



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic and President of the Serbian Government Commission on Missing Persons and Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Veljko Odalovic visited today "Kosmet Victims" Memorial Room, opened by the Association of Families of the Kidnapped and the Murdered in Kosovo and Metohija, at the Association premises in Beogradjanka Building, at the end of last June.

The Memorial Room is dedicated to the memory of those kidnapped and murdered in the southern Serbian province, from the first civilian victim Zarko Spasic of 14 May 1998, to Gendarmerie member Stevan Sindelic, murdered in the Ground Safety Zone, on 28 August 2014.

Thanking the Ministry representatives for accepting the invitation to visit the Memorial Room, Association President Simo Spasic took the guests to view the exhibition, highlighting the Association activities aimed at regulating the status of civilian victims' families, and erecting a monument to all victims from Kosovo and Metohija.

The Serbian Foreign Minister emphasized that the Government was making its best effort to prevent history from falling into oblivion otherwise there was a risk of having history repeat itself. "We will not refrain from criminal prosecution and bringing criminal charges against those responsible for war crimes", the Foreign Minister stated.

He assessed that most seriously affected victims in Kosovo were Serbs, and that the ethnic structure was changed there through crime and Serb expulsion. He pointed out that the case of Ramush Haradinai was a sort of test for Europe.

"If political decisions are to be more important than whether someone is a war criminal or not, the question arises as to whether punishment of war crimes is an objective that Europe is committed to or is the punishment applicable to Serbs alone", said the Minister who started his tour of the Memorial Room, symbolically, at exactly 12:44.

He claimed that although Serbia never denied the need for holding accountable all those who had committed war crimes, irrespective of their nationality, only Serbs were declared responsible.

"Crimes committed against Serbs have become more or less justified. The fact that no Albanians were convicted by the Hague Tribunal, that witnesses to Albanian terrorism were killed, and that some countries fail to respect wanted notices testify to the continued presence of double standards and the fact that the right to kill Serbs is being legalized", Dacic assessed.

Referring to Kosovo's intention to re-apply for admission to UNESCO, Dacic said that this would prompt Serbia to undertake a broad activity on the international level in order to affect the voting of member states on this issue.

"The voting in UNESCO disregards abstentions. I have no knowledge of what the United States reaction would be now, but previously, great pressure was made by Western countries on those that have not recognized Kosovo, to abstain. We have been able to persuade Japan, Korea, Colombia - which have recognized Kosovo, to abstain, but we cannot persuade Macedonia and Montenegro to do that, which affects me, indeed", Dacic said.

President of the Serbian Government Commission on Missing Persons Veljko Odalovic said that efforts have been made for years to pass a law regulating the rights of families of civilian victims of conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, but there was frequently an absence of full understanding for the adoption of such law.

"It seems to me that this situation is gradually changing, and that relevant ministers have realized that adoption of such a law was needed. It is necessary to combine all victims from Slovenia to Kosare, though it would be quite demanding to include it all in a legal form", said Odalovic.

He added that the relevant Serbian authorities would endeavour to collect as much evidence, and as many facts, about perpetrators of crimes in Kosovo and Metohija as possible, and forward them to the newly established Court for war crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army.