



## **Lemkin Institute Statement on the Broadcasting of the Documentary “Republika Srpska: The Struggle for Freedom”**

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The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention calls out the recent film, “Republika Srpska: The Struggle for Freedom,” for genocide denial and an outrageous misrepresentation of documented historical facts. In a classic denialist move, the movie misleads the audience by framing the victims as executioners and the war criminals as victims. This is a common tactic of genocidaires, known as DARVO: Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender.

The film, which bills itself as a “documentary,” is based on a false narrative of the war that destroyed Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995. The film’s trailer lays out this false narrative from the start, claiming that Serbs’ “freedom” has been historically denied not just by the Ottoman Empire, from which present-day Serbia gained independence in 1867, but also by Bosniak political authorities and European courts of justice. In particular, it presents the Serbs as an enslaved people and Alija Izetbegovic, the Muslim president of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992 (when Serbia attacked the region), as the instigator of the demise of Yugoslavia. This reframes the genocide committed by Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995 as a defensive action and a freedom struggle.

Boris Malagurski, the producer of the film, is known for being an ultra-nationalist Serb and a firm opponent to Kosovo’s independence. He has been a longtime correspondent for the Russian State-funded channel RT, where he has made many controversial and inflammatory claims, such as that the “U.S. is more deceitful towards Bosniaks than the Nazis were to the Jews”. In 2013, he was accused of doctoring interviews.

On October 11, 2022 Malagurski openly provoked the Mothers of Srebrenica on Instagram by accusing them of seeking to “burn the books of history” on Twitter. In an effort to appear open-minded and manganamous, he disingenuously invited them to watch the film, which was partly filmed at the site of the Srebrenica genocide and at the Srebrenica Memorial Center in Potocari, causing further grief and anger among the families of the eight thousand boys and men who were massacred in July 1995. The Mothers of Srebrenica is an organization that was formed

by women survivors of the Srebrenica genocide to push for truth about the fates of their loved ones and accountability for the perpetrators. They have requested that the film be banned.

Some venues have already canceled planned premieres of the film. After Benjamina Karic, the mayor of Sarajevo, asked the mayor of Salzburg, Harald Prenner, to cancel the premier that was planned in his city, he did so immediately. Karic described the film as a piece of “propaganda that distorts the facts and glorifies the ideologies that caused the division of our country, genocide, and numerous war crimes.”

As we have explained in our “Statement on the Threat of Renewed Genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (September 2022), Balkan political leaders and some influential genocide deniers such as Boris Malagurski “propagate a revisionist discourse of the war despite broad international consensus and numerous international and domestic court judgments” that prove genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes committed by Serbs against Bosniaks.

“Republika Srpska: The Struggle for Freedom” has been partly funded by the authorities of Republika Srpska (RS), who have tried for years to dismantle the Dayton Peace Agreement, which was signed in 1995 and brought an end to war and genocide. The movie is part of a wider agenda led by the administration of the Republika Srpska to deny even further the overwhelming evidence of the genocide committed against Muslims (Bosniaks) – in Srebrenica in 1995 as well as across Bosnia-Herzegovina for the entire period of the war.

RS authorities, led by ultranationalist and revisionist politicians, are continuously pushing for the secession of Republika Srpska from the Bosnian state and its absorption into Serbia. In order to succeed in this project, they do not refrain from the use of hateful language that describes the genocide as a “fabricated myth.” On 10 October 2022, a week after elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the newly elected president of RS, Milorad Dodik, reiterated his plan to secede. He argued that “the country must be redefined (...) if the current setup of the country did not evolve” (meaning, if RS doesn’t become independent), it “must dissolve”.

In this sense, this documentary, widely viewed in Republika Srpska, is fueling the escalation of inter-ethnic tensions and risks contributing directly to the eruption of more serious violence if measures are not taken to stop its dissemination. Like all genocide denial, its aims are not the “freedom” of the Serbs but a continued genocidal campaign against Muslims in the region that has become deeply linked to extremist nationalist thinking among Serbs since at least the 1980s. It was this ideology that fuelled the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and it is this ideology that threatens a repeat of that violence in the present-day.

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention underscores its commitment to the freedom of all peoples to practice their religion and express themselves culturally in a world that values and

respects them and provides institutions that protect them. We work in solidarity with threatened peoples to create such a world. However, when claims to “freedom” are linked to hate-speech, to genocide denial, and to vicious ideologies that characterize whole peoples as cosmic enemies, we know we are in the space of genocide rather than in a struggle for freedom.

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention calls for the cancellation of all broadcasting premieres of this film that are planned in Europe and elsewhere. The controversy surrounding “Republika Srpska: The Struggle for Freedom” is not about a difference of opinion on the facts of history, it is bald-faced genocidal denial and an expression of the same genocidal ideology that destroyed the lives of tens of thousands of Bosnian Muslims only 30 years ago. Sponsoring the film, and helping it to reach the broader public with the imprimatur of respectability, amounts not only to complicity but also to incitement. As long as inflammatory works like this one are made easily available to the public in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in the wider region, the peace and stability of the country, and especially its Bosniak population, will be threatened.

In view of the dangerous political instability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Lemkin Institute reiterates its call to the international community to take urgent and concrete measures to prevent further atrocities from being committed in the country.