memorial Center. 9 April 2024. <https://srebrenicamemorial.org/en/news/adoption-of-the-srebrenica-resolution-at-the-united-nations-general-assembly/195> (accessed 19 February 2025).

Specific calls for the UN to adopt a Srebrenica resolution commenced about a year before it came to fruition. In July 2023, Dunja Mijatović, then Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, cited the Mothers of Srebrenica's demand and called for the "international community to stop looking the other way" and recognize 11 July as an official day of remembrance.⁵¹ Mijatović's charge was grounded in the rise of genocide denial in Bosnia. According to her, establishing "a day of remembrance would show that the international community stands on the side of the truth and in solidarity with the survivors and families of the victims".⁵² This sentiment was echoed by former general counsel of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) Menachem Rosensaft in September 2023.⁵³ Several months later, in March and April 2024, the initiative was taken to formulate and announce the Resolution at the UNGA.

Drafting and Introducing the Resolution

Resolution A/RES/78/282 was introduced on 17 April 2024, sparking vigorous debate within international institutions and across Bosnia, Serbia, and other states in Southeastern Europe. Its primary sponsors were Germany and Rwanda, two states commonly cited for their domestic reckonings with legacies of atrocity and genocide (Neiman 2019; Sodaro 2017). As mentioned previously, Rwanda was the subject of a similar resolution which designated 7 April as International Day of Reflection on the Genocide in Rwanda of 1994. A number of other states joined in immediate support of the Resolution, including the United States, United Kingdom, France, Turkey, Chile, and Ireland.⁵⁴

Several days after the text's formal introduction, the UN held a briefing in preparation for the Resolution. Zlatko Lagumdžija, the permanent representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the UN, stewarded the event which also included remarks from Željko Komšić, the Croat member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina,

51 "High Time to Recognise 11 July as an Official International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Srebrenica Genocide." Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. 10 July 2023. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/high-time-to-recognise-11-july-as-an-official-international-day-of-remembrance-of-the-victims-of-the-srebrenica-genocide> (accessed 19 February 2025).

52 "High Time to Recognise 11 July as an Official International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Srebrenica Genocide."

53 Rosensaft, Menachem. "The U.N. Faces a Heavy Responsibility as the General Assembly Starts." *Newsweek*. 6 September 2023. <https://www.newsweek.com/heavy-responsibility-faces-un-general-assembly-starts-opinion-1825090> (accessed 19 February 2025).

54 The complete list of final sponsors also includes Albania, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, the Marshall Islands, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, and Vanuatu.

and Azir Osmanović, a survivor of the genocide and curator at the Srebrenica Memorial Center. Osmanović noted the quotidian nature of genocide denial in Bosnia, describing it as “ruthless and rampant”. He also suggested to the attending states that “recognition of the Srebrenica genocide as a universal tragedy would help to stem this tide”.⁵⁵ A vote on the Resolution was scheduled for 2 May 2024.⁵⁶

Among Bosniak institutions and human rights actors in the region, the effort was positively received. The Srebrenica Memorial Center welcomed the announcement, but emphasized that “the voting results in the General Assembly will not only determine the international community’s attitude towards the past and the genocide in Srebrenica but will also be a guide as to who our country can count on as partners and allies in times of uncertainty and threats”.⁵⁷ Following fervent Bosniak efforts to secure the required two-thirds of the votes of UN member states, the governments of Serbia and Republika Sprska mobilized in resistance. The Resolution was thrust into the political discourse, narratively constructed as an attack on the Serbian people and, especially, the Bosnian Serb state. More generally, Republika Srpska officials spoke of the Resolution’s destructive capacity – most notably arguing that it would upset the fragile post-Dayton political order, notwithstanding the fact that Milorad Dodik has clearly striven to undermine the agreement himself.⁵⁸ The campaign against the Resolution, discussed in the final section of this article, escalated toward the end of April as the UNGA vote neared.

The Text of the Resolution

The text of the 2024 Resolution possessed qualities similar to the various other commemorative resolutions passed by the UNGA. Its recitals drew from established principles of international human rights law and international criminal law to legitimate the text’s function and moral authority. The Resolution affirmed the work

55 “Briefing on the Preparation for the Commemoration of the 29th Anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide, Including the Draft Resolution on ‘International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica’.” *UN Web TV*. 19 April 2024. <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1n/k1nr07uc2v> (accessed 17 February 2025).

56 “Bosnia and Herzegovina: Briefing.” Security Council Report. 29 April 2024. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2024/04/bosnia-and-herzegovina-briefing.php> (accessed 17 February 2025).

57 “Adoption of the Srebrenica Resolution at the United Nations General Assembly.” Srebrenica Memorial Center Announcement. 9 April 2024. <https://srebrenicamemorial.org/en/news/adoption-of-the-srebrenica-resolution-at-the-united-nations-general-assembly/195> (accessed 19 February 2025).

58 Karčić, Hamza. “Putin’s Most Loyal Balkan Client.” *Foreign Policy*. 7 October 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/07/bosnia-elections-milorad-dodik-putin-russia/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

of the ICTY and IRMCT, as well as prosecutions for the genocide in Srebrenica in Bosnia-Herzegovina itself. Further, drawing on the frameworks of transitional justice, the recitals described the work of criminal prosecution as “central to the process of national reconciliation and trust-building and to the restoration and maintenance of peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina”. Instead of citing the Dayton Accords directly, the Resolution stated the UN’s commitment to “maintaining stability and fostering unity in diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina”.⁵⁹

Foregrounding the determination that the massacres related to the depopulation of Srebrenica amounted to a genocide, the recitals section of the Resolution cited several convictions of Bosnian Serb officials, such as the ICTY’s conviction of Radislav Krstić in 2001 and the IRMCT’s judgements against Radovan Karadžić in 2019 and Ratko Mladić in 2021.⁶⁰ The Resolution also noted the ICJ’s ruling in 2007, which affirmed unequivocally that the “acts committed in Srebrenica constituted acts of genocide”.⁶¹

Notably, the Resolution’s recitals specifically define the victims of the genocide, describing the international crime as the “genocide against Bosnian Muslims committed at Srebrenica in 1995”.⁶² Hamza Karčić (2015) has discussed the operationalization of disparate histories in Srebrenica resolutions, some of which he calls minimalist and parsimonious in defining the crime. For example, the commemorative text passed by the European Parliament in 2009 did not name Bosniaks as the community targeted for destruction in whole or in part, opting to describe the genocide merely according to its spatial occurrence in Srebrenica. Karčić observed that “this [was] one of the rare instances where genocide [was] defined not according to the identity of the victims (Bosniaks) but according to a narrowly defined geographical location of the crime (Srebrenica)” (Karčić 2015, 204). It is thus meaningful that the Resolution advanced at the UNGA centered on the identity of the victims by precisely stating that the genocide was committed against Bosniaks.

The operative clauses of the Resolution, supplementary to the designation of 11 July as the annual International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica, focus initially on the harms of genocide denial and glorification. In direct and cogent terms, the Resolution “condemns without reservation any denial of the Srebrenica genocide as a historical event” and “also condemns without reservation actions that glorify those convicted of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide by international courts, including those responsible

⁵⁹ G.A. Res. 78/282, U.N. Doc. A/RES/78/282. 30 May 2024.

⁶⁰ ICTY. “Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstić (Appeal Judgement), IT-98-33-A.” 19 April 2004; IRMCT. “Prosecutor v. Radovan Karadžić (Appeal Judgement), MICT-13-55-A.” 20 March 2019; IRMCT. “Prosecutor v. Ratko Mladić (Appeal Judgement), MICT-13-56-A.” 8 June 2021.

⁶¹ “International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica.”

⁶² “International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica.”

for the Srebrenica genocide”.⁶³ It encourages member states to preserve established facts and develop educational programs to combat the political denial and distortion of the genocide.⁶⁴ Reflective of its emphasis on international remembrance, the Resolution also invites widespread observance of 11 July.⁶⁵ Lastly, recognizing the ongoing nature of efforts to hold perpetrators of the genocide accountable, the Resolution also urges the identification of Srebrenica victims as well as criminal procedures against alleged offenders to continue.⁶⁶

The Resolution only describes the individuals convicted of the genocide and does not mention their national or ethnic backgrounds. It thus does not, despite claims to the contrary, single out Serbia and Serbs, or paint all ethnic Serbs as a genocidal people. Nor does the Resolution mention Serbia or Republika Srpska. The German Federal Government Special Representative for the Countries of the Western Balkans, Manuel Sarrazin, emphasized that the Resolution is not directed against Serbia or Republika Srpska.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, an amendment was introduced by Montenegro, and adopted in the final days before the vote, which directly asserted the Resolution’s singular condemnation of individuals. The added provision “reiterat[es] that criminal accountability under international law for the crime of genocide is individualized and cannot be attributed to any ethnic, religious or other group or community as a whole”.⁶⁸

Montenegro’s intervention sparked domestic discontent. The Executive Director of Human Rights Action (HRA) in Podgorica, Tea Gorjanc Prelević, accused the governing Europe Now Movement (*Pokret Evropa sad!*, PES), led by Prime Minister Milojko Spajić, of adjusting the Resolution to satisfy Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić (Višnjić 2024). On the contrary, Serbia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Marko Đurić accused Montenegro of disingenuously placating the concerns of their Serbian constituents, while still advancing an anti-Serb initiative in the UN. Serbian political parties in Montenegro, namely the Democratic People’s Party (*Demokratska narodna partija*, DNP), echoed the criticism advanced by Đurić. Milan Knežević, the DNP’s leader, warned the prime minister that support for the Resolution would be a deep

63 “International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica.” Sections 2 and 3.

64 “International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica.” Section 2.

65 “International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica.” Section 7.

66 “International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica.” Section 4.

67 Popović, Sofija. “Sarrazin: UN Resolution on Srebrenica Is Not against Serbia and Republika Srpska.” *European Western Balkans*. 24 April 2024. <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2024/04/24/ewb-interview-sarrazin-un-resolution-on-srebrenica-is-not-against-serbia-and-republika-srpska/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

68 “International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica.”

offense to Serbia and Republika Srpska.⁶⁹ However, after the acceptance of the proposed amendments, Montenegro declared their support for the Resolution.⁷⁰

A vote on the Resolution was delayed beyond 2 May due to disagreements on the final text and concern that there were not sufficient votes among the member states to achieve the required two-thirds majority.⁷¹ The vote was rescheduled for 23 May, about three weeks later. Despite intense opposition and the manufacturing of controversy by member states, on that day the Resolution passed with 84 member states voting in favor, 19 against, and 68 abstentions. Another 22 states were absent for the vote.⁷²

The Serbian Campaign Against the Resolution

The attack on the Resolution replicated many of the themes discursively deployed to stir up nationalism since the 1990s. Couching the Resolution within preexisting narratives of international anti-Serbianism, Bosniak maliciousness, enduring national vulnerability, the illegitimacy of international institutions, and a politicized conceptualization of Serbian victimhood provided an accessible template to legitimize a national campaign against it (Wygnańska 2021; Volčič 2005; Lerner 2020). Relatedly, the Resolution provided the leaders of Serbia and Republika Srpska with the means to divert domestic attention away from institutional corruption and bureaucratic neglect.⁷³ It also nicely coincided with the rerun of internationally scrutinized local elections in the Serbian capital, Belgrade.⁷⁴

69 Višnjić, Borislav. "Montenegro Accused of Kowtowing to Serbs on UN Srebrenica Resolution." *Balkan Insight*. 7 May 2024. <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/05/07/montenegro-accused-of-kowtowing-to-serbs-on-un-srebrenica-resolution/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

70 Wankiewicz, Paulina. "The Srebrenica Resolution: Slim Chances for Reconciliation." Centre for Eastern Studies. Analyses. Warsaw. 12 June 2024. <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2024-06-12/srebrenica-resolution-slim-chances-reconciliation> (accessed 17 February 2025).

71 "A UN Resolution on the Srebrenica Genocide Ignites Old Tensions." *Al Jazeera*. 14 May 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/14/why-has-a-un-resolution-on-srebrenica-genocide-ignited-tensions-in-bosnia> (accessed 19 February 2025).

72 "General Assembly Adopts Resolution on Srebrenica Genocide, Designating International Day of Reflection, Commemoration." United Nations Meeting Coverage and Press Releases. 23 May 2024. <https://press.un.org/en/2024/ga12601.doc.htm> (accessed 20 February 2025).

73 Todorović, Sofija. "Serbia's Lies About UN Srebrenica Resolution Are All About Power." *Balkan Insight*. 21 May 2024. <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/05/21/serbias-lies-about-un-srebrenica-resolution-are-all-about-power/> (accessed 20 February 2025).

74 Geć, Jovana. "An Election for Control of Serbia's Capital Is to Be Rerun Following Opposition Fraud Claims." *AP News*. 3 March 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/serbia-election-belgrade-opposition-adf6f5b21e020d27bda986a366c64a8c> (accessed 18 February 2025).

In March 2023, both the Serbian government and leaders of Republika Srpska initiated a direct, public attack on the Resolution. A series of independent remarks – offered by Milorad Dodik, Aleksandar Vučić, Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia Aleksandar Vulin, and speaker of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska Nenad Stevandić, respectively – laid the foundations for the campaign against the Resolution’s adoption. On 10 March 2024, President of Republika Srpska Dodik claimed that the Resolution put the survival of the Bosnian state at risk.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, Dodik himself was sanctioned by the United States and widely condemned for attempting to sabotage the Dayton Agreement.⁷⁶ That same day, Stevandić asserted that the Resolution’s goal was the destabilization of Bosnia.⁷⁷ Several weeks later, President of Serbia Vučić warned that should the Resolution be adopted, Bosniaks would demand, in response, both the abolition of Republika Srpska and compensation from Serbia.⁷⁸ He warned of “hard days” ahead for Serbia.⁷⁹ Likewise, Deputy Prime Minister Vulin cautioned that the Resolution was the “finalization of the conspiracy against the Republika Srpska and the Republic of Serbia”.⁸⁰

In a series of posts on the platform X, Dodik framed efforts to commemorate Srebrenica as political violence against the Serbian people, and a conspiracy created by the West to undermine Bosnia’s political order.⁸¹ As his rhetoric escalated, Dodik linked the Resolution to an impending political crisis, claiming that the UN’s initiative would render it impossible for Serbs to live in the state of Bosnia.⁸² He called for Serbian independence from Bosnia, claiming that the Resolution was incompatible with the status quo existence of Bosnian Muslim and Bosnian Serbs in one political entity.⁸³ However, while painting secession as having been provoked by the Resolution, Dodik had in fact been pursuing secessionist objectives long before the UNGA initiative commenced (Toal 2013). The United States, as well as the High

75 “Dodik: Nova rezolucija o Srebrenici rizikuje opstanak cijele BiH.” *RTRS vijesti*. 10 March 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87KbPeU9-f4> (accessed 19 February 2025).

76 “Treasury Sanctions Milorad Dodik and Associated Media Platform for Destabilizing and Corrupt Activity.” U.S. Department of the Treasury Press Release. 5 January 2022. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0549> (accessed 18 February 2025).

77 “Stevandić: Nova rezolucija o Srebrenici usmjerena na destabilizaciju BiH.” *RTRS vijesti*. 10 March 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86rIpGPMEYw> (accessed 19 February 2025).

78 “A UN Resolution on the Srebrenica Genocide Ignites Old Tensions.”

79 Kurtić. “Bosnian War Victims Protest Army Personnel ‘Tribute to Mladic’.”

80 Todorović. “Serbia’s Lies About UN Srebrenica Resolution are All About Power.”

81 @MiloradDodik. X. 9 April 2024. <https://twitter.com/MiloradDodik/status/1777788186569155006> (accessed 20 February 2025).

82 @MiloradDodik. X. 11 April 2024. <https://twitter.com/MiloradDodik/status/1778497350492688886> (accessed 20 February 2025).

83 @MiloradDodik. X. 22 April 2024. <https://twitter.com/MiloradDodik/status/1782389721034809501> (accessed 20 February 2025).

Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina Christian Schmidt, have documented Dodik's attempts to subvert the state and bring about crises which undermine it.⁸⁴

Bosnian Serb officials were also adamant that the Resolution violated the constitutional framework of Bosnia – a position embraced by the Serbian government and the Russian delegation. In particular, Bosnia's UN representative Zlatko Lagumdžija was accused of unilaterally advocating the Resolution, without proper authorization under the constitution. In the postwar constitution that structures Bosnia's governance, the Presidency consists of three members, one from each ethnic group: Bosniak, Serb, and Croat.⁸⁵ Under the collective powers of the Presidency, stipulated in Article V of the constitution, it shall have responsibility for conducting the state's foreign policy.⁸⁶ The argument that Lagumdžija was not backed by the three members of the Presidency was advanced by its Serb member, Željka Cvijanović, in letters to all UN member states.⁸⁷

On 18 April 2024, two major events in Republika Srpska furthered the Bosnia-based campaign against the Resolution. A rally was held in Banja Luka, led by Dodik but attended by Serbian officials including the speaker of the Serbian Parliament Ana Brnabić. At the rally, Dodik admitted that Srebrenica was a “mistake” and a “huge crime”, but simultaneously denied the genocide and threatened to secede from Bosnia if the Resolution was passed.⁸⁸ Additionally, on the same day, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska adopted a strongly criticized report which claimed that half as many Bosniaks were killed in Srebrenica as is actually the case, and that the majority of them were combatants.⁸⁹ In Serbia, however, that same month, Serbian civil society actors and human rights organizations – including the

⁸⁴ Kurtić, Azem. “Newly US-Sanctioned Bosnian Serbs ‘Honoured’ to be Blacklisted.” *Balkan Insight*. 14 March 2024. <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/03/14/newly-us-sanctioned-bosnian-serbs-honoured-to-be-blacklisted/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

⁸⁵ “Amendment I to the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina.” *Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina* 25 (9). 26 March 2009. <https://www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/legal/laws-of-bih/pdf/001%20-%20Constitutions/BH/BH%20Amendment%20I%20to%20BH%20Constitution%2025-09.pdf> (accessed 19 February 2025).

⁸⁶ “Amendment I to the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina.” Section V.

⁸⁷ “Cvijanović Wrote to the UN: Lagumdžija Undermines BiH's Constitutional Framework, Resolution on Srebrenica Adoption Would Threaten Reconciliation in BiH.” *Srpska Republika News Agency*. 4 April 2024. <https://www.srna.rs/en/novost/1191780/cvijanovic-wrote-to-the-un-lagumdžija-undermines-bih> (accessed 19 February 2025).

⁸⁸ “Thousands of Bosnian Serbs Attend Rally Denying Genocide Was Committed in Srebrenica in 1995.” *AP News*. 18 April 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/bosnia-serbs-srebrenica-genocide-denial-56d4c3b1e7dca96a5be28b66a9fcdc6a> (accessed 19 February 2025).

⁸⁹ “Bosnian Serb MPs Adopt a Report Denying the Srebrenica Genocide.” *Reuters*. 18 April 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/bosnian-serb-mps-adopt-report-denying-srebrenica-genocide-2024-04-18/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

Humanitarian Law Center (*Fond za humanitarno pravo*), the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, and Women in Black Serbia – called on their government to support the declaration and “stop with the practice of glorifying convicted war criminals, while denying the crimes, victims, and judgments of international courts”.⁹⁰

Nonetheless, in the days preceding the vote, Serbian officials in both Bosnia and Serbia engaged in symbolic measures to escalate the stakes of the Resolution. In fact, survivors of the genocide lamented “the denial of genocide on a daily basis”, which permeated the days leading up to the UNGA’s consideration of the Resolution.⁹¹ In Republika Srpska, Bosnian Serbs held a government meeting in Srebrenica, the location of the genocide, where they called for separation from the other Bosnian entity, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the meeting, Republika Srpska’s Prime Minister Radovan Višković claimed that some of those buried in Srebrenica “are [actually] alive”.⁹² In Serbia, the government launched a media campaign in opposition to the Resolution. Videos were shared from government accounts titled “We are not a genocidal nation. We remember [...] Proud Serbia and Srpska.”⁹³ Similar messages were broadcast on the Belgrade Waterfront apartment complex, overlooking the Sava River, and in Srebrenica itself.

The day before the vote, Serbian Foreign Minister Marko Đurić penned an opinion piece in the Brussels-based European branch of the US daily *Politico*, where he articulated his state’s rationale for opposing the UNGA effort. The piece was tonally distinct from the more antagonistic rhetoric which constituted most of the attack on the Resolution, as Đurić claimed “only political extremists reject the view that unspeakable crimes were committed in Srebrenica” and “only the most callous of people are unwilling to acknowledge and honor those victims”.⁹⁴ Taken at face value, Đurić thereby implicitly labelled several members of both Serbia’s and

90 “Human Rights Organizations from Serbia Call on the Government and the President of Serbia to Support the UN Resolution on the International Day of Reflection and Remembrance of the Srebrenica Genocide.” Humanitarian Law Center Press Release. 19 April 2024. <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?p=39593&lang=de> (accessed 20 February 2025).

91 Kurtić, Azem. “Bosnian Serb Leaders Hold Defiant Meeting in Srebrenica Before UN Vote.” *Balkan Insight*. 23 May 2024. <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/05/23/bosnian-serb-leaders-hold-defiant-meeting-in-srebrenica-before-un-vote/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

92 Kurtić. “Bosnian Serb Leaders Hold Defiant Meeting in Srebrenica Before UN Vote.”

93 “Human Rights Organizations from Serbia Call on the Government and the President of Serbia to Support the UN Resolution on the International Day of Reflection and Remembrance of the Srebrenica Genocide.”

94 Đurić, Marko. “UN Srebrenica Resolution Will Cause Further Division in the Balkans.” *Politico*. 22 May 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/un-generally-assembly-opinion-srebrenica-resolution-bosnia-balkans-serbia/> (accessed 20 February 2025).

Republika Srpska's governments callous extremists. He published a similar piece in the US-based internet news portal *RealClearWorld*.⁹⁵ As explained above, the presidents of the Republika Srpska and Serbia, Milorad Dodik and Aleksandar Vučić, have both defended and platformed perpetrators of the genocide, mourned their convictions at court, and fostered the sociopolitical space for Srebrenica genocide denial and the minimization of the crime. When Vučić traveled to New York to attend the UNGA vote in person, he did so with the blessing of Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Porfirije, who also condemned the resolution.⁹⁶ Departing from Belgrade, Vučić declared that he was “going to New York to fight for Serbia”.⁹⁷

The Global Politics of Srebrenica Denial

In the following, we examine the global politics of Srebrenica denial in order to contextualize the vote on the Resolution at the UN. While Vučić and Serbia's political infrastructure writ large stewarded the attack on the Resolution, efforts aiming to render the document politically controversial relied upon the work of other UN member states. Several states geopolitically aligned with the Republic of Serbia, or seeking to avoid and delegitimize charges of genocide in international forums, opposed the Resolution or promoted genocide denial in related public statements. Broadly speaking, a widespread increase in Srebrenica denial accompanied the Resolution's introduction and debate.

Reminiscent of the futile 2015 UNSC effort to commemorate Srebrenica as a genocide, Russia assumed a principal role in opposing the UNGA Resolution and mobilizing states against its adoption in 2024. The Russian government has thus long operated as a central force in the struggle over Srebrenica's memory, deploying its “soft power” to deny the genocide and retain its favor and influence in the Balkans. The allyship between Russia and Republika Srpska is extensive: Milorad Dodik has

95 Đurić, Marko. “UN Resolution on the Balkans Would Be a Mistake.” *RealClearWorld*. 17 April 2024. https://www.realclearworld.com/2024/04/17/un_resolution_on_the_balkans_would_be_a_mistake_1025603.html (accessed 20 February 2025).

96 “Vučić Received Blessing of Patriarch Porfirije Prior to Trip to New York: ‘I’m Going to Fight Wholeheartedly.’” *B92*. 20 May 2024. <https://www.b92.net/english/politics/23665/vucic-received-blessing-of-patriarch-porfirije-prior-to-trip-to-new-york-im-going-to-fight-wholeheartedly/vest> (accessed 19 February 2025).

97 “Vucic: ‘I Am Going to New York to Fight for Serbia.’” *Sarajevo Times*. 20 May 2024. <https://sarajevotimes.com/vucic-i-am-going-to-new-york-to-fight-for-serbia/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

visited Russia several times since Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine commenced in February 2022, and Putin was gifted a medal of honor in Republika Srpska in early 2023.⁹⁸ In 2021, a report by *Balkan Insight* documented how Russian-government backed organizations contributed to events that deny the Srebrenica genocide.⁹⁹ Political scientist Sead Turčalo, too, accentuated the commitment to enforcing ahistorical narratives that is shared by Putin's government and the current leaderships in Serbia and Republika Srpska, a commitment that has only heightened since Russia has leveraged curated tellings of history to justify its ongoing invasion of Ukraine.¹⁰⁰

Serbia and Republika Srpska relied on this relationship when rebuking the Resolution and working to prevent its passage. On 22 April 2024, Russia's Permanent Representative to the UN Vassily Nebenzia announced the country's strict opposition to the initiative, noting that Russia "will never support such a resolution".¹⁰¹ He argued that the Resolution violated the Dayton Agreement, because Republika Srpska did not consent to its introduction. After the Serb member of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency, Željka Cvijanović, wrote to the UNSC warning of the Resolution's injurious potential, Russia requested a convening of the Council to discuss the situation. The UNSC met for an emergency meeting on 30 April 2024, where extensive debate unfolded as to the merits of the Resolution and the role of the Western states in Bosnia. In the meeting, Cvijanović, Serbian Foreign Minister Đurić, and Russian representatives attacked the Resolution, establishing a front against what they saw as the further destabilization of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian state and foreign interference. They painted Bosnia as a state on the verge of implosion, arguing that the Resolution threatened to accelerate the state's collapse. While the Resolution was

98 Ahmatović, Šejla. "Bosnian Serb Leader Dodik Bows to Putin." *Politico*. 21 February 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/bosnian-serb-leader-dodik-sucks-up-to-putin-and-praises-orban/> (accessed 17 February 2025); "Bosnian Serb Leader Awards Russian President Putin Medal in Absentia." *Reuters*. 8 January 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/bosnian-serb-leader-awards-russian-president-putin-medal-absentia-2023-01-08/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

99 "How Russian State Funds Promote Genocide Denial in Bosnia." *Balkan Insight*. 16 December 2021. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/12/16/how-russian-state-funds-promote-genocide-denial-in-bosnia/> (accessed 17 February 2025).

100 Turčalo, Sead. "The Kremlin's Hand: How Russia Fuels Srebrenica Genocide Denial and Balkan Instability." *Just Security*. 1 May 2024. <https://www.justsecurity.org/95283/the-kremlins-hand-how-russia-fuels-srebrenica-genocide-denial-and-balkan-instability/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

101 "Remarks to the Press by Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia Following Meeting with President of Serbia, Aleksander Vučić, on the Sidelines of UNSC Meeting on Kosovo." Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations. 22 April 2024. https://russiaun.ru/en/news/pressenc_230424 (accessed 20 February 2025).

the central topic of discussion, the role of the High Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina was also contested.¹⁰²

Russia deployed its geopolitical strength to round up votes against the Resolution, as well as abstentions, as we will illustrate in the following. On the day of the vote, 23 May 2024, Russia predictably voted against. However, unlike in 2015, its effort to prevent the Resolution's passage failed. During the UNGA debate prior to the vote, Russia, speaking in opposition to the Resolution, reproduced many of the same arguments that were advanced by Serbia and Republika Srpska. When the Resolution passed anyway, Permanent Representative Nebenzia described the result as "shameful" and lauded Vučić's efforts, who, he claimed, had "made it absolutely clear [...] what lies behind proposing this draft and adopting it".¹⁰³ The following day, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs described the document as "politicized and anti-Serb" in nature.¹⁰⁴

While it is no surprise that Russian ally Belarus voted against the Resolution, Viktor Orbán's Hungary also proved to be a loyal ally as the only European Union state to oppose it. Milorad Dodik had visited Budapest about a week before the UNGA's final vote on the initiative. Dodik's Republika Srpska enjoys substantial financial and political support from Hungary, and Serbia and Hungary also boast a close relationship, with Orbán representing one of President Vučić's key European allies. On 15 May, Hungary announced their disapproval of the Resolution. Acknowledging Srebrenica as a "tragedy", Péter Szijjártó, the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, argued that the Resolution "intentionally or unintentionally would demonize the entire Serbian nation".¹⁰⁵ Other Hungarian officials, too, blamed the international community for escalating tensions in Bosnia, while stopping short of condemning Dodik's blatant corruption and propagation of genocide denial.¹⁰⁶

102 "Security Council Debates General Assembly Initiative to Remember Srebrenica Genocide." United Nations Meeting Coverage and Press Releases. 30 April 2024. <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15688.doc.htm> (accessed 20 February 2025).

103 "Remarks to the Press by Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia Following UNGA Vote on the Draft Resolution on Srebrenica." United Nations Meeting Coverage and Press Releases. 23 May 2024. https://russiaun.ru/en/news/presser_23052024 (accessed 19 February 2025).

104 "Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova's Comment on the UN General Assembly's Resolution on the Srebrenica Genocide." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Press Release. 24 May 2024. https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1952712/ (accessed 19 February 2025).

105 Lederer, Edith M. "UN Resolution to Commemorate the Srebrenica Genocide in Bosnia Sparks Opposition from Serbs." *AP News*. 16 May 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/srebrenica-genocide-bosnia-serbia-un-resolution-eff0ed11387007b97949913e98414548> (accessed 19 February 2025).

106 Inotai, Edit. "Hungary Throws Diplomatic Weight Behind Bosnian Serbs During Dodik Visit." *Balkan Insight*. 15 May 2024. <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/05/15/hungary-throws-diplomatic-weight-behind-bosnian-serbs-during-dodik-visit/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

Another EU state, Bulgaria, was almost convinced to walk back their support for the Resolution but ultimately voted affirmatively. This surfaced due to leaked correspondence between Bulgarian then-Prime Minister Dimitar Glavchev and the Bulgarian Ambassador to the UN Lachezara Stoeva, hours before the vote. Glavchev sought to pressure Stoeva to abstain from the vote, most probably passing onto his counterpart pressure he had received from neighboring Serbia or Russia.¹⁰⁷

China also voted “No” on 23 May. While condemning the events in Srebrenica as “deplorable”, the Chinese delegation was concerned about the controversial reception of the Resolution in Bosnia. In May 2024, as the UNGA debated the Srebrenica commemoration effort, Chinese President Xi Jinping was received by President Vučić in the Serbian capital.¹⁰⁸ A few weeks before Jinping’s visit to Belgrade, in April, Chinese officials met with Milorad Dodik in East Sarajevo, where they allegedly assured Republika Srpska leaders that China would align with Serbia and Republika Srpska in objecting to the Resolution.¹⁰⁹

Markedly, Israel’s UN delegation was absent in the Assembly on 23 May and thus did not vote on the Resolution. At the time of the Resolution’s introduction, Israel was already facing accusations of genocide in proceedings at the ICJ due to its wanton violence in Gaza after the Hamas attack in Israel on 7 October 2023.¹¹⁰ The ICC recently issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former Israeli defense minister Yoav Gallant, as well as Hamas leader Mohammed Deif (who was killed in an Israeli airstrike in August 2024), charging each with war crimes and crimes against humanity.¹¹¹ Israel has long taken a hostile position

107 “Leak Suggests Bulgarian PM Tried To Pull Support For Srebrenica Genocide Resolution At UN.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Bulgarian Service*. 30 May 2024. <https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-diplomacy-un-vote-srebrenica-serbia-russia/32972506.html> (accessed 19 February 2025).

108 Filipović, Branko, and Daria Sito-Sučić. “China, Serbia Chart ‘Shared Future’ as Xi Jinping Visits Europe.” *Reuters*. 8 May 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/chinas-xi-jinping-visit-serbia-anniversary-1999-nato-bombing-2024-05-07/> (accessed 17 February 2025).

109 “Meeting with the Delegation of the People’s Republic of China Held in East Sarajevo.” Protocol of the Republic of Srpska. 16 April 2024. <https://www.protokolrs.net/en/odrzan-sastanak-sa-delegacijom-narodne-republike-kine-u-istocnom-sarajevu/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

110 “Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).” International Court of Justice. Order of 26 January 2024. <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf> (accessed 19 February 2025).

111 “Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC: Applications for Arrest Warrants in the Situation in the State of Palestine.” International Criminal Court. 20 May 2024. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-icc-prosecutor-karim-aa-khan-kc-applications-arrest-warrants-situation-state> (accessed 18 February 2025).

toward the UN, and toward the UNGA in particular (Herzog 1978). This antagonistic relationship has escalated over the past year.¹¹²

Avoiding the vote did not stop representatives of the Israeli government from commenting on Srebrenica and the Resolution. The *Jerusalem Post*, one of Israel's flagship English-language newspapers, provided Dodik with an exclusive interview where he maligned the Resolution, denied the genocide, and advanced Islamophobic conspiracies.¹¹³ In a highly publicized diplomatic calamity a few weeks before the vote, Israel's Ambassador to Serbia Yahel Vilan denied the Srebrenica genocide. Vilan told *Sputnik*, a Russian state-owned outlet, that "Srebrenica should not be called genocide" as doing so "diminishes the importance of that term".¹¹⁴ Bosnian Foreign Minister Elmedin Konaković condemned Vilan's remarks, as did the Srebrenica Memorial Center and Jewish leaders in Bosnia and the West.¹¹⁵

Israel also boasts diplomatic and military ties with Serbia, and historically to Republika Srpska as well. In 2016, Israel's Supreme Court ordered the containment of documents which would have revealed the details of Israeli weapons exports to the Bosnian Serb military during the genocide in 1995, and the 1990s in general. The exports supposedly occurred well after the UNSC had placed an arms embargo on the warring parties.¹¹⁶ The Vučić government in Serbia, on the other hand, has armed

112 For example, see Iordache, Ruxandra. "Israel Envoy Calls for Resignation of UN Chief Who Said Hamas Attack 'Did Not Happen in a Vacuum'." *CNBC*. 26 October 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/25/antonio-guterres-israel-envoy-calls-for-un-chiefs-resignation.html> (accessed 17 February 2025); "Israeli Parliament Votes to Label UN Relief Agency a Terror Organisation." *Reuters*. 22 July 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-parliament-votes-label-un-relief-agency-terror-organisation-2024-07-22/> (accessed 17 February 2025); Cordall, Simon S. "Israel's 'War' Against the UN." *Al Jazeera*. 25 October 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/25/israels-war-against-the-un> (accessed 17 February 2025).

113 Beck, Eldad. "Republika Srpska President Dodik to 'Post': Coexistence with Muslims Is Impossible – Exclusive." *The Jerusalem Post*. 14 June 2024. <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-806165> (accessed 19 February 2025).

114 Sokol, Sam. "'Disgrace to Diplomacy': Bosnia Accuses Israeli Diplomat of Genocide Denial." *The Times of Israel*. 2 May 2024. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/disgrace-to-diplomacy-bosnia-accuses-israeli-diplomat-of-genocide-denial/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

115 Sokol. "'Disgrace to Diplomacy': Bosnia Accuses Israeli Diplomat of Genocide Denial."; "Israeli Reports Say Bosnia Decries Diplomat's Remarks on Srebrenica Genocide." *N1 Sarajevo*. 6 May 2024. <https://n1info.ba/english/news/israeli-reports-say-bosnia-decries-diplomats-remarks-on-srebrenica-genocide/> (accessed 17 February 2025).

116 Brown, John. "Supreme Court Rules against Exposing Israel's Role in Bosnian Genocide." *+972 Magazine*. 5 December 2016. <https://www.972mag.com/israels-involvement-in-bosnian-genocide-to-remain-under-wraps/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

Israel's military at increased rates since 2023.¹¹⁷ In advance of the vote, Israel was additionally courted by Republika Srpska: The Serb member of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency Željka Cvijanović wrote to Israel's UN Ambassador Gilad Erdan, explicitly requesting that Israel oppose the initiative.¹¹⁸ Israel did not partake in the vote. The Netanyahu government made no statement following the Resolution's passage that would have clarified its position.

These illustrations of both explicit and tacit support for genocide denial should not conceal the support the Resolution received. In its final form, it reflected a consensus among the majority of the voting parties that the killings in Srebrenica constituted a genocide, and embraced the obligation to mitigate the revisionist glorification of the perpetrators and the belittling of the crime. Virtually all Western states supported the Resolution, as did a multitude of African, Southeast Asian, Latin American, and Middle Eastern ones. The entirety of the member states which once constituted Yugoslavia, apart from Serbia, voted in favor of the Resolution, suggesting a regional consensus as to the genocide and imperative to protect its memory.¹¹⁹

There was also a particularly high volume of abstentions on the Resolution.¹²⁰ Abstaining countries voiced a multitude of reasons for their abstention, including frustration with the Resolution's drafting process, the absence of consensus in the UNGA, and a refusal to align with the United States and Europe's perceived hypocrisy and selective condemnation of violence.¹²¹ For example, in explaining their abstention, Mexico's delegate acknowledged Srebrenica's genocidal character while lamenting that the Resolution was not drafted and adopted by consensus. Brazil's

117 Dragojlo, Saša, and Avi Scharf. "Serbian Arms Sales to Israel Top 23 Million Euros in 2024." *Balkan Insight*. 2 September 2024. <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/09/02/serbian-arms-sales-to-israel-top-23-million-euros-in-2024/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

118 Sokol, "Disgrace to Diplomacy": Bosnia Accuses Israeli Diplomat of Genocide Denial."

119 Stojanović, Milica. "UN Assembly Adopts Resolution Establishing Srebrenica Genocide Day." *Balkan Insight*. 23 May 2024. <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/05/23/un-assembly-adopts-resolution-establishing-srebrenica-genocide-day/> (accessed 17 February 2025).

120 Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Bahamas, Bahrain, Barbados, Benin, Bhutan, Botswana, Brazil, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cyprus, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Georgia, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, India, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Laos, Lebanon, Lesotho, Madagascar, Maldives, Mexico, Mongolia, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Nigeria, Oman, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Republic of the Congo, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Seychelles, Slovakia, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam abstained.

121 "General Assembly Adopts Resolution on Srebrenica Genocide, Designating International Day of Reflection, Commemoration." UN Meeting Coverage and Press Releases. 23 May 2024. <https://press.un.org/en/2024/ga12601.doc.htm> (accessed 17 February 2025).

delegate raised similar concerns.¹²² The Maldives also abstained due to a desire to avoid shifting focus away from the atrocities in Gaza.¹²³ Beyond the Maldives, several other states pointed to parallels between Srebrenica and Gaza.¹²⁴ Thus, it appears that many of the states who abstained from the Resolution did not do so because they reject Srebrenica's qualification as a genocide. And while we are wary of advancing conclusive assumptions as to the reason behind each state party's abstention, the Resolution's passage suggests that Srebrenica denial has limited purchase within the international community.

Backlash and Aftermath

Backlash to the Resolution unfolded immediately. In response to its adoption, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, draped in a Serbian flag, bowed down, began weeping, and then stood up and raised a Serbian three-finger salute.¹²⁵ After the vote, he spoke to the media, reiterating the tenets of the campaign against the Resolution and praising the unified stance of the Serbian people against it.¹²⁶ In Belgrade, government ministers watched the vote together, wrapped in Serbian flags.¹²⁷

While mourning the Resolution's passage and deploying it as pretext to escalate tensions and proliferate fear and anxiety, Serbia and Republika Srpska simultaneously hailed the matter as a victory.¹²⁸ Given the high volume of abstaining parties, and 22 member states not casting a vote, Vučić and Dodik argued that a true majority was not achieved, and Serbia had successfully defeated the West. Describing Serbia's reaction to the Resolution, Tatjana Papić observed Vučić's reception as a hero upon his return to Serbia. Allies of his government lionized his dedication to Serbia before

122 "General Assembly Adopts Resolution on Srebrenica Genocide, Designating International Day of Reflection, Commemoration."

123 "Maldives Abstained from Srebrenica Resolution Vote 'to Avoid Diverting Attention' from Gaza War." *SunOnline International*. 27 May 2024. <https://en.sun.mv/89735> (accessed 17 February 2025).

124 "General Assembly Adopts Resolution on Srebrenica Genocide, Designating International Day of Reflection, Commemoration."

125 @admirim. X. 23 May 2024. <https://x.com/admirim/status/1793693882141589918> (accessed 17 February 2025).

126 "Srebrenica Survivors Hail UN Genocide Resolution, Serbs Question Vote's Legitimacy."

127 "Srebrenica Survivors Hail UN Genocide Resolution, Serbs Question Vote's Legitimacy."

128 "The Story of a General Assembly Resolution, the Weaponizing of Genocide, and the Bizarre." *EJIL: Talk!*. 5 June 2024. <https://www.ejiltalk.org/the-story-of-a-general-assembly-resolution-the-weaponizing-of-genocide-and-the-bizarre/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

the “hostile” UN. Car processions were organized across the country.¹²⁹ The government praised the member states that had opposed the Resolution by rotating their names on a screen in Belgrade. Pro-government press in Serbia embraced Vučić’s characterization of the events.¹³⁰

The Resolution offered Serb officials, both in Republika Srpska and in Serbia, ammunition to promote their vision of a “Serbian world” (*Srpski svet*). This “Serbian world”, popularized by the Vučić government since 2021,¹³¹ is understood by many to reflect a contemporary manifestation of Slobodan Milošević’s “Greater Serbia” in the late 1980s, which would precipitate the war in Bosnia and the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Ljubomirović 2022; Lukić 1994). Some scholars describe the ideology as an extension or duplication of the concept of a “Russian world” (*Rússkiy mir*), which is the underlying thought guiding Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.¹³² Proponents of both “Greater Serbia” and the “Serbian world” believe in one unified Serbian state which connects Serbs across the Balkans, and includes the merging of Republika Srpska and Serbia. According to this belief, Serbian unity is required to preserve Serbian nationhood and peoplehood, in order to withstand a presumed multitude of converging, existential threats from Serbia’s neighbors and the international community (Goldberg 2024, 3; Wygnańska 2021).

The leaders of both Serbia and Republika Srpska have situated the Resolution within the ideological paradigm of the “Serbian world”, framing it as a reflection of the latent external threat to Serbs. Shortly before the passage of the Resolution, the leadership of Republika Srpska promoted a secession plan, announcing that the Serbian entity would seek “disassociation” from Bosnia. Republika Srpska’s prime

129 Papić, Tatjana. “The Story of a General Assembly Resolution, the Weaponizing of Genocide, and the Bizarre.” *EJIL: Talk!*. 5 June 2024. <https://www.ejiltalk.org/the-story-of-a-general-assembly-resolution-the-weaponizing-of-genocide-and-the-bizarre/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

130 Kurtić, Azem, and Katarina Baletić. “In Serbia and Bosnia, Media Give Divided Verdicts on UN Srebrenica Resolution.” *Balkan Insight*. 24 May 2024. <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/05/24/in-serbia-and-bosnia-media-give-divided-verdicts-on-un-srebrenica-resolution/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

131 “Critics Condemn Minister’s Call to Unite ‘Serb World’.” *Al Jazeera*. 19 July 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/19/critics-condemn-ministers-call-to-unite-serbian> (accessed 20 February 2025).

132 Karčić, Hamza. “Serbia Is Taking a Page Out of Russia’s Book.” *Foreign Policy*. 24 April 2023. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/04/24/serbia-balkans-expansionism-russia-montenegro-elections/> (accessed 20 February 2025); Ljubomirović 2022; Varga, Boris, “‘Srpski svet’, ‘Ruski svet’ i genocid u Srebrenici.” *Al Jazeera Balkans*. 6 May 2021. <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/opinions/2021/5/6/srpski-svet-ruski-svet-i-genocid-u-srebrenici> (accessed 20 February 2025); Mankoff, Jeffrey. “Russia’s War in Ukraine: Identity, History, and Conflict.” Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). 22 April 2022. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-war-ukraine-identity-history-and-conflict> (accessed 20 February 2025).

minister Radovan Visković announced the plan, linking it implicitly and explicitly to the UNGA vote on the Resolution.¹³³

In July 2024, Serbia hosted the first so-called All-Serb Assembly (*Svesrpski Sabor*), which provided a platform to situate the Resolution in the confines of rising Serbian chauvinism, and functioned as a direct response to its adoption.¹³⁴ The All-Serb Assembly, stewarded by presidents Dodik and Vučić, constituted festivals on the streets of Belgrade and a collection of high-level meetings between Bosnian Serb officials and the Serbian government. The multi-day event also saw the adoption of a “Declaration on the Protection of National and Political Rights and the Joint Future of the Serb People” on 8 July 2024.¹³⁵ The Declaration draws on the thinking behind a “Serbian world” in promoting the unification of Serbian lands across borders, aiming “to achieve an ever-closer harmonization between RS and Serbia through a distorted interpretation of the Dayton system”, and capitalizing on the narrative turned self-fulfilling prophecy that the Resolution undermines the political order in Bosnia.¹³⁶ The Declaration in fact explicitly disavows the Resolution, claiming that it “attempted to collectively blame the entire Serb people”.¹³⁷

The Resolution, and Srebrenica’s memory in general, thus appear to contribute to the ongoing revitalization of Serbian nationalism, which threatens to further destabilize the Balkans. Members of both Serbia’s and Republika Srpska’s

133 “Bosnian Serbs’ Move Toward Secession ‘Dangerous, Irresponsible,’ U.S. Envoy Warns.” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty’s Balkan Service*. 24 May 2024. <https://www.rferl.org/a/dodik-secession-resolution-murphy-dayton-srebrenica/32962229.html> (accessed 20 February 2025).

134 Đaković, Tanja Nikolić. “Echo of the All-Serbian Assembly: Response to Injustice or Celebration of Defeat.” *NIN*. 13 June 2024. <https://www.nin.rs/english/news/51150/echo-of-the-all-serbian-assembly-response-to-injustice-or-celebration-of-defeat> (accessed 20 February 2025).

135 Declaration on the Protection of National and Political Rights and the Joint Future of the Serb People. Government of the Republic of Serbia. 8 June 2024. <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/224914/declaration-on-protection-of-national-political-rights-common-future-of-serbian-people-adopted.php> (accessed 17 February 2025).

136 Soria-Metais, Grégoire. “Belgrade Hosts the First All-Serb Assembly.” *New Eastern Europe*. 8 July 2024. <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2024/07/08/belgrade-hosts-the-first-all-serb-assembly/> (accessed 19 February 2025).

137 “Deklaracija o zaštiti nacionalnih i političkih prava i zajedničkoj budućnosti.” Predsjednik Republike Srpske. 11 June 2024. <https://www.predsjednikrs.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/deklaracija-D1%98a-o-zastiti-nacionalnih-i-politickih-prava-i-za-D1%98ednicko-D1%98-buducnosti-srpskog-naroda-2024.pdf> (accessed 17 February 2025); see also “Conclusions and Recommendations from the Scientific Conference ‘Instrumentalization and Politicization of National Rights: The ‘All-Serbian Assembly’ Declaration as a Continuity of Expansionist State Policy.’” University of Sarajevo. Institute for Research of Crimes Against Humanity and International Law. 9 January 2025. <https://iziz.unsa.ba/userfiles/file/Conclusions.pdf> (accessed 17 February 2025).

government have continued to enlist the Resolution in blaming Bosniaks and the West for undermining Bosnia's post-Dayton constitutional structure, and for allegedly attacking the Serbian people writ large. States like Russia continue to escalate the tensions by uplifting Srebrenica genocide denial. As nationalism surges, the rationales and vocabularies which have structured the concerted attack on Srebrenica remembrance continue to foment division and disparage the victims of genocide.

Conclusion

In her book *The Past Can't Heal Us*, Lea David argues that “external mandating of memory often produces a backlash and, contrary to the expected outcome, reinforces nationalist infrastructures” (David 2020, 189.) The nationalist attack on the UNGA's commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide appears to reify this claim. The objective of this article is to highlight the role the Resolution has been assigned by those who are *actually* working toward destabilizing Bosnia and furthering the Serbian government's nationalist project. This is not the UN, nor is it the “West”, nor any other “external mandate of memory”. Moreover, our article also reveals that the international community has proven susceptible to the efforts to render the discussion about the genocide against the Bosniaks controversial, even though the legal rulings are clear and have left no doubt about the nature of the crime.

The adoption of UNGA Resolution A/RES/78/282, which designates 11 July as the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Srebrenica Genocide, represents an important development in global efforts to confront genocide denial and honor the victims. The vehement opposition from Serbia, Republika Srpska, and their international allies highlights how historical narratives can be weaponized to reinforce nationalist ideologies. Framing the Resolution as a collective indictment of Serbs, which it clearly is not, these actors strategically deployed a rhetoric of victimhood and external interference to deflect responsibility, mobilize domestic political support, and even advance secessionist agendas. The global geopolitical dimensions of such weaponization, notably the role of states such as Russia, Hungary, and China, further illustrate how the politics of memory are deeply intertwined with contemporary power dynamics and regional alliances.

Ultimately, we are convinced that Resolution A/RES/78/282 will, in its future implementation, help to institutionalize a day of remembrance of the Srebrenica genocide. This in turn will firmly bolster Srebrenica's position in the global knowledge and memory landscape.

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Bionotes

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