



FROM MASSACRE TO MANIPULATION: SERBIA'S STRATEGY TO DENY THE HISTORY OF REÇAK

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On January 15, 1999, during the second day of the Orthodox New Year, Serbia marked yet another dark chapter of atrocity in its history. In the village of Reçak in Shtime, Serbian forces massacred 45 men, women, and children, all unarmed civilians. This barbaric act once again demonstrated the brutality of a genocidal regime, intent on the extermination of Albanians.

Until that day, Serbia's propaganda machine had managed to obscure and distort the facts of its crimes in Kosovo. However, in Reçak, the truth triumphed under the watchful eyes of Ambassador William Walker. On the morning of January 16, 1999, the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Walker, visited the crime scene with a group of journalists. What lay before them was a scene of horror: the mutilated bodies of massacred victims were scattered across the valley and other parts of the village.

"Massacre" and "crime against humanity", this is how Walker described the barbaric act, transforming Reçak into a symbol of the Albanian people's tragedy under Slobodan Milosevic's regime. This crime captured international attention and served as a turning point, exposing the true face of the Serbian regime and its systematic brutality against Kosovo Albanians.

Reçak was not just a massacre; it was a call for justice and a moral awakening for the international community. At a time when peace negotiations were at their most sensitive, this heinous act reinforced the conviction that intervention was imperative to halt crimes against humanity.

Denial of the Truth and Serbian Propaganda About the Reçak Massacre

The Reçak Massacre, an act of brutality that shocked the world continues to be denied by Serbia to this day, despite irrefutable facts and international evidence. At the helm of Serbia's government today stands Aleksandar Vucic, the former Minister of Information under Milosevic's regime. As

a direct participant in the propaganda apparatus of that time, Vucic has intimate knowledge of the crimes committed.

In 2021, Vucic labeled the Reçak Massacre a “fabrication” by international actors and described William Walker as a “frustrated man”. Serbian Minister Aleksandar Vulin echoed this denial, calling the event a “horrific lie and fabrication”. This refusal to acknowledge reality is not merely an effort to protect the image of the past regime but also a continuation of Serbia’s propagandistic narrative.

In 1999, Serbia’s Ministry of Internal Affairs claimed that “its police units were attacked by Albanian terrorist groups”, asserting that the victims were not civilians but members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). This version of events was reinforced by a report compiled by a Yugoslav-Belarusian medical team, which alleged that all victims, including a 12-year-old child, were “separatist guerrillas”.

However, a subsequent investigation led by Finnish anthropologist Dr. Helena Ranta, representing the European Union, concluded that the victims were unarmed civilians and that the massacre was a “crime against humanity”. Unfortunately, the publication of this report was delayed for two years, providing Serbia with an opportunity to manipulate facts and spread disinformation. Despite these efforts, independent international media documented the atrocities at Reçak and exposed the Serbian regime’s attempts to conceal this monstrous crime.

In an effort to sustain its denial and justify its actions, Serbia produced a documentary through the Serbian State Radiotelevision, using media as a propaganda tool to distort the truth.

Efforts to Deny the Reçak Massacre and Serbia’s Manipulative Strategy

Serbia did not stop at denial and propaganda; it also employed spies and covert operations to distort the truth about the Reçak Massacre. As part of this effort, individuals were tasked with shifting the blame onto Albanians and fabricating a new narrative to discredit the massacre. Among these attempts was a plan to establish a “second Yellow House” near Reçak to reinforce false accusations against the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).



The Kosovo Intelligence Agency (KIA), in cooperation with justice and police institutions, uncovered and arrested two Albanians, Bedri Shabani and Muharrem Qerimi, who were working for Serbia's intelligence agency, BIA. Investigations revealed that these individuals were tasked with spreading disinformation about the Reçak Massacre and reshaping the history of the war in Kosovo to align with Serbia's narrative.

These agents, under the direction of Serdjan Rosic, pursued a broader agenda: to distort NATO's intervention in Kosovo by propagating the idea that the Reçak Massacre was staged by international actors as a pretext for military intervention in the former Yugoslavia. Moreover, Bedri Shabani had a strategic mission assigned by Serbia: to create a replica of the "Yellow House" in Mollopole, a village near Reçak. This effort aimed to link the former KLA military hospital to fabricated allegations of organ trafficking, thereby bolstering Serbian propaganda.

Despite BIA's immediate denials following the arrests, intercepted phone calls released during the investigation provided clear evidence of these individuals' connections to the Serbian intelligence service. These findings once again exposed the lies and systematic efforts of Serbia to manipulate the truth and undermine international justice.

The Reçak Massacre is not only a crime against humanity but also a persistent test against denial and manipulation by a regime that refuses to confront its past. Efforts to distort history serve as a stark reminder of the importance of preserving truth and justice for the innocent victims.