

Introduction

Thirty Years Too Late: Crimes Unpunished, Victims Unknown

The thirty-year history of the independent post-Yugoslav states is a history of disgrace. Created in the worst kind of bestial bloodshed — a combination of military aggression and civil wars fuelled by the narcissism of small differences — the small Balkan states were offered an opportunity that does not come often after the war. With the goodwill of the, at the time, still united and democratically potent “international community,” they were given the chance to, if nothing else, settle their post-war accounts with dignity, both with themselves and with each other, since they had lacked the wisdom to avoid starting the wars in the first place. But they failed to seize that chance: Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Kosovo continue to prolong their cold war of memories to this day, perhaps preparing for another, while tormenting the memory of the victims through a persistent disorder of remembrance that fluctuates between bureaucratic indifference and outright lies, with only occasional, and mostly rare, flashes of common sense. At the heart of this colossal ideological, and indeed civilisational, manipulation lies a simple concept: the victim, a notion so self-evident, and yet, thirty years after the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina ended, it is clear that the societies in this region have failed the simplest and most important test: a balanced and humble acknowledgement that a victim is a victim, deserving of factual truth, recognition, and remembrance, and that their descendants deserve truth, justice, respect, and reparations.

To those acting in good faith, it became clear very early on that the nationalist destroyers of Yugoslavia would mask their crimes with lies. Honourable journalist and pre-war *Borba* editor, Trogir-born Mirko Klarin argued as early as 1991 for the establishment of an international criminal tribunal. This was the first proposal for what would become the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), a key institution in investigating and preserving facts and delivering criminal justice during and after the wars of the 1990s. It was clear from the very start that criminal justice was the broadest foundation for a future culture of remembrance: a social mirror reflecting the moral hope that effective mechanisms for criminal justice, and thus reparations, memory, non-recurrence, and the consolidation of peace, could be established. The second foundation is the establishment of facts about victims and their social remembrance: to uncover and publish

the names and essential information about victims — when, where, and how their right to life was taken, who did it, and why. This is the basic ethical and civilisational obligation owed to survivors: to punish the perpetrator and remember the human being whose right to life was denied. If we fail to do this, the barbarity of war will never truly end. In Croatia, as elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia, these two fundamental tasks remain unfulfilled, and that is not only a disgrace for local authorities but also a collective betrayal of civic morality of these societies. These societies are ailing from silence and from clumsy, incomplete discourse, from unacknowledged violence, from horrors uninvestigated and hidden. They are confused by crimes presented as heroism, unwilling and unable to face the truth about themselves.

This publication focuses on Croatia. Thirty-five years after the first serious interethnic tensions began, and thirty years after the military conclusion in Operation Storm, it is clear that Croatia has failed even the most basic test of transitional justice: it has not punished all war crimes, not even the gravest ones that are common knowledge, and it has not compiled a complete list of all war victims. Serbs in Croatia, burdened by a collective and often unjust accusation of sole war responsibility, have remained victims longer than others in these prolonged, incomplete, and unresolved processes. In the previous edition of this publication, released in 2018 under the title “War Crimes Against the Serbs in Croatia 1991 — 95,” journalist Bojan Munjin wrote how the wall of silence among Croatian units about the perpetrators of war crimes against Serbs was “never or almost never breached.” “They clearly knew what had happened and who had committed the crimes, but they did not want to testify about the atrocities that evidently occurred. Out of fear? No. Anyone familiar with the circumstances in Croatia knows very well that those military units were dominated by the belief that is still prevalent in public today — that all those people in camouflage were ‘our guys’ who fought side by side solely to defend the homeland. The Serbs, if indeed it was them, got what they deserved,” Munjin wrote in the text “Between Horror and Oblivion,” the introduction to “War Crimes Against the Serbs in Croatia 1991 — 95,” published in October 2018 by the Serb National Council (SNV).

The publication in your hands bears witness to the incomplete and unfinished attempt to establish the two pillars of transitional justice in Croatia: criminal prosecution of war crimes and the creation of the most accurate, consolidated list of war victims possible. These efforts have been further hampered by the fact that criminal justice — trials for war crimes — have often been, particularly during certain periods over the past thirty-five years, applied in ways that disadvantaged the Serbian community, frequently crossing the line into abuse of the law

for the purpose of collective intimidation, becoming part of a general nationalist policy whose unspoken goal was the “quiet” ethnic cleansing of Serbs in Croatia — even during times that did not necessarily coincide with the active war conflict. This unspoken yet actively pursued policy had real consequences: as convincingly shown by the landmark study “The Community Deserves a Future. The Demographic Picture and Future of Serbs in Croatia” by demographer Sanja Klempić Bogadi of the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies in Zagreb, published in spring 2025 by the Serb National Council in cooperation with publisher Jesenski i Turk, the number of Serbs in Croatia since 2011 has decreased almost three times more than the number of members of the majority population. Namely, while the number of Croats fell by ten percent from 2011 to 2021, which is in itself an alarming figure, the number of Serbs fell by over thirty percent. The unequal treatment of Serbs in the punishment of war crimes is not, of course, the only reason for such dramatic depopulation — there were 581,633 citizens of Serbian nationality in Croatia in 1991, accounting for 11.5% of the population, and thirty years later, in 2021, just 123,892, or 3.2%, but there is no doubt that this major injustice contributed to assimilation and what Sanja Klempić Bogadi calls “ethnic mimicry.”

“For the past thirty years, a significant number of people in Croatia have concealed their Serbian identity out of fear of stigmatisation by the majority population,” writes Sanja Klempić Bogadi, citing research showing that “assimilation is particularly visible in settlements where Serbs are a minority.” “Ethnic mimicry is clearly a phenomenon that is difficult to quantify in terms of its impact on the demographic decline of Serbs in Croatia, but it is widespread, especially in urban areas,” she writes, and summarises: “The key question is: why do some Serbs still conceal their ethnicity almost thirty years after the war? Although ethnic self-identification is in principle guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, social and political circumstances often prevent people from feeling truly free to declare themselves as Serbs. The media continues to perpetuate the narrative of Serbs as culprits. Almost all interviewees in qualitative research believe that Serbs in Croatia are stigmatised. Some even think that their situation today is worse than it was ten years ago.”

Two processes linked to the judicial punishment of war crimes have undoubtedly contributed, at the intersection of the “social and political circumstances” described by Sanja Klempić Bogadi, to the creation and maintenance of a social atmosphere portraying Croatia as a society riddled with resentment and hatred: the insufficient and unequal judicial sanctioning of war crimes, both those committed against Croats and against Serbs, and the absence of an effective mechanism to translate

findings, conclusions, and criminal sanctions from judicial processes into relevant public discourse that could shape public opinion, facilitate collective learning of the truth, and ease social tensions by “melting” the icebergs of hatred, which, under conditions of chronic neglect and, perhaps, deliberate manipulation of the past, only grow larger and colder.

A cardinal example of such neglect, be it intentional or not, is likely the case of Branimir Glavaš, wartime commander of Croatian forces in Osijek and former HDZ prefect of Osijek-Baranja County, who has been convicted twice over the past seventeen years for the wartime execution of Serbian civilians in Osijek in 1991 — once with finality — yet this did not stop him, nor did it raise significant public concern, from running for county prefect in the April 2025 local elections, referring to the nearly two-decade-long criminal case against him as a “farce” and mocking the judiciary and civic decency by declaring that, if elected, it would be nothing less than “a slap in the face to the Croatian judiciary.” While not the most dramatic, the Glavaš case is undoubtedly the most well-known and destructive example of the Croatian judiciary’s feeble handling of crimes against Serbs. And it is a case that unquestionably contributed to the “ethnic mimicry” of Serbs described by Sanja Klempić Bogadi.

At the time of writing this text, in May 2025, the proceedings had not yet reached a second final verdict, even though eighteen years had passed since the initial indictment, and despite the first final judgment being delivered in 2010, after which Glavaš — having fled to Bosnia and Herzegovina — served nearly the full eight-year prison sentence. In 2015, however, the Constitutional Court overturned the final verdict. This was not due to doubts about the facts, but on the account of procedural ambiguities regarding the official start date of the war in Croatia. All this led to the entire trial being restarted. Today, after all the accused were once again found guilty in a first instance ruling by the Zagreb County Court in October 2023 for war crimes against Serbian civilians in Osijek in 1991, Branimir Glavaš is an independent candidate for Osijek-Baranja County prefect. Notably, after the ruling was delivered by Judge Dražen Kevrić at the end of the first-instance trial, Glavaš shouted in court: “Shame on you! Fuck you!” Upon exiting the courtroom, he called Kevrić “a pussy without balls” and “a servant of the regime.” “Fuck him and this court,” he added on camera.

Throughout almost twenty years, the public has rarely mentioned the victims for whose murders Tuđman’s political strongman was convicted. While nearly every Croatian knows Branimir Glavaš by name, few have heard of Đorđe Petrović or Čedomir Vučković, and even fewer of

Branko Lovrić, Alija Šabanović, Radoslav Ratković (who miraculously survived after escaping from the Drava River with a gunshot to the jaw), Jovan Grubić, Milutin Kutlić, Svetislav Vukajlović, Petar Ladnjuk, Milenko Stanar, and Bogdan Počuč. These are some of the victims named in Glavaš's trial, along with several whose identities remained unknown during the investigation. Rarely, if ever, does Croatian public discourse address the fact that the families of these individuals have borne the burden of an almost twenty-year trial presented to the public as a process focused primarily on the defendant, not on the victims or the necessity of justice. When we closely examine the Glavaš case, his continual disgraceful behaviour and the lack of response to it, the concurrent neglect of the victims and their suffering, and the total lack of interest in how their families have lived all this time, it becomes clearer how come over the past decade, three times as many Serbs have left Croatia as Croats.

The trial of Branimir Glavaš and others is just one of many examples over the past three decades that have shown how judicial proceedings in the pursuit of justice, particularly when it comes to Serb victims of war crimes, can be twisted in the public eye into their very opposite: a caricature of a legal process which, instead of empowering the victims' families and restoring faith in the possibility of justice, and instead of reassuring Serbs in Croatia that they live in their own country, perpetually retraumatizes anyone who sincerely believes in the precision of Themis' scales. Besides such trials, of which there have been many and whose examples the reader will find in this volume, there remain to this day numerous cases that have never even been initiated. In Croatia, a member of the European Union, even three decades after the war, there are still serious war crimes committed against Serbs that have never been addressed in any judicial way, which is an undeniable and grave scandal, albeit one to which the public has long since grown accustomed, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for brutal, unprovoked wartime killings of civilians to go unpunished. One of the gravest such crimes took place on 1 May 1995 at around six in the morning, at the very beginning of the military-police operation Flash, when Croatian soldiers entered the village of Medari, six kilometres west of Nova Gradiška, and killed 21 civilians with both "cold weapons and firearms." The victims included three children and eleven women.

This crime has never been investigated or prosecuted. No indictment has been filed, and it appears the case never even reached the phase of judicial inquiry. Until the summer of 2010, the investigation was under the jurisdiction of the County State Attorney's Office in Slavonski Brod, after which it was transferred to the County State Attorney's Office in Osijek. In 2024, marking the 29th anniversary of the crime, Documen-

ta — Centre for Dealing with the Past, an NGO, called on “the police and the County State Attorney’s Office in Osijek to conclude the pre-investigative proceedings and file the indictment they have been promising for years.” Some of the victims’ families attempted to pursue justice on their own by suing the state; the lawsuit was dismissed, and the plaintiffs — sisters Radmila and Mirjana Vuković, whose father Milutin, mother Cvijeta and seven-year-old younger sister Dragana were killed that day — were ordered to pay court costs. Lacking the funds to do so, the court imposed a debt enforcement order, and their home was put up for auction twice. The unfinished house in Medari was so neglected that nobody wanted to buy it.

The crime in Medari is not the only war crime against Serbs that Croatian courts have failed to investigate, even more than thirty years after it occurred. The same goes for the killings of Serbs in Vukovar, which began in late spring 1991, months before the armed conflict and the mass assault by the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) on Vukovar. The exact number of victims has still not been established. In its 2023 report on war crimes trials monitoring, which is the most recent available at the time of writing, Documenta summarised the situation as follows: “Regarding the crimes committed against Serbs in Vukovar from late spring and summer 1991 until the fall of Vukovar, investigations are still ongoing within the so-called preliminary procedure. The State Attorney’s Office has failed to act even in cases involving crimes committed by the Croatian Army (HV) and police during Operation Flash in May 1995 in parts of western Slavonia, such as Medari and Rajiči. Furthermore, in the 26 years since Operation Storm, the Croatian judiciary has filed only three indictments for war crimes committed against Krajina Serbs, involving a total of seven members of Croatian military and police units.”

Here we have briefly mentioned only the most high-profile examples in the media — the details of which are included in this publication — but even these suffice to illustrate the Croatian judiciary’s unreliability in prosecuting war crimes. The fact that there have also been many failures in punishing war crimes against Croats does not excuse the ineffectiveness in prosecuting crimes against Serbs. On the contrary, it opens the door to a general loss of public trust in the justice system and fosters an atmosphere ripe for political suspicion, conspiracy theories, and resentment — all of which favour the rise of radical political options such as the Homeland Movement (DP), a coalition partner of the ruling HDZ following Croatia’s 2024 parliamentary elections. That party of war veterans gained a significant portion of its votes by stoking Vukovar residents’ frustrations with claims — often mere manipulations — that the judiciary, under the influence of the malevolence of a

mysterious and never-explained “deep state,” was deliberately refusing to prosecute war crimes against Croats in Vukovar. Had it been otherwise, had the courts punished all, or at least most, of the war crimes promptly and convincingly, there would be far less political room for parties offering quick, radical, and mostly anti-Serb solutions, thereby causing enormous harm above all to Serbs, but also to Croatian society as a whole.

As things stand, there is no realistic prospect that this situation in the judiciary will improve anytime soon. Although the aforementioned Documenta report covers only the year 2023, its conclusions remain valid at the time of writing. “Following Croatia’s accession to the European Union, there has been a stagnation in the quality of criminal prosecution and trials. The competent County State Attorney’s Offices lack the capacity to review and investigate unresolved war crimes cases, leading to a decline in investigative effectiveness, particularly in cases involving Croatian military personnel. Trials *in absentia* lead to a high likelihood of cases being reopened, and very limited regional judicial cooperation in war crimes prosecution results in a lack of information and evidence sharing. The register of missing persons has not been updated since 2015 and lacks transparency. The UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence noted an increase in political interference in war crimes prosecutions and indicated that progress in investigating and prosecuting war crimes appears to have stalled over the past seven years. Access to information is severely limited due to the delayed publication of verdicts and anonymisation, which hampers case monitoring and leads to declining media interest in ongoing proceedings.” A similar assessment was given by Chief State Attorney Ivan Turudić in the Report of the Chief State Attorney of the Republic of Croatia on the Work of State Attorney’s Offices for 2024, published in early May 2025: “The primary characteristic of criminal cases involving these offences (war crimes, author’s note) is the difficulty of evidence gathering due to the passage of time since their commission,” Turudić wrote. “Some incidents under review occurred more than 30 years ago, making it very difficult to reconstruct events at the crime scenes. Some witnesses have died, others struggle to recall specific events, some refuse to testify, all of which results in incomplete and poor-quality testimonies. Also, obtaining physical documentation is extremely difficult as well.”

Beyond judicial inefficiency, in the broader context of transitional justice, a major issue is the absence of societal and public engagement with court findings. Even when verdicts are handed down, trials are quickly forgotten, as are the reasons they were held in the first place, not to mention the victims themselves. Moreover, several scandalous

actions by top state officials have revealed that part of the Croatian political elite, regardless of ideological orientation, has little regard for establishing serious post-war justice or promoting the necessary societal condemnation of war crimes, regardless of who committed them. In 2021, for instance, President Zoran Milanović reinstated war decorations and the rank of major general to Branimir Glavaš — honours that had been stripped from him in 2010 following a final conviction for war crimes against Serbian civilians in Osijek in 1991 by Milanović's predecessor, Ivo Josipović. Whether Milanović will again revoke those honours and thus nullify his own decision, if a new first-instance verdict against Glavaš is confirmed during his second presidential term, remains to be seen. But responsibility for the general social indifference to the consequences of war crimes, particularly those committed against Serbs, does not lie solely with politicians. In 2018, Bojan Munjin wrote in the publication "War Crimes Against the Serbs in Croatia 91 — 95", in words that remain relevant today the following: "What really poses a problem is that the most respected majority institutions, such as the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (HAZU) and the Croatian Writers' Association, as well as professional bodies like the Medical Association, the Bar Association, the Croatian Philosophical Society, and many others, not to mention the political class, have never clearly and unambiguously condemned these crimes. Nor has the dominant religious institution in Croatia, the Catholic Church, which, whether it wants to admit it or not, bears a significant moral stain on its conscience. Ultimately, from the standpoint of the rule of law, unresolved war crimes will have a corrosive effect through their silence. No Croatian lawyer can speak of the superiority or inviolability of Croatian laws, of the foundations of justice or the rule of law as a whole, if in the corner of their conscience they know that dozens or even hundreds of such crimes occurred and that almost no one has been held accountable. Consequently, no institution charged with upholding the rule of law, be it the police, courts, parliament, government, or the president's office, can claim to have fulfilled its role if it has not effectively responded to this issue. Without resolving the question of war crimes, there can be no resolution to the issue of reconciliation among the country's citizens — Croats, Serbs, and others — because only those who are aware of their own responsibilities can truly reconcile. Without a publicly voiced 'We are sorry' at commemorations, victory anniversaries, and state foundation days; without legal and moral authorities speaking out about these crimes; and without valid judicial rulings, the hearts of victims' families, their neighbours or compatriots, will continue to carry a chronic sense of injustice."

It must be said that there have been attempts from the highest levels of politics to raise awareness in society about the need for a balanced ap-

proach to war crimes and to the wartime suffering of members of the Serbian community in Croatia. President Stjepan Mesić dedicated both his terms in office, among other things, to this effort. In the spirit of liberal civic tradition, he strongly advocated for Croatia's sincere cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and repeatedly reminded the public, particularly during anniversaries of Croatian Army operations, that crimes were committed against members of the Serbian community and that Croatian institutions had a duty to address war crimes impartially. But even by the end of Mesić's second term, resistance from the nationalist right to his concept had begun to grow, weakening further in the years that followed, until it was completely abandoned under the presidency of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and has remained so to this day.

It is true that in the summer of 2020, the Croatian government led by the HDZ and Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, which at the time included the Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS), launched an important and welcome Croatian Serbian reconciliation initiative. As part of that initiative, then Deputy Prime Minister Boris Milošević attended the 25th anniversary commemoration of Operation Storm in Knin, and on 28 September, Prime Minister Plenković attended a memorial in Varivode, where he expressed "deep regret" for the killing of nine "innocent and helpless people" who were murdered "despite the fact that there was no longer any fighting in the area." "As Prime Minister of the Croatian Government," said Plenković, "I deeply regret this and, on behalf of the Government, express our condolences for the members of your families whose lives the Croatian state, unfortunately, failed to protect. Not only did this crime plunge your families into mourning, but it is also an insult to modern Croatia, for it offends human dignity. It tramples on the ideals for which the vast majority of Croatian defenders — including Serbs among them — fought bravely to defend our homeland. They fought for a free, democratic, and tolerant Croatia, in which all citizens are equal regardless of their national origin, religious or political beliefs," said Plenković. "Unfortunately," he also said, "the crime in Varivode was not the only one of its kind. A month earlier, seven villagers were killed in Gošić, not far from here. Two days before that, six people were killed in Grubori, near Knin. These are just the most well-known cases, and sadly, as we have heard, there were more," he reminded, and stressed that "our institutions have a duty to identify those responsible for these crimes because there is no statute of limitations for war crimes, and it is our civilisational duty as a democratic society to ensure the victims receive justice and redress." Five years later, at the time of writing, Plenković's HDZ is in coalition with the radically right-wing, anti-Serb party, the Homeland Movement, and the reconciliation initiative appears to be a long-forgotten thing of the

past. Nothing remains but to patiently work on restoring the conditions that will, sooner rather than later, allow for the revival, this time permanently, of such a socially healing process.

In Croatia, another fundamental pillar of transitional justice has failed — accurate knowledge of all the victims. Even three decades after the end of the armed conflicts, Croatia does not have a credible list of those killed in the war, despite the existence of an authorised state institution tasked with compiling such a list — the Croatian Memorial-Documentation Centre of the Homeland War — and the efforts of civil society organisations striving to produce one. The paradox of this absence becomes even greater considering that neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina has no centralised state institution dedicated to this task, yet it does possess a list of war victims, “The Bosnian Book of the Dead,” as well as a high-quality online multimedia publication called “The Bosnian Atlas of War Crimes,” along with a thorough, three-volume register of all places of wartime detention and torture across Bosnia and Herzegovina. “The Bosnian Book of the Dead” and “The Bosnian Atlas of War Crimes” are the results of the project “Human Losses in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1991 — 1995”, conducted by the Research and Documentation Centre in Sarajevo, led by researcher Mirsad Tokača. As part of this years-long project, 95,940 war victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina were accurately documented, and their names published in four volumes of “The Bosnian Book of the Dead,” which is available online and transformed into an extraordinarily precise and comprehensive, publicly accessible interactive web search tool for locations of places of suffering — “The Bosnian Atlas of War Crimes.”

Equally impressive work was carried out by Zlatica Gruhonjić and Kemija Hodžić, human rights activists from Banja Luka and Sarajevo, who compiled a list of all prisons and camps during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and published their findings in three extensive volumes titled “Camps and Other Places of Detention During the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992 — 1996.” Kemija Hodžić is an activist with the Sarajevo-based association Transitional Justice, Responsibility and Remembrance, and Zlatica Gruhonjić is affiliated with the Banja Luka Centre for Democracy and Transitional Justice. Their organisations published the three-volume edition in cooperation with the RECOM Reconciliation Network. Kosovo also has a victims' register. The Humanitarian Law Centre (FHP) in Belgrade, in cooperation with its office in Kosovo, compiled the “Kosovo Memory Book,” a list of war victims in Kosovo from 1998 to 2000, regardless of their nationality. Importantly, this project also included the publication of a brief biography for each victim. “This monument is alive but indestructible,” reads the introductory note of the online edition of the Kosovo Memory Book. “It calls to

be paused before, for every name to be read, for people to learn who these individuals were, how they perished, and for people to remember people. Over time, with information on the fate of those still missing, secret mass graves, and new evidence of crimes committed and victims, 'The Kosovo Memory Book' will become the most reliable witness of our recent past. (...) For the first time in Balkan history, numbers have been replaced with names, leaving no room for manipulation, minimisation, or exaggeration. Every story in the book corresponds to the life of the person it recounts."

Croatia, a member of the European Union, does not have such registers, at least not in a form that is easily accessible, clear, transparent and verifiable, unlike "The Bosnian Book of the Dead," "The Bosnian Atlas of War Crimes," the volumes "Camps and Other Places of Detention During the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992 — 1996," or "The Kosovo Memory Book." Such a register should be compiled by the Croatian Memorial-Documentation Centre of the Homeland War, whose primary task, according to the Centre's website, is to "collect, integrate, organise, and safeguard all documentation and data created during and related to the Homeland War." To date, this task has not been completed, even though the Centre has collected extensive material for the final register. According to information provided by the Centre's Director, Ante Nazor, to the weekly *Nacional* in December 2023, "as of 6 December 2023, the database of fatalities in the Homeland War in the Republic of Croatia, maintained by the Croatian Memorial-Documentation Centre of the Homeland War and including Croats or Croatian citizens killed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, contained around 19,500 individuals. This number also includes missing persons, for whom we obtain data from the Directorate for Detained and Missing Persons of the Ministry of Croatian Veterans. Of this number, 66% were soldiers — 68% Croatian defenders and 32% members of the aggressor forces, the JNA and Serbian Montenegrin units — and 33.5% were civilians, of whom 43% died on free Croatian territory and 57% on temporarily occupied territory. Among the civilians killed on occupied territory, 56.3% were Croats, and 43.5% were others, mostly Serbs. For 0.5% of individuals, their status was unknown." Nazor emphasised that the Centre is reluctant to publish victim figures publicly "because the final data may significantly differ from what I am presenting now." He added that "the data I have presented here should be treated with great caution until the Croatian Memorial-Documentation Centre of the Homeland War officially publishes them as final," expressing hope that this would happen "by March 2025, for the 20th anniversary of the Centre's founding, although experience shows such predictions are risky." At the time of writing, in May 2025, an official list of war victims in Croatia has still not been published; Croatia trails Bosnia and Herzegovina by nearly two decades.

Parallel to and independently of the Croatian Memorial-Documentation Centre of the Homeland War, the “Human Losses in Croatia 1991 — 1995” project was launched some fifteen years ago by Documenta — Centre for Dealing with the Past, precisely because “even fifteen years after the end of the war, a credible, verifiable and uncontested number of war victims, especially of those killed and missing across the entire Republic of Croatia, had not been determined.” “The implementation of this project will prevent arbitrary, inaccurate, and malicious manipulation of war victim numbers,” Documenta announced, stating that the main goals of the project are “to determine the most complete number of war victims from 1991 to 1995 and the facts surrounding their deaths,” as well as “to provide a publicly accessible and searchable database with relevant information.” On behalf of Documenta, data was provided to *Nacional* in December 2023 by the organisation's researcher, Tena Banjeglav. According to her, at that time Documenta's database contained “around 21,300 individuals,” but Banjeglav stressed that “this number doesn't mean much,” since “there are still various issues with the list and we have a great deal of work ahead before we even come close to a final figure, which we believe we will never fully reach,” she said. She also emphasised that the data must be accompanied by “an element of paying tribute to the victims” and “telling the stories of their lives.” “For this reason, after publishing the data, we would like to create narratives that bring to the public the stories of these individuals' lives and the circumstances of their deaths. To publish a complete list as soon as possible, we would, above all, welcome cooperation with institutions and organisations that have the data we lack, and which are currently inaccessible to us. We would also need stable and significantly increased research funding, as well as a larger research team,” she concluded. “We hope that once the research is complete, we will publish a comprehensive list of all victims who were resident in the territory of the Republic of Croatia before and during the war, regardless of their national, ethnic, religious, or any other background, in a format that is publicly available, systematic, and searchable. At that point, the list will no longer be ours, it will become public and the collective property of Croatian society.”

Such a list is essential for Croatia. To truly comprehend the scale, but also to begin to truly understand the causes of the catastrophe that brought such suffering to people in Croatia in the first half of the 1990s, we must do the fundamental: know who the war victims are and bring war crimes to justice. Without this, Croatia's wartime trauma will continue to drag the country back into a closed cycle of hatred, mutual suspicion, and potentially, violence. This volume, marking the 30th anniversary of the war's end in Croatia, is therefore both a reminder and a call to action: a reminder that the effort is not over, and a call for it to

finally become a joint undertaking by all — state institutions, all national communities, and society as a whole — in the name of justice, truth, and peace, which we all so desperately need.

Boris Pavelić