

# Normative Power Still Matters: Adopting the Srebrenica Resolution

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BEDRUDIN BRLJAVAC, AUG 23 2011

Despite the European Union (EU) member states playing a passive and almost invisible role during the Yugoslavian wars, the EU's later interventions and strategic approach towards the western Balkans region have proved both the potential and the importance of the EU as a normative power. In fact, the EU has demonstrated that it can—even without significant conventional military power—play an equally important role through promotion of democratic values and norms. Thus, in its policy papers and strategic documents directed towards the regional countries the EU has aimed to promote values and norms such as regional cooperation, democracy, rule of law, human rights, minority rights, and peaceful coexistence. As a result, the EU is contributing to a significant extent to institutionalization of democracy, peace, and stability across Europe. For instance, the Srebrenica Resolution adopted in January 2009 by the European Parliament represented a significant *normative* initiative that once again proved the EU to be a committed normative power in global affairs.

The concept of *normative power Europe* is built on the EU's normative foundation and its normative difference in international politics. Despite increasing commitments in the sphere of security and defence policy—leading to the label *military power Europe*—the activities and developments pursued by EU member states make them more civilian or normative in nature. As Ian Manners—for many the father of the concept of *normative power Europe*—argued, the EU's role in international politics must be seen as one of 'normalization', spreading common principles regardless of Westphalian conceptions of power balances: no matter how states behave in mutual competition, the EU enjoys the unique "ability to shape conceptions of normal in international relations." (Manners, 2002: 239). In addition, in official documents such as the Treaty of the European Union, the EU member states have declared clear support for values such as consolidation of democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

### The Srebrenica Genocide as a Collective European Failure

In the summer of 1995 more than 8,000 *Bosniaks* or Bosnian Muslims—mainly men and boys in and around the town of Srebrenica—were killed by the Army of Republika Srpska under the command of General Ratko Mladic. In addition, a paramilitary unit from Serbia known as the Scorpions participated in the killings. In 2004, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in the Hague decided that systematic and well-planned killings of Srebrenica male Bosniaks constituted a clear crime of genocide. Surprisingly, the International Court of Justice in 2007 ruled that Serbia was not guilty of genocide, stressing that it only "had violated the obligation to prevent genocide."

The Srebrenica genocide is one of the biggest political, military, and diplomatic shames in contemporary history. In fact, in April 1993 the United Nations (UN) declared the besieged territory of Srebrenica as a 'safe area' under direct UN protection and responsibility. However, in July 1995 the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR), represented by 400 Dutch peacekeepers, failed to prevent the massacre in Srebrenica. Thus the UN and the EU share significant responsibility both for the atrocities in the Bosnian war and for the Srebrenica genocide because both failed to employ the necessary military and diplomatic means to prevent the catastrophe, despite clear indications of grave problems prior to the massacre. The EU's role is all the more embarrassing due to the proximity of the massacre to

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its borders.

## The European Parliament Promotes Reconciliation

One of the most significant initiatives to ensure that the Srebrenica genocide is remembered by current and future generations across Europe is the Srebrenica resolution. In January 2009 the European Parliament voted with an overwhelming majority on the resolution calling for recognition of 11 July to be a day of commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide throughout the EU. The European Parliament called on the 27 EU member states and the European Commission to support the parliament's decision. The resolution called the Srebrenica genocide "the biggest war crime in Europe since the end of WWII." (Hadzovic, 2011). The parliament called it "a symbol of the international community's impotence to intervene and protect civilians." In addition, the representatives in the European Parliament called for further efforts to be made in order to bring to justice all those responsible for the genocide.

By adopting the Srebrenica resolution, the EU proved its commitment and *mission civilisatrice* to peaceful coexistence in Europe and the promotion of the universal values of justice and reconciliation. In other words, through the Srebrenica resolution, the EU clearly displayed its potential capabilities as a normative power in international politics. As the European Commissioner for Foreign Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner pointed out,

"proclaiming July 11 as a day of remembrance for the Srebrenica genocide should be a step in the right direction for reconciliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the region." (BETA, 2009).

Furthermore, the European Parliament (2009) declared that,

"The EP stresses that reconciliation is an important part of the European integration process, a process in which the religious communities, the media and the education system play a significant role," bringing peace and stability to the region as a final objective. Thus, the Srebrenica resolution is aimed at initiating and strengthening reconciliation, justice, and harmonious coexistence in both the western Balkans and Europe.

Furthermore, the resolution on Srebrenica is of utmost importance in terms of institutionalizing remembrance of one of the worst human crimes committed since the Holocaust, so that such a massacre is never repeated. However, the message of 'never again' spoken in the aftermath of 1945 is now closer to genuine realization than mere political rhetoric, through institutionalizing the Srebrenica genocide into the collective memory of European citizens. As Member of the European Parliament Jelko Kacin said in support of the resolution, Srebrenica must be engraved into our historical memory and built into the foundations of EU enlargement to the West Balkan areas (Ifimes, 2009). The Srebrenica resolution is a historic opportunity to make a shift from bloody past to peaceful future.

## Long-Term Effects

The Srebrenica resolution adopted by the European Parliament has the potential to produce long-lasting ramifications in terms of speeding justice and respect to victims of genocide asking for a similar adoption of the resolution in the parliaments of individual European countries. Thus, many countries in Europe have adopted the Srebrenica resolution as suggested by the European Parliament. Most importantly, Serbia, as a country whose government at the time was directly involved in the Bosnian conflicts, has adopted the resolution on the Srebrenica genocide and the Serbian parliament has condemned the crimes committed against the Bosnian Muslims of Srebrenica. Although the Serbian version of the resolution avoids mentioning genocide, it remains important that this issue is officially on the agenda in Serbia. Also, the adoption of the text ends years of denial by Serbian politicians about the seriousness and truth of the massacre.

Furthermore, the Srebrenica resolution was adopted by other countries from the western Balkans region, including Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Slovenia. The Bosnian parliament, however, has not yet adopted the resolution on the Srebrenica genocide—even though it has the greatest need to adopt such a resolution in order to start the genuine process of reconciliation and long-lasting peace. The Serb members in the Bosnian parliament do

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not support the Srebrenica resolution because many of them do not accept that the events at Srebrenica were an organised act of genocide. They are clearly not ready for a new and peaceful future. As the European Parliament's reporter on Serbia, Jelko Kacin, said in support of the Srebrenica resolution,

"this resolution is not directed at the past. When speaking about the dead, the resolution is addressing the living and their future" (HC, 2010).

## Concluding Points

Although the EU member states played a passive and weak role during the Yugoslavian wars, the EU's later interventions and strategic policy instruments towards the western Balkans region proved the potential and importance of the EU as a normative power. Perhaps the most ideal demonstration of the relevance and potential of the normative power of Europe is the adoption of the Srebrenica resolution by the European Parliament in January 2009. After adopting the resolution, the parliament called on member states and other European countries to adopt similar resolutions. Thus, such an initiative has sent the urgent message of promoting justice, peace, and harmonious coexistence in the western Balkans region and in Europe. Thus, by adopting the resolution the EU demonstrated that normative power Europe is still a relevant and useful idea in practical global affairs. However, an important problem remains in that a large number of Bosnian politicians are living in the past and are not ready to make the critical moves necessary to pave the way towards a brighter future for their children.

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