

Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression in Canada

Serbian American Scholar barred from entering Canada

By [Stephen Karganovic](#)

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#), [Law and Justice](#)

In-depth Report: [THE BALKANS](#)

This past weekend marked a painful ordeal for academic freedom and for freedom of expression in general in the Dominion of Canada. Rumours have been circulating for some time that in Canada those hallowed freedoms were becoming increasingly elusive and badly battered by political correctness. The airport detention and ultimate expulsion from Canadian soil of a Serbian-American scholar.

The details of this story are by now well known and scarcely require extensive recapitulation. But for the benefit of latecomers, this is essentially what happened. The Serbian Students' Association at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver invited Dr. Trifković to read a public lecture entitled "Balkans: Uncertain Prospects for an Unstable Region." The lecture or, as it turns out, the lecturer, attracted the (unfavourable) attention of a group of stern censors of Balkan-related discourse who are known as the [Bosnian Muslim] Institute for the research of Genocide, Canada. In case anyone might be wondering what the topic of the genocide research that is being conducted by this purportedly Canadian scholarly organisation might be, it is not the extermination of Canada's native peoples. Instead, it is the controversial issue of Srebrenica and the alleged "genocide" said to have taken place there in 1995. As it became clear from the substance of the Institute's complaint[2] it is precisely Dr. Trifković's views on that one issue – Srebrenica – that matters to the complainers and motivated their furious exclusionary campaign.

The president of this one-issue provincial Balkan outfit, a certain "professor" Emir Ramić, upon learning of Dr. Trifković's scheduled campus appearance in Vancouver, fired off an indignant protest letter to UBC president Stephan Toope "imploring" him to "ban" the offensive speaker, using just that suggestive terminology which in South Africa has gone out of fashion since the fall of apartheid. Just in case Prof. Toope did not get the message, Ramić warned him in the letter that his outfit "will send a request to the Canadian Parliament and Government to ban Trifković's lecture."

The Institute's ideological perspective and links to other institutions and individuals not noted for political sobriety or moderation provide a useful aside to the Vancouver lecture controversy. As it turns out, its director, Ramić, sits on the editorial board of the Sarajevo Islamist magazine "Korak"[3] [Step] in which other "scholars" of the same ilk espouse views the editorial tolerance for which ought certainly to trigger the Immigration Minister's lively interest in Mr. Ramić himself the next time he attempts to cross the border from abroad back into Canada.

Two brief but powerful quotes from the magazine that Mr. Ramić helps to edit shed

informative light on its philosophical complexion. In the article “Basic principles of the law of war in Islam,” on p. 15, Mr. Ramić’s colleague and the author, Dr. Enes Ljevaković, argues for the following view that might be found unsettling by some: “Jihad is a just and legitimate fight against aggression and a struggle in protection of human rights and freedoms.” Further down, on p. 94, in an article entitled “The Israeli regime is terrorist,” another scholarly associate, Fikret Muslimović, expounds this opinion: “In the course of the decades-long Middle Eastern crisis, the State of Israel has been conducting a reign of the most pitiless and brutal terror against the Palestinians. Technically, the State of Israel is democratic, but it is in reality a terrorist state. Given its brutal terrorist conduct the State of Israel should be denominated as ‘terrorist Israel.’”

It also appears that two centres of intellectual activity, the “Institute” in Canada and the Islamist magazine in Sarajevo, have a close partnership that includes reciprocal service by their senior staff. Just as Mr. Ramić is on the editorial board of “Korak”, the latter’s chief editor Asaf Džanić serves on the Board of Mr. Ramić’s Canadian “Institute.” [4] Which puts the only clearly superfluous, but conceivably totally uninformed, individual on the “Institute’s” Board, Elie Wiesel, in – to say the least – some very awkward company.

Returning to UBC president Toope, he chose to take no public stance at all as this controversy involving academic freedom, an issue that he ought to have a thing or two to say about, swirled around him. One supposes that it was for the reason of the president’s studious silence that the Institute then decided to take the matter up to the next level in Ottawa, having judiciously concluded that it was a perfect opportunity to make their political assets there perform a service. The rest is history. When Dr. Trifković stepped off the plane in Vancouver on the day he was scheduled to deliver his lecture, he was interrogated by an immigration official for several hours, denied entry into Canada on the most banal bureaucratic rationale,[5] and put on the next flight back to the United States.

The affair is, of course, hugely embarrassing for Canada and it compromises its pretensions to be an open and democratic society. Whatever the speaker’s views on Srebrenica, they are completely irrelevant. Canadian citizens are certainly entitled, and should be deemed intelligent enough, to hear and judge all views. But to make the immigration minister’s ruling even more awkward, Srebrenica was not even on the lecture’s agenda. The exclusionary reaction was designed to target the messenger personally, not his message, although on close reading of Canada’s system of values the latter course of action would have been equally unjustified.

The absurdity (in a society that purports to be open and democratic, that is) of “banning” a speaker scheduled to lecture on one topic because of objections to his views on another, will be apparent if we consider the following hypothetical. Imagine that Albert Einstein is still alive, and has made some comments critical of the Bosnian genocide Institute’s interpretation of events in Srebrenica. Next imagine that he was invited by a group of students at the University of British Columbia who are interested in physics to give a lecture on the theory of relativity. Based on the Institute’s reaction in the instant case, are we wrong to imagine that university authorities would be urged to “ban” Professor Einstein’s lecture (and perhaps also even Einstein personally) from the premises of the University of British Columbia on the grounds that he was a Srebrenica “genocide denier”?

But it serves no purpose to further bore the reader with the narration of how the principles of “open society” were violated in Canada and with hypotheticals illustrating an otherwise

crystal clear point. Of greater importance by far is to pose the following question: Why are the Srebrenica genocide lobby (and Mr. Ramić's "Institute" is, of course, just one of its numerous local incarnations) so unnerved by the slightest, and even merely potential, contradiction? Why do they view the lecture of a scholar who was scheduled to speak on an entirely different topic (although, to be fair, Srebrenica could have come up during the question and answer period) as such an enormous threat?

The short answer to that question is that they are fully cognizant of the fragility of their case and of their own inability to hold their ground in unfettered intellectual debate. In dealing with their opponents the only practical recourse they have is to use methods that would strike the casual observer as distinctly unacademic: To try to discredit and intimidate them, when possible to ruin them financially and – preferably – simply to silence them.

Their myth is in deep trouble. New facts and evidence are emerging continuously, logistical support once freely furnished by the media and vital to maintaining the fictitious Srebrenica narrative is becoming ever less monolithic, scholarly questioning of the institutionalised tale and the exposure of its numerous shortcomings are on the rise and this is coming to the notice of ever wider segments of the general public. The incoherence and ultimately the unsustainability of the Srebrenica propaganda narrative in its currently imposed form are becoming notorious. The partisans of the official version now have little choice but to go into "damage control" mode.

In fact, Canada is not the only country where the faltering Srebrenica lobby is fighting desperately to preserve its gravely compromised propaganda position. For almost a year the Srebrenica lobby has been pressing a revengeful legal case against an obscure Swiss cantonal newspaper, "La Nation". The newspaper's "offence" was to publish in its 11 April, 2008 issue a mildly sceptical critique of the official Srebrenica narrative.[6] That small newspaper with modest resources is now facing a lawsuit for enormous financial damages for pain allegedly caused to sensitive Srebrenica survivors which could cause its extinction if the court sides with the plaintiffs. Insignificant as in the global media universe "La Nation" might be, and however unperceived outside of the Swiss canton of Vaud its disappearance, its demise would certainly emit an intimidating message to all media organisations contemplating even the slightest deviation from the party line on Srebrenica. One supposes that precisely to be the idea behind this vicious lawsuit.

There is another and fresh example of the desperate viciousness of the Srebrenica lobby. It is the contemptible media attack in Bosnia ostensibly on the Serbian-American columnist Nebojša Malić, but actually on his family, specifically his mother, who still lives in "multi-cultural" and "pluralistic" Sarajevo. Last week, Sarajevo television station TV1 broadcast a vile and inciting story about Malić and the critical comments he makes in his column on Antiwar.com as well as in other media which happen to include frequent and "unorthodox" references to the neuralgic topic of Srebrenica. [7] Clearly in his overseas abode in the US Malić is quite beyond the reach of Sarajevo censors (and their thugs) but that cannot be said of his close family who still reside in Bosnia. The media pressure which appears to target him constitutes, in fact, a thinly disguised threat to his family. The uninhibited, typically Balkan, comments posted by readers of "Dnevni Avaz" make it very clear on the local level what fate could befall the relatives unless their kin, the "monster Malić" (as they delicately put it), wises up and desists.

A few other examples from this same general genre also deserve mention. The Srebrenica lobby are investing a great deal of effort, and who knows what else, in both Serbia and

Bosnia to ensure the passing of legal regulations that would make disputing the official story on Srebrenica or the expression of any public doubt in its validity a criminal offence. In Serbia the leaders of this campaign are parliament deputies Nenad Čanak[8] and Žarko Korać.[9] The projected amendment to the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina that would make “genocide or holocaust” denial a crime[10] is on the table but it currently faces an obstacle in the Parliamentary Assembly of BH in the form of resistance by Serbian deputies, whose consensual approval is necessary for the measure to pass.

To sum up. Some of these damage control operations have been relatively successful, others are still in progress and their outcome is uncertain, and still others have for the moment been blocked. But the feature that they all have in common is as an expression of Srebrenica genocide lobby’s fear of “heretical” opinions, their systematic avoidance of confrontation with the facts, and their flight from honest intellectual debate. Their sense of insecurity about the sustainability of their myth on the open market place of ideas is entirely valid. It marks also the beginning of the end of this pathetic tale which Professor Edward Herman has called “the greatest triumph of propaganda at the end of the twentieth century.” The gist of the matter is not that Srdja Trifković was sent back from Vancouver airport but that his intellectually challenged opponents were obliged to resort to political intrigue in order to prevent him from addressing a segment of the Canadian academic public. Tactical victories are often no more than a foreshadowing of strategic defeat. The Srebrenica genocide story is in precisely that phase of its progressive disintegration.[11]

And, for the record, this is not so because we say it is. This is the message subliminally sent out by the paranoid partisans of the dying tale themselves, who refuse to accept that, like all war propaganda, after fifteen years it is long past its expiration date. With every clumsy attempt to rescue their phony narrative and to exempt it from even the possibility of critical scrutiny, such as we just saw in Canada, the Srebrenica lobby are shooting themselves in the foot and they are unintentionally making their own significant contribution to the false story’s ultimate demise.

Stephen Karganović is President of the Dutch NGO, [Srebrenica Historical Project](#).

Notes

[1]

<http://www.instituteforgenocide.ca/the-protest-letter-of-the-irgc-to-the-president-of-the-of-th-e-university-of-british-columbia/>

[2] <http://zatebebih.net/pdf/13.pdf>, see box on bottom of p. 1.

[3] <http://www.instituteforgenocide.ca/board-of-directors/>

[4] After six hours’ detention and sporadic interrogation at Vancouver airport (15:00–21:00) Trifković was denied entry into Canada and escorted to the next flight to Seattle on the following grounds: “Inadmissible on grounds of violating human or international rights for being a prescribed [sic] senior official in the service of a government that, in the opinion of the minister, engages or has engaged in terrorism, systematic or gross human rights violations, or genocide, a war crime or a crime against humanity within the meaning of subsections 6 (3) to (5) of the Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act.”

[5]

<http://www.nspm.rs/istina-i-pomirenje-na-ex-yu-prostorima/betoniranje-istine-u-svajcarskoj.html>

[6] For the treatment accorded to Malić and his mother in the high circulation Bosnian Muslim newspaper "Dnevni Avaz," see:

<http://www.dnevniavaz.ba/dogadjaji/teme/29038-Sin-Mirjane-Mali-visoke-funkcionerke-SDP-brani-zloinca-Karadia-negira-genocid-Srebrenici.html>

[7] Blic [Belgrade], 28 May, 2007.

[8] <http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=623435&page=15>

[9] It should be noted that in what they believe to be a very clever move, the Srebrenica genocide lobby does not miss a single opportunity to ride on the coattails of a real genocide, the holocaust of the Jewish people during World War II. See Voice of America, May,, 2009

<http://www1.voanews.com/bosnian/news/a-29-2009-05-06-voa6-86197862.html?moddate=2009-05-06>

[10] See the sustained critique by a group of authors, "Deconstruction of a virtual genocide: An intelligent person's guide to Srebrenica,"

http://www.srebrenica-project.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=108:srebrenica-requiem-for-a-propaganda-fiction&catid=12:2009-01-25-02-01-02

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