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Robert Donia, ed., *From the Republika Srpska Assembly, 1991–1996: Excerpts from the Delegates' Speeches at the Republika Srpska Assembly as Body of Evidence for the International Criminal Tribunal at the Hague*. Sarajevo: University Press, 2012. Pp. 247. ISBN 978–9958–673–13–9.

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What is in the minds of politicians who plan and carry out genocidal projects? This, of course, can never be known with utter certainty, but traces of motives can be assembled in various ways to help us develop a broad picture. Such is the goal of this volume of speech excerpts edited by historian Robert Donia (Univ. of Michigan), a frequent expert witness at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY); it includes an introduction by criminologist Edina Bećirević (Univ. of Sarajevo) and a concluding essay by Donia. The main content is mostly what the title indicates: quotations from the transcripts of proceedings of the Assembly of the Republika Srpska (RS), the Serb entity that tried to break away from Bosnia-Herzegovina in a war that began in April 1992 and ended shortly after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in December 1995. The bookend essays and the speech excerpts are printed both in English and the language designated “Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian” by the ICTY.

The material presented here originated specifically as evidence prepared for use by prosecutors in ICTY cases against Serbian officials. It has been selected to show that the RS parastate was formed with the intention of creating an ethnically homogeneous territory through intimidation, forced movements of population, and acts of violence extending to crimes against humanity and genocide.

In her introduction, Bećirević writes that the book is meant to familiarize the public with the factual findings of the ICTY, regardless of the outcomes of trials, something that has not been done previously. Such knowledge, she argues, is essential in “the struggle against the denial of the past,” adding that “by reading this book it becomes clear that the wartime members of the so-called Republika Srpska Assembly did not make the slightest effort to hide their intention of destroying Bosniaks and Croats—which is defined by the 1948 UN Convention as genocide” (7–9).

Do the transcripts in fact demonstrate genocidal intent on the part of the members of the (not quite legal) RS legislative body? Certain of the excerpts indicate that some members of the assembly espoused wholly aggressive intentions. But there were also measured voices that showed some signs of awareness and warned that the plans being developed were criminal. The first set of selections illuminates the “political ideals” of the assembly leaders and delegates, including goals ranging from border changes and collective representation of ethnic groups to outright separation of communities. Some of the proposals endorse the use of force, others do not; few go much beyond the level of nationalist rhetoric. Some of the deliberations sound like conversations that might be heard in an especially unsavory pub. Most of them, though distasteful in the extreme, do not alone constitute clear evidence of genocidal intent.

Much of the material is presented to establish that RS authorities (a) sought to block the capacity of the Bosnian state to govern and (b) coordinated their policy closely with Serbia's. While interesting in themselves, these documents may be thought of as artifacts of the Stanišić-Simatović case, for which the prosecution prepared evidence to prove that the two defendants, Serbian Interior Ministry officials, were responsible for abuses committed by Bosnian Serb “regular” forces and paramilitaries.

Ironically, the evidence contained in the book was prepared for the trial of Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović, who were acquitted by the Tribunal's Trial Chamber in 2013; among the most frequently cited figures are Vice President Biljana Plavšić and Assembly Speaker Momčilo Krajišnik, both convicted but subsequently granted early release. Up to 1993, Krajišnik appears as a relatively conciliatory figure, whereas Plavšić is consistently and inflexibly ideological (like President Radovan Karadžić, whose trial is still ongoing).

In his postscript, Donia assesses what the transcripts reveal—fundamentally, “a common set of assumptions and convictions” (229); he also points out some of their limitations, particularly the small size and selectivity of the sample. The common set of assumptions and convictions attests to a political scheme that could not be accomplished without forcible and violent changes in the population—a circumstance of which, as the transcripts show, members of the political leadership were fully aware. Donia also notes, however, that open discussion of crimes committed by RS forces was generally suppressed in the assembly deliberations (232).

The excerpts Donia has gathered help to clarify the nature of politics in a brutal rogue parastate and demonstrate how archival material can be adapted for use as evidence in a criminal trial. The book does have its shortcomings, however. In the first place, researchers will not be satisfied with someone else’s criteria for the inclusion of excerpts, however systematically chosen and carefully prepared they may be. At best the collection will guide researchers to places in transcripts where they may want to seek fuller information. And, too, as Donia is certainly aware, the deliberations of a political body cannot offer a complete picture of actions taken in an environment where legal and political controls were often improvised or specious. In this respect, it would be advisable to approach this material together with the results of other research conducted for ICTY cases, for example, Christian Nielsen’s examination of the archives of the RS Interior Ministry.

This volume may best be considered a sampler of what may yet become available for research, if the massive archive compiled by the ICTY is opened to the public. Documents already presented as evidence in trials (except in closed sessions) are now easily consulted, but the enormous body of material produced by prosecution and defense researchers remains unseen. Making the existing record of this intensively documented conflict accessible will require intensive lobbying by researchers. In the meantime, Robert Donia’s collection of excerpts gives a glimpse of a future path to a deeper understanding of the war on its institutional, political, social, and operational levels. Given the inconsistent verdicts reached at the ICTY, this anthology of trial material is a useful gesture toward enabling researchers to step up to the table.