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REPORT

SREBRENICA GENOCIDE DENIAL IN RUSSIAN MEDIA SPACE

Srebrenica, 2023

Report
Srebrenica Genocide Denial
in Russian Media Space

Srebrenica – 2023

IMPRESSUM PAGE

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This document is an official report compiled for the needs and on behalf of the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial Center and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide (hereinafter: Srebrenica Memorial Center). This report is the result of a joint work of the Srebrenica Memorial Center and Austrian Service Abroad (www.auslandsdienst.at).

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I. Introduction

This year, Srebrenica Memorial Center has decided to expand beyond the countries of the former Yugoslavia in our research on the denial of the Srebrenica genocide in mass media. For the first time, we have also examined denial in the Russian media space. This report provides readers with an overview of the evolution of the Russian government's official position as well as the stances of independent researchers and politicians regarding the Srebrenica genocide. Additionally, the report follows the developments in media coverage of the genocide over the years. The objective of the report is to present a concise review of the presence and utilization of Srebrenica genocide denial in Russian media during the last 23 years. To this end, the authors have traced the developments chronologically in order to clearly identify periods of intensified denial in the mass media, which were found to be closely connected to significant events such as the Russian veto of the UN Security Council Resolution in 2015, the publication of the report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Sufferings of All Peoples in the Srebrenica Region between 1992 and 1995 (hereinafter the IIC Report), and the tragic events of March 2022 in the city of Bucha, Ukraine.

II. Empirical and Statistical Basis of the Report

This report is based on qualitative and quantitative research that examines 78 different sources related to the genocide denial that were identified within the Russian media space. Since this is the first analysis of Russian mass media concerning Srebrenica, the report covers the period from January 1st, 2000, until April 30th, 2023. The content analyzed in this report includes various sources such as newspaper and journal articles, academic publications, conference materials, interviews, blog and messenger posts, books, and TV news segments.

The sources are organized chronologically and divided into four major groups identified during the research: i) 2000-2014; ii) 2015; iii) 2016-2021; iv) 2022-2023. Here is a breakdown of the identified cases of denial within each time period:

- Between 2000 and 2014, 13 sources were analyzed and 13 instances of denial were identified.
- In 2015, five sources were identified, which contained five cases of denial, two cases of relativization, and one case of acknowledging crimes but not

genocide. All of these cases are connected to the Russian veto of the UN Security Council Resolution.

- From 2016 to 2021, 24 sources were examined and found to contain 18 cases of denial, ten cases of acknowledging crimes but not genocide, and one case of relativization. The cases included seven reactions to the IIC Report and five responses to the ban on genocide denial implemented by the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina at that time, Valentin Inzko.
- In 2022-2023, 36 sources were reviewed, which contained 33 instances of genocide denial and three instances of acknowledging crimes but not genocide. All of these occurrences were specifically related to the events in Bucha, Ukraine, in March of that year.

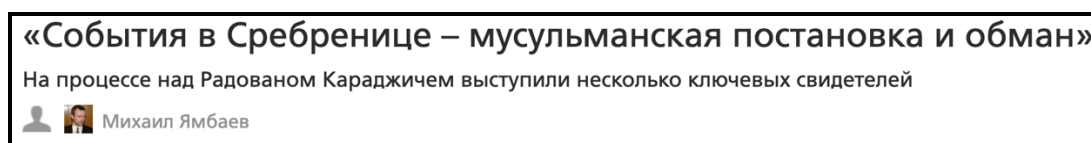
The vast majority of the examined sources originate from the Russian media space, with only two cases found in the Belorussian media. The author employed the standard methodology used by the Srebrenica Memorial Center in the genocide denial reports published in previous years.

Specific patterns were observed in the majority of the identified cases of genocide denial. These include the usage of quotation marks around terms such as *genocide* and *victims of the genocide* (i.e., “genocide,” “victims of the genocide”), as well as phrases such as “so-called genocide” or “alleged genocide” which are intended to undermine the nature of the atrocities committed in Srebrenica. Deniers also frequently label the genocide a “myth,” “mystification,” “provocation,” “lie,” “fabrication,” and “fake.” Other prevalent tactics involve disputing the judicially established historical narrative, including the documented number of victims, and challenging the proceedings and judgements of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Notably, no instances of direct glorification of war criminals or calls for a new genocide were found in the examined cases.

III. Denial from 2000 to 2021

From 2000 until 2015, the official Russian position on Srebrenica was generally adequate and measured. The tragedy in Srebrenica was recognized as genocide, and denial was predominantly limited to articles published by obscure internet portals. However, in 2009, an international conference held in Moscow at the Russian Academy of Science provided a platform for certain Russian and Serbian

academics and practitioners to openly deny the genocide, diverging with the prevailing moderate stance.¹



(‘Events in Srebrenica are Muslims’ fabrication and deception’)²

After Russia’s veto of the UN Security Council Resolution on Srebrenica in 2015, denialist reactions resurfaced, albeit only within marginal media outlets. Major Russian mass media continued to provide factual coverage of the topic, refraining from substantive commentary.



(‘Srebrenica: to the 20th anniversary of the information myth’)³

In December 2019, the topic of the Srebrenica genocide came to the fore when, in reference to the situation in the Donbas region, Russian President Vladimir Putin cautioned against transferring border control to Ukraine, citing the possibility for a recurrence of events akin to the Srebrenica tragedy.⁴ This indicative statement is important to understanding the genocide denial which would unfold three years later, the analysis of which will be presented below.

Although between 2016 and 2022 denial was primarily found within lesser-known media outlets, the international conference dedicated to the publication of the IIC

¹ The compendium of papers presented at the conference can be found here: https://inslav.ru/sites/default/files/editions/2012_mezhdunarodnyj_tribunal.pdf (in Russian). Papers were analyzed separately and denial cases were included in the database for this report.

² Mikhail Yambaev, “События в Сребренице – мусульманская постановка и обман [Events in Srebrenica are Muslims’ fabrication and deception],” *Russkaya Narodnaya Liniya*, June 14, 2013, https://ruskline.ru/news_rl/2013/06/14/sobytiya_v_srebrenice_musulmanskaya_postanovka_i_obman.

³ Aleksandr Mezyaev, “Сребреница – к 20летию информационного мифа [Srebrenica – to the 20th anniversary of the information myth],” *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhisn*, July 14, 2015, <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/13480>.

⁴ See, e.g., “Putin warns of second Srebrenica if no amnesty for East Ukraine”, *Reuters*, December 10, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-putin-idUSKBN1YE240>.

Report merits distinction in this regard. This conference, organized by the International Institute for Scientific Development in partnership with the Gorchakov Foundation, provided a platform for some academics to express denialist views as well as for members of the IIC to comment on the report. Gideon Greif explicitly stated, “The Commission does not consider the killings that took place around Srebrenica to be genocide. It acknowledges the fact that thousands of people, mostly prisoners of war, were killed, and those responsible for these crimes should be severely punished.”⁵ Similarly, Markus Goldbach emphasized, “It is clear that the definition of a substantial group given by the Chamber of Appeals in the Krstić case and later verdicts do not indicate that a real genocide occurred in Srebrenica.”⁶ These statements reflect a more nuanced approach to the denial of the events in Srebrenica, recognizing the severity of the killings but not characterizing them as genocide. This form of denial, acknowledging the crimes in Srebrenica but not the genocide, is frequently encountered within the Russian media space.



(“The West will not break the Bosnian Serbs, and the “genocide in Srebrenica” will not help it”)⁷

It is also important to mention that five instances of denial in the period between 2000 and 2014 and four instances in the period between 2016 and 2022 were

⁵ Gideon Greif at the International Conference “Итоги работы независимых международных комиссий: сербские жертвы в гражданской войне в Сараево 1991–1995 гг. и жертвы всех народов в районе Сребреница 1991–1995 гг [Results of the work of the IIC: Serb casualties in the civil war in Sarajevo 1991-1995 and the victims of all peoples in the Srebrenica region],” September 14, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXZ2nrUGJfw>.

⁶ Markus Goldbach at the International Conference “Итоги работы независимых международных комиссий: сербские жертвы в гражданской войне в Сараево 1991–1995 гг. и жертвы всех народов в районе Сребреница 1991–1995 гг [Results of the work of the IIC: Serb casualties in the civil war in Sarajevo 1991-1995 and the victims of all peoples in the Srebrenica region],” September 14, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXZ2nrUGJfw>.

⁷ Tatjana Stojanović, “Запад не сломит боснийских сербов, и “геноцид в Сребренице” ему не поможет [The West will not break the Bosnian Serbs, and the “genocide in Srebrenica” will not help it],” *Regnum*, August 2, 2021, <https://regnum.ru/news/3335140.html>.

expressed in Russian media in the Russian language by figures from the former Yugoslavia.

IV. Denial in 2022

By the beginning of 2022, a resurgence of denial was perceptible in the Russian mass media. The genocide in Srebrenica was referred to as “a fake genocide” and parallels were drawn with the 2014 downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17, both events being portrayed as elements of an information war waged by the collective West.⁸See below:



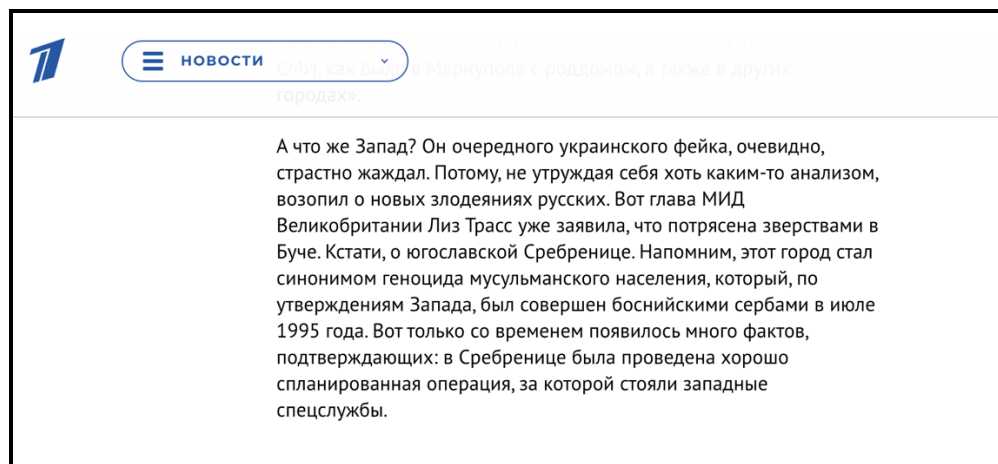
(‘Shurygin: “Genocide in Srebrenica” and Malaysian “Boeing” is a psychological and information war of the West’)⁹

However, the most recent and significant shift came in April 2022, when prominent Russian mass media outlets, as well as bloggers, commentators, and political figures, drew comparisons between the situation in Ukrainian Bucha and Srebrenica. The majority of the denial cases identified in 2022 were concentrated between the 3rd and 11th of April, and there is a practical explanation for this surge in media activity. On April 1st, 2022, Ukrainian forces entered the city of Bucha and reported massacres of civilians allegedly carried out by Russian forces who had recently departed from the area. Photos and videos of the victims on the streets of Bucha were widely disseminated by major global media outlets, sparking international outrage and condemnation of the actions attributed to the Russian army. In response to these reactions, the Russian side began to deny the events in Bucha, substantiating their arguments with comparisons to what they referred to as the staged provocations or fabrications in Srebrenica.

⁸Aleksey Toporov, “Шурыгин: “Геноцид в Сребренице” и малазийский “Боинг” – это психологическая и информационная война Запада[Shurygin: “Genocide in Srebrenica” and Malaysian “Boeing” is a psychological and information war of the West],” *PolitNavigator*, February 18, 2022, <https://www.politnavigator.net/shurygin-genocid-v-srebrenice-i-malazijjskij-boing-ehto-psikhologicheskaya-i-informacionnaya-vojjna-zapada.html>.

⁹Ibid.

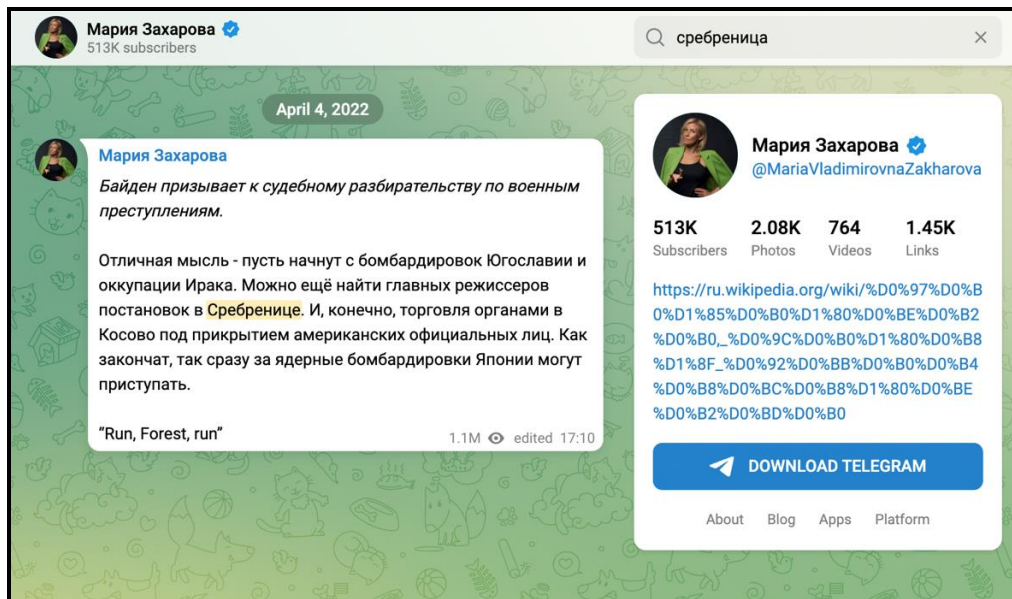
Within a few days in April 2022, more than 30 cases of Srebrenica genocide denial were identified, including in mainstream Russian media outlets. The following statement was made on First TV, a Russian state television channel: “[...] by the way, about the Yugoslav Srebrenica. Recall that this town has become synonymous with the genocide of the Muslim population, which, according to the West, was committed by the Bosnian Serbs in July 1995. But over time, many facts appeared confirming that a well-planned operation was carried out in Srebrenica, behind which stood Western intelligence services.”¹⁰ See below:



Notably, in a post on Telegram, Maria Zakharova, the Spokesperson of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, referenced Srebrenica, commenting on President Biden’s call for prosecutions for war crimes in Ukraine, “Great idea – let them start with the bombing of Yugoslavia and the occupation of Iraq. You can still find the main directors of fabrications in Srebrenica. And, of course, the organ trade in Kosovo under the guise of American officials [...]”¹¹ See below:

¹⁰“В Минобороны РФ ответили на обвинение фабрики фейков о расправе над мирными жителями на Украине [The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation responded to the accusation of a fake factory about the massacre of civilians in Ukraine],” *First TV Channel Russia*, April 3, 2022, https://www.1tv.ru/news/2022-04-03/425494-v_minoborony_rf_otvetili_na_obvinenie_fabriki_feykov_o_rasprave_nad_mirnymi_zhitelyami_na_ukraine.

¹¹ Maria Zakharova’s official Telegram Channel, April 4, 2022, <https://t.me/s/MariaVladimirovnaZakharova?q=%D1%81%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B1%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B0>.

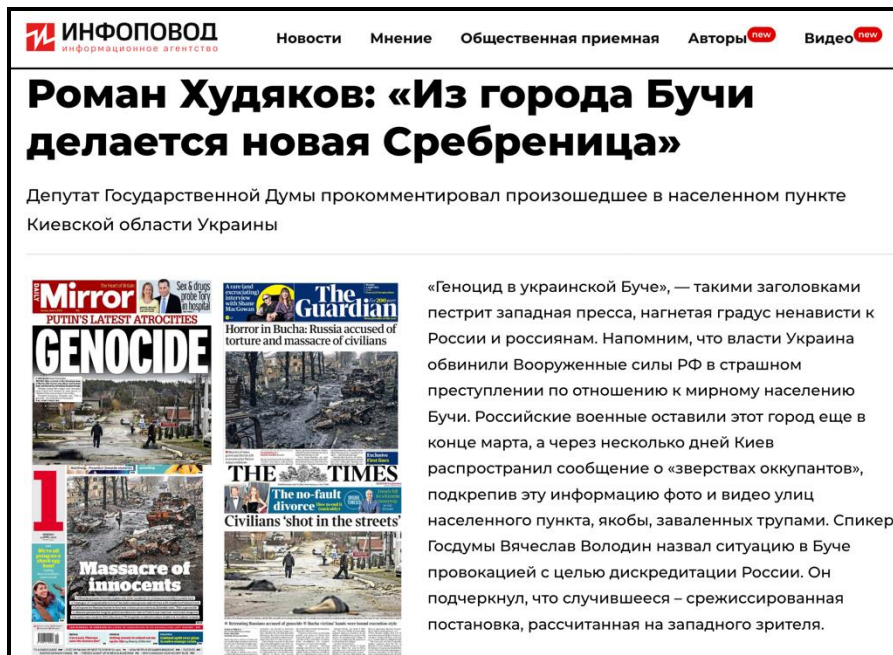


During this period, Russian mass media was overrun with commentary and comparisons that denied the Srebrenica genocide, labeling it a staged fabrication and drawing parallels with the events in Bucha. These comments reflected a narrative suggesting a deliberate manipulation of historical events. One piece of commentary remarked, “But between March 30th of March and April 2nd, an unknown producer of entire franchises of political media blockbusters pulled a dusty folder with the inscription ‘Srebrenica’ out of a stuffy attic.”¹² This statement conveys a sense of skepticism about the authenticity of the Srebrenica genocide.

Another opinion piece comparing Srebrenica and Bucha read, “A new Srebrenica is being made out of the city of Bucha. When the Serbs were accused of genocide, NATO then began to raze Serbian cities to the ground. After all, why invent new schemes if the old ones still work?”¹³ This comparison aims to cast doubt on the credibility of both events, suggesting a pattern of fabrications and political agendas. See below:

¹² Ilya Titov, “Бучи случай: корявый фейк со множеством дефектов и просчётов должен стать поводом для предоставления Украине тяжёлого вооружения[Bucha case: a clumsy fake with many defects and miscalculations should be the reason for providing Ukraine with heavy weapons],” *Zavtra*, April 4, 2022, https://zavtra.ru/blogs/buchi_sluchaj.

¹³Roman Khoudyakov, State Duma Deputy, “Роман Худяков: Из города Бучи делается новая Сребреница[Roman Khoudyakov: A new Srebrenica is being made from the city of Bucha],” *Infopovod*, April 5, 2022, <https://infopovod.ru/opinions/roman-hudyakov-iz-goroda-buchi-delaetsya-novaya-srebrenicza/>.



(‘Roman Khoudyakov: A new Srebrenica is being made from the city of Bucha’)

The narrative continued with claims that the killing of civilians in the Kyiv region by Ukrainian territorial defense or the National Guard “marked the beginning of a series of bloody fabrications similar to the Yugoslav Srebrenica.”¹⁴ Another article also emphasized the alleged involvement of intelligence agencies, stating, “For specialists from the CIA and MI6, such performances with corpses are a favorite pastime. The most elaborate mystification took place in Srebrenica in July 1995... And this became the basis for NATO’s bombing campaign on the territories of Republika Srpska in Bosnia.”¹⁵ This statement once again implies a conspiracy involving foreign agencies manipulating the narrative surrounding Srebrenica.

¹⁴Aleksandr Khrolenko, Military expert, “Буча: антироссийская провокация с тройным дном [Bucha: an anti-Russian provocation with a triple bottom],” *Sputnik Abkhazia*, April 5, 2022, <https://sputnik-abkhazia.ru/20220405/bucha-antirossiyskaya-provokatsiya-s-troynym-dnom-1038502563.html>.

¹⁵Vladimir Sapunov, “Подлая медиапровокация в Буче – сигнал российской элите: или победа, или Гаага [Vile media provocation in Bucha is a signal to the Russian elite: either victory or The Hague],” *36on.ru/Voronezh City Informational Portal*, April 5, 2022, https://36on.ru/news/author-columns/103658-podlaya-mediaprovokatsiya-v-buche-signal-rossiyskoy-elite-ili-pobeda-ili-gaaga?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com.



(‘The expert compared the provocation in Bucha with the incident in Srebrenica. [...] the provocation in Bucha is coordinated following the example of Srebrenica’)¹⁶

Moreover, another opinion piece suggested a parallel between the tragic events in Bucha and in Srebrenica, stating, “The staging of the ‘Russian massacre’ in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha is the same fake that was invented by the Americans in Srebrenica.”¹⁷ By equating the two events, this seeks to discredit the credibility of both, portraying them as manufactured narratives.



(‘Suzdaltsev: provocation in Bucha coordinated following the example of Srebrenica together with the United States’)¹⁸

Collectively, these denialistic comments from Russian mass media contribute to a larger narrative that challenges the authenticity of the Srebrenica genocide while

¹⁶ Andrey Suzdaltsev, “Эксперт сравнил провокацию в Буче с инцидентом в Сребренице [The expert compared the provocation in Bucha with the incident in Srebrenica],” *RIA Novosti*, April 4, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220404/bucha-1781618504.html>.

¹⁷Igor Pshenichnikov, “Сценарий “резни в Буче” написан 23 года назад: к нём ответ, что будет с Россией [The scenario of the “massacre in Bucha” was written 23 years ago: it contains the answer to the question what will happen to Russia],” *Tsargrad*, April 5, 2022, https://tsargrad.tv/articles/scenarij-rezni-v-buche-napisan-23-goda-nazad-v-nem-otvet-cto-budet-s-rossiej_524732.

¹⁸Anastassia Kuznetsova, “Суздальцев: провокация в Буче скоординирована по примеру Сребреницы совместно с США [Suzdaltsev: provocation in Bucha coordinated following the example of Srebrenica together with the United States],” *Yuzhny Federalny*, April 4, 2022, <https://u-f.ru/news/politics/u21/2022/04/04/334673>.

drawing comparisons to the events in Bucha. They imply a coordinated effort to cast doubt on historical events and highlight alleged manipulations by foreign entities. Such narratives can have far-reaching implications, shaping public opinion and fostering skepticism towards established historical truths.

V. Conclusion

The analysis of Srebrenica genocide denial in the Russian mass media from 2000 to 2023 yields significant findings.

Firstly, it is notable that the official Russian position on the Srebrenica genocide remained relatively moderate until 2015, even acknowledging the committed crimes as genocide. Furthermore, instances of denial were limited to obscure media platforms.

Secondly, the report identifies a distinct pattern in media coverage during April 2022. The sources analyzed in this study, which deny the Srebrenica genocide and draw parallels with the events in Bucha, exhibit similar language, terminology, and publication timelines. This suggests a coordinated effort, indicating that the mass media may be reflecting the views of the Russian government on the Bucha events and their perceived connection to the Srebrenica genocide. The convergence of messaging raises concerns about the propagation of denialistic narratives through mainstream media channels.

Thirdly, it is important to note that some past deniers of the Srebrenica genocide became active again during the Bucha events, contributing to the dissemination of denial narratives. This underscores the persistence of denialism and its ability to resurface during times of heightened political tensions or international incidents.

The commentary and comparisons found in Russian mass media concerning the Srebrenica genocide and the events in Bucha reveal a narrative aimed at undermining the authenticity of the genocide itself. These narratives cast doubt on the credibility of historical accounts and suggest a deliberate manipulation of facts for political purposes. By drawing parallels between Srebrenica and Bucha, the comments seek to discredit both events, portraying them as manufactured narratives, concocted falsehoods, provocations, or operations orchestrated by Western security services. The implication of foreign intelligence agency involvement further fuels conspiracy theories surrounding Srebrenica.

The impact of such denial narratives can be significant, as they shape public opinion and foster skepticism towards well-established historical truths. It is crucial to recognize and critically assess the sources of information, particularly in cases where denialism is employed to distort historical events. The analysis presented in this report sheds light on the evolution of Srebrenica genocide denial in Russian mass media and underscores the importance of promoting accurate and unbiased narratives that uphold the integrity of the historical record.

VI. Authors and contributors

Editor

Edin Ikanović is a law graduate with many years of experience in local self-government and non-governmental sector. For the past four years he worked as a researcher for the online platform “Raskrinkavanje.” He is involved in numerous initiatives advocating for the rights of the returnee population and has written analysis and texts on this topic for several media outlets, including *Oslobođenje* and *Al Jazeera Balkans*. He was involved in several initiatives concerning access to non-discriminatory in the BiH entity of Republica Srpska. He is currently employed as an external monitoring associate at the Memorial Center.

Proofreader and Editor (English version)

Monica Hanson-Green has been working with the Srebrenica Memorial Center as an independent consultant since 2019. She authored the first edition of the Srebrenica Genocide Denial Report which was published in 2020 and continues to be actively engaged in the Memorial Center’s ongoing research and commemorative projects. She holds a BA in International Studies from the University of New Orleans, and an MA in Social and Political Sciences from the International University of Sarajevo.

Author

Marina Maier is an international lawyer and researcher with more than 15 years of experience. She is a graduate of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna and holds an LLM in European Law from the University of Graz, and an Advanced LLM in International Criminal Law from the University of Leiden. Currently, she is a PhD candidate at the University of Leiden, conducting her research on punishment in International Criminal Law. Marina is Head of Education at Austrian Service Abroad and performed as an Austrian Peace Servant Abroad at the Srebrenica Memorial Center between March and July 2023 based on the cooperation agreement between the two organizations.

VII. List of analyzed sources (chronologically)

2000-2015

Pomorцев, Anatolij [Поморцев Анатолий]. «Миф о Сребренице – геноцид, которого не было [Myth about Srebrenica – genocide that didn't exist].» *Russkaya Liniya*. July 16, 2007. <https://rusk.ru/st.php?idar=22562>.

Laughland, John. «Злоупотребление концепцией геноцида в расследовании военных преступлений [Abuse of the concept of genocide in the investigation of war crimes].» *Compendium of papers from the conference International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia: activities, results, effectiveness held on April 22-23, 2009 in Moscow by the Russian Academy of Science, Institute of Slavic*

Studies. https://inslav.ru/sites/default/files/editions/2012_mezhdunarodnyj_tr_ibunal.pdf.

Ivanišević, Milivoje. «Обманы Сребреницы [Lies of Srebrenica].» *Compendium of papers from the conference International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia: activities, results, effectiveness held on April 22-23, 2009 in Moscow by the Russian Academy of Science, Institute of Slavic*

Studies. https://inslav.ru/sites/default/files/editions/2012_mezhdunarodnyj_tr_ibunal.pdf.

Škrbić, Ratko. «Анализ населения Сребреницы: на пути к истине [The population of Srebrenica analysis: on the way to truth].» *Compendium of papers from the conference International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia: activities, results, effectiveness held on April 22-23, 2009 in Moscow by the Russian Academy of Science, Institute of Slavic*

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<http://www.senica.ru/balkans/facts/bosnia/srebrenica-lozh-i-informacionnye-igry>. This is the Russian language version of the article; the original article in Serbian was published in *Ogledalo* on June 22, 2005.

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Grigorenko, Amiram [Григорьев Амирам]. «Ходжалы и Сребреница как примеры “шахидизма” и спекуляции [Khojaly and Srebrenica as examples of “shahidism” and speculation].» Blogpost in Livejournal. August 4, 2001. <https://amiram-g.livejournal.com/456502.html>.

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https://ruskline.ru/news_rl/2013/06/14/sobytiya_v_srebrenice_musulmanskaya_postanovka_i_obman.

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