

FOREWORD

ON JUNE 26TH 2013 A SMALL VILLAGE ON THE RIGHT BANK OF THE TISZA, BARELY KNOWN TO MORE THAN A HANDFUL OF EUROPEAN CITIZENS OR POLITICIANS, SERVED AS THE SCENE FOR AN ACT OF COMMEMORATION ON A EUROPEAN SCALE OF SIGNIFICANCE. A COMMEMORATION THE LIKE OF WHICH HAS BARELY TAKEN PLACE IN EUROPE AND NOT ONCE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE. AT CSÚROG (ČURUG), IN THE VOIVODINA PROVINCE OF THE SERBIAN REPUBLIC, SERBIAN AND HUNGARIAN PEOPLE, HEADED BY SERBIAN PRESIDENT TOMISLAV NIKOLIĆ AND HUNGARIAN PRESIDENT JÁNOS ÁDER, JOINTLY BOWED THEIR HEADS IN HOMAGE TO SERBIAN VICTIMS KILLED IN RAIDS PERPETRATED BY HUNGARIANS DURING WWII AND TO HUNGARIAN VICTIMS KILLED BY SERBIAN PARTISAN ACTION.

The idea of holding a mutual commemoration and erecting a joint memorial first emerged in November 2012 during a visit by Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić to Budapest. Therefore gratitude and appreciation are due primarily to the Presidents of Hungary and Serbia, without whom these two countries might not have embarked on a process of appeasement. The National Assembly of the Serbian Republic also contributed significantly to discharging the heavy burden of a shared past. By issuing a parliamentary declaration condemning the massacres perpetrated in Voivodina in 1944–45, Serbia, ambitious to become an EU member, set an example to several states already members of the European Union. And last, but not

least I wish to express gratitude to the descendants of the victims, fellow-Hungarians of the Voivodina region who have fought, as law-abiding citizens of Serbia and catalysts of the appeasement process, to see a restless and uneasy past 'dissolved into peace by remembrance'. The commemorations at Csúrog (Čurug), including the other events of the Hungarian President's two-day visit to Serbia, put the full stop at the end of a tragic chapter in the joint history of these two nations and opened a new chapter in their co-operation as two neighbouring states. This way they also contributed to stability in the region. The significance of this step could only be compared to that of the cultural autonomy of the Hungarian ethnic com-

munity living in Serbia. This institutional framework could also serve as an example for any state or national community in the region or, indeed, in Europe. Enriching this autonomy with further opportunities and entitlements must be a joint aim for both Hungary and Serbia. A further step toward stability in the West Balkans could be attained by integration of the countries of the region in the European Union. Hungary considers Serbia a member of the European family and sees its future in the European Union. Therefore our country most heartily supports Serbia's ambitions toward European integration and looks upon it as a potential future ally in a European Union of powerful nations. The operation of contemporary integrated Europe must be built on more than just the spirit of intense market competition. Inner cohesion in the Union is inconceivable without a convergence in values and interests. In our closer Central European region re-discovering and activating regional solidarity can bring an awareness of shared values and interests for the relevant countries. The nations of the region find it hard to enforce their interests alone and can see no hope at all in enforcing them to each other's disadvantage. If we wish to enforce our national interests within the EU, this requires mutual understanding and support. Divided we can only sink, but united we will be able to rise to be equal among equals.

I see the present act of joint commemoration as one of the greatest achievements of the foreign politics of the current government. A step which both Hungarian and Serbian diplomacy have every reason to consider a success. However, our work is not done once this momentous step has been taken by our politicians. We have not managed to create an ideal world, only offered an example to show that we are able to engage in dialogue which leads to specific and tangible results. Hungary and Serbia, as well as the ethnic Serbian community living in Hungary and the ethnic Hungarian community living in Serbia, all have a vested interest in seeing the process of ap-

peasement between the two nations make headway and in regional co-operation enhancing in the wake of improving neighbourly relations.

Naturally, there is much that is still waiting to be accomplished in the process of appeasement. Before anything else, we need to face up objectively to our joint history and pay final homage to all victims. This is a difficult road to walk and both parties must show considerable courage as facing up to the truth of their historical past is a challenge which must not be further delayed. If we want genuine appeasement, this can only be based on sincerity, building the future on truth and trust instead of lies. Building trust is not something that can be accomplished on demand from the outside. As regards Hungary and Serbia, the will to do so is there on the highest levels. In the light of this I do believe that the time has come for building from below. The best way to serve Serbian-Hungarian, as well as broader regional appeasement is by building the broadest possible alliance in support of this idea on the micro-level in our narrowest regions. A good example in the local environment might perhaps work to convince the whole Central European society that building appeasement with neighbouring nations is a vested interest of all nations affected.

I am convinced that if we Hungarians and Serbs can walk down this difficult road which we have already set out on, we shall serve as a model for those countries of Europe and the world which have not yet been able to attain the level of historical appeasement and trust which Hungary and Serbia, one current and one prospecting member of the EU, have already attained based on a joint agreement.

Budapest, February 2014

Zsolt Németh
*Parliamentary State Secretary to the
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary*

Where we started...

A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE MOST PAINFUL WOUNDS IN THE JOINT PAST OF SERBIA AND HUNGARY

THE RAID OF 1942

The Peace Treaty of Trianon which concluded WWI annexed Voivodina from Hungary to the Serb-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom. As a result, nearly half a million Hungarians found themselves in the position of an ethnic minority. In April 1941, at the same time when Yugoslavia was occupied by the Germans, the Hungarian army marched into some of the areas which had formerly been part of its territory, including Bácska (Bačka), the area flanked by the rivers Danube and Tisza. Hun-

garian regular forces experienced very little military resistance but the eradication of local partisan units and martial court procedures cost many lives on both sides. According to Hungarian data, civilian casualties after the entry of the Hungarian military amounted to 2870 people, while Yugoslav data recorded directly after the war speak of losing 3506 Serbian civilians. From the second half of that year onwards there was an increasing number of acts of sabotage and assaults against the local Hungarian administration and gendarme fuelled by the Yugoslav Communist Party, the latter also causing the

death of some Hungarians. In response, in January 1942 the Hungarian army launched an anti-partisan operation, first targeting the area called the Sajkás (Šajkaška), the piece of land surrounded by the Danube and, its large tributary which runs into the former at this point, the Tisza. The partisan-hunt was later extended to Újvidék (Novi Sad). As a result, according to Hungarian official statistics from 1944, 3340 civilians mostly of Serbian nationality were killed. Works by Serbian historians speak of the loss of between 3800–4000 lives. At Újvidék (Novi Sad), the majority of the 1246 civilian casualties were Jews.

These events raised a great outcry in Hungary. Members of Parliament were vocal in protest and demanded investigation of the events in Parliament. Prime Minister Miklós Kállay managed to have a martial law procedure launched. Out of all countries participating in WWII, Hungary was the only one to prosecute officers of its own army and gendarme for atrocities perpetrated against civilian population. Those responsible were sentenced to death, but some of them fled to Germany to escape having to face punishment. Material damage caused by these raids was also assessed and the country started to pay compensation. However, Jews were never entitled to compensation, and payment was stopped altogether after Hungary became occupied by the Germans. Once WWII ended, Hungary extradited the arch offenders to Yugoslavia, where they were sentenced to death and executed.

THE MASSACRES OF 1944–45 IN VOIVODINA

On October 17th 1944, the commanders of the Yugoslavian partisan battalions which marched in along with the Soviet troops introduced military administration in Bácska (Bačka),

Baranya (Baranya) and the Bánság (Banat) region and this remain in force until February 15th 1945. Although it faced no armed resistance, the very day after it was announced, the military administration ordered that Hungarian and German men of working age be gathered together in labour camps. Next, following an initiative by the leadership of the communist party, a collective persecution campaign was launched against the Hungarian and the German population. During the winter of 1944–45, throngs of civilians of these two nationalities were murdered, usually following bestial tortures, at their own place of residence. Those left to survive were even prevented from according their loved ones a proper funeral. On May 18th 1945, the Ministry of the Interior issued a decree whereby all cemeteries in Serbia which served as resting places for 'enemies of the nation' and 'Fascists' were to be declared secret locations, they were to be disguised and all traces of their existence must disappear – indeed, they must not even be approached. The entire set of events was hushed up until 1990. Because sources were inaccessible, for a long time there were only estimates regarding the exact number of people who were arrested and murdered mostly without any proper legislative procedure. Today, most researchers agree that the number of Hungarian victims was around 20,000. There were raids in practically all towns and villages with a Hungarian population, but in three villages of the Sajkás (Šajkaška) area, Csúrog (Čurug), Zsablya (Žabalj) and Mozsor (Mošorin), the entire Hungarian community was wiped out. 'Punishment of collective guilt' affected all Hungarian inhabitants of these three villages. In January 1945 all of them were declared war criminals, their belongings were confiscated, most able-bodied men were executed and the remaining Hungarians were transported to the 'special status' camp at Járek (Bački Jarak) and were forever banned from entering again their original place of residence.

The way we progressed...

THE WORK OF THE HUNGARIAN-SERBIAN ACADEMIC JOINT COMMITTEE

Presidents László Sólyom and Boris Tadić made an initiative in late 2009 to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts to set up a joint committee with the objective of exploring and establishing their joint historical past, particularly as regards the period between 1941–48. They recognised that unless we take account of and face up to this segment of history, it is impossible to eradicate a sense of distrust going back centuries between these neighbouring nations. It was also clear that this was a task to be accomplished by the relevant professional and academic organisations. Accordingly, a Hungarian-Serbian Academic Joint Committee was established in December 2010 in Budapest, with Ferenc Glatz, former President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, director of the Institute of Historical Disci-

plines of that Academy, and academician Vojislav Stanovčić, as co-presidents. Within the framework of the programme of Serbian-Hungarian historical appeasement, the Joint Committee was set the following agenda: creating places of remembrance; doing research in Serbian archives; collecting witness statements and recollections; creating a Voivodina Subcommittee within the Committee for Identifying Mass Graves in Serbia; setting up an information website and publishing papers on the subject. The joint committee co-operates with the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice; the Hungarian National Council of Voivodina and the Hungarian Cultural Institute at Zenta (Senta). Organised by the Committee, an international conference was held in Budapest on September 30th 2011 to discuss the post-WWII massacres in the region,

with papers given by both Hungarian and Serbian participants. Proceedings of the conference were published in a bilingual volume *Co-Existence, Exploration of the Past and Appeasement, 1918–2012*. Since 2014 the Hungarian section of the Joint Committee has been operating under the leadership of Dr Károly Kocsis, academician, Doctor of Geography. The establishment of the Joint Committee and the results of its work could not have been achieved, had the Hungarian population of Voivodina not had a well-organised and effective cultural and political representation. The work of the Com-

mittee is far from being done. The next steps are to systematise, verify and publish the data that have been collected. The Joint Committee is still rendering indispensable services, since it serves as a professional forum which makes sure that research can continue along an exacting professional methodology regardless of the ebb and flow of daily politics, and thus attain objective results. The work that the Joint Committee has rendered so far has played a fundamental role in paving the way to the historic act of homage performed by the two Presidents in 2013.

János Áder and Tomislav Nikolić at a round-table talk of the Hungarian-Serbian Academic Joint Committee



The way we have travelled...

A HISTORICAL MEETING OF PRESIDENTS

János Áder, President of Hungary, paid an official visit to Serbia on June 25–26th 2013. The official visit and its central element, the joint visit to Csúrog (Čurug) for a wreath-laying ceremony, had been agreed upon during Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić's visit to Budapest on November 12–13th 2012 in order to create a shared gesture by which the two heads of state can contribute to historical appeasement between the two nations. During the first day of his visit, János Áder visited Belgrade to hold talks with President Tomislav Nikolić and Prime Minister Ivica Dačić. Later on, in the Serbian National Library, the two Presidents attended, and made speeches at a round-table talk of the members of the Hungarian-Serbian Academic Joint Committee, which studies the history of the innocent victims killed in the Voivodina region between 1941–48. János Áder also laid a wreath on the memorial of the unknown heroes at Mount Avala, visited the scene of the Battle of Belgrade, the Castle of Belgrade, and at-

tended the formal dinner given in his honour by the President of Serbia. On the second day of his visit the Hungarian President held talks with Serbian Speaker of Parliament Nebojša Stefanović and gave an address at the extraordinary session of the Serbian Parliament. The National Assembly of the Serbian Republic also took a significant step to contribute to discharging the heavy burden of the shared past of the two nations. Five days earlier, on June 21st 2013, they issued a declaration condemning the bloody raids perpetrated in Voivodina in 1944–45 along with the martial decrees passed in the spirit of collective guilt. In his address János Áder expressed his gratitude for the contents of that declaration and as President of Hungary apologised for the sins perpetrated by Hungarians against innocent Serbians during WWII. The Hungarian President's address was received by a standing ovation by representatives of the Serbian Parliament. Later the two presidents paid homage to the innocent Hungarian victims of Voivodina



János Áder was received by Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić



Prime Minister Ivica Dačić and



Speaker of the House Nebojša Stefanović

at Csúrog (Čurug). The commemoration, which was attended by a great many Hungarians from all over Voivodina, began with a religious farewell ceremony celebrated by bishops János Péntzes of Szabadka (Subotica) and László Németh of Nagy-

The ceremony in front of the memorial of Hungarian victims was performed by Roman Catholic Bishop János Péntzes, while Serbian Orthodox Bishop Irinej Bulović offered a prayer

becskerek (Veliki Bečkerek). The two statesmen jointly laid a wreath in front of the new memorial, then bowed their heads in memory of the Hungarian victims and prayed, along with all those present, for the people massacred in 1944–45. After

Events took place in the reverse order inside the memorial museum of Serbian victims

laying the wreath on the memorial, situated outside the village, the two Presidents continued their journey by visiting what is known as the Topalov warehouse. After an Orthodox farewell ceremony they now paid homage together to the Serbians executed in 1942, and again went on to lay a wreath and bow their heads together. Next, the two heads of state addressed the multitude of Hungarians and Serbians gathered together in the square outside the Orthodox church of Csúrog (Čurug). János Áder's two-day visit to Serbia in the spirit of Serbian-Hungarian historical appeasement ended at Szabadka (Subotica), where he attended a literary show at Dezső Kosztolányi Theatre. The Hungarian head of state was accompanied by Zolt Németh, Parliamentary State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Oszkár Nikowitz, Hungary's Ambassador in Belgrade. The memorial ceremonies were attended by officials of the Republic of Serbia and of the Province of Voivodina, as well as by local officials, Serbian and Hungarian clerical notabilities, and leaders of Hungarian political parties and NGOs of the region, including István Pásztor, head of the Association of Hungarians in Voivodina and Tamás Korhecz, President of the Hungarian National Council. The commemoration at Csúrog (Čurug) was broadcast live by the state

television of Voivodina, the address given at the extraordinary session of Serbian Parliament by Serbian public service television channel RTS-2, while the most important media all offered accounts of János Áder's visit to the country.

Tomislav Nikolić and János Áder welcome Zolt Németh arriving at the formal dinner given in honour of the Hungarian head of state



The way we experienced it...

APPEASEMENT IS A PROCESS BUT IT IS COMPOSED OF SINGLE MOMENTS

I am supposed to be writing about June 26th 2013, but I can't help thinking of autumn 1944. And when I do, I must also think of winter 1942. And of 1948. I am supposed to be writing about a single day, but my gaze, which is not even a historian's gaze, but that of a politician, must encompass this landscape where Serbians and Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Croats and Bunyevats have been and are still living together to this day. I am also supposed to be writing about the borders – the end of WWI and the Trianon Treaty. All that time, however, I am also compelled to think of 1848–49, of the martyrs who connect us and the battles at Szenttamás (Srbobran), Kishegyes (Mali Idoš) or at the one-time Kaponya tavern (in the territory of Bajmok), which divide us. I am supposed to be writing about the Hungarians who were massacred during the terrible winter of 1944–45 – the people I am supposed to be, and indeed

want to be, writing about. About June 26th 2013 when in the place of the carrion pit at Csúrog (Čurug), in front of the memorial raised by the Serbian Republic, President Tomislav Nikolić bowed his head in front of the Hungarian victims. And this way I also should and want to be writing about Serbian-Hungarian appeasement. During WWII, and the years following, some horrific, intolerable, bestial crimes were committed, fuelled by ideological inspiration. This disgrace was done to us by communist partisans. Their feeble and deceitful justification for this wild rampage saturated with hate was the unfounded argument of 'punishing people who had helped the occupying forces'. The victims were Hungarians. This was all their crime. The crime of over ten thousand children, women, old men and men in their prime of their lives. Their martyrdom is a great loss to the families and the community.



Zsolt Németh and István Pásztor at the commemoration held in the Topalov warehouse

A wound which will never heal. But at the same time, it is a loss which, by the suffering entailed, has forged us into a closer unit.

When I write about June 26th 2013, I am also writing about the Topalov warehouse. Which is where János Áder, President of Hungary bowed his head in homage to the victims of the bestial murders of 1942. These, too, were perpetrated on ideological grounds, in a cruel, inhuman way against Serbian babies and mothers, men and boys, by Hungarians. I want to write about a sentence spoken by János Áder in his address to the Serbian Members of Parliament in Belgrade. 'Virtuous people will have the courage to say what they believe to be correct at the bottom of their heart. And you have listened to your hearts.' This address was given two days after Serbian Parliament accepted the *Declaration on the Serbian Republic Condemning the Atrocities Committed Against the Hungarian Civilian Population of Voivodina in 1944–45* – the declaration which after nearly 70 years dashed the humiliating stigma of collective guilt from the Hungarians of Csúrog (Čurug),

Zsablya (Žabalj) and Mozsor (Mošorin) and from all the innocent Hungarian victims who were massacred.

I wanted to write about all of this when I accepted the invitation to contribute to this volume. But now, when after so many months I recall that day, those events, the courageous commemorations held over the past decades in the face of prohibition which we celebrated on All Saints' Day year after year all on our own, encouraged by no one but often threatened, all I want to say is this: May God give us strength, all of us, to open up our graves, bury our dead and leave to our children and grandchildren the legacy of the mission of appeasement, a process consisting of so many single moments; its burden and its human dignity.

István Pásztor
*President of the House of Representatives
of the Province of Voivodina
and the Association of Hungarians in Voivodina*

Habent sua fata monumenta

PLACES OF REMEMBRANCE AT CSÚROG (ČURUG)



Outside of the restored Topalov warehouse

The village of Csúrog (Čurug) lies on the right bank of the Tisza, in the northern part of the Sajkás (Šajkaška) region. This is where the number of Serbian victims killed by raiding Hungarians was highest. Serbian data speak of 886 dead, many of them children, women and old people. The Topalov warehouse in the centre of the village was the scene where the Hungarian gendarme machine-gunned over 400 people and threw the bodies into the icy Tisza. This place of remembrance

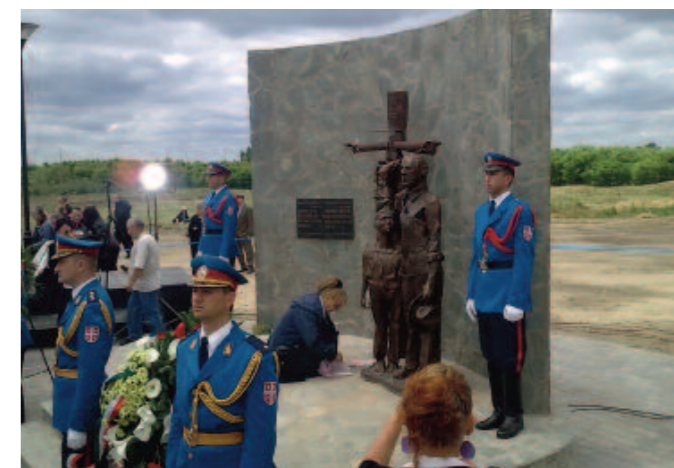
and the memory of the victims is kept alive by Razzia 1942 Memorial Society. In line with the plans of the Memorial Society and in the spirit of Hungarian-Serbian appeasement, the warehouse building has been converted into the Museum to the Victims of the Raid at Csúrog. Costs of the operation, amounting to almost €100,000, were secured by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary. The Museum was opened on June 26th 2013 by Tomislav Nikolić, President of the Serbian Republic, and János Áder, President of Hungary.

At present, the Museum of Raid Victims displays a permanent exhibition of photographs partly featuring the Serbian victims and partly taken during the raid itself. On the outside wall of the museum, a memorial plaque written in Serbian indicates that this place of remembrance was created in homage to the people of Csúrog (Čurug) who fell prey to the raid in 1942. The memorial plaque placed on the building earlier commemorates the bloody rampage of the Hungarians Fascists. Today this plaque forms part of the exhibition material and may be viewed in the museum itself. A further memorial plaque commemorates the renovation of the building and the opening of the museum. Razzia 1942 Memorial Society also wish to ded-

icate a few tableaux to the bloody massacres of 1944–45 which are partially seen to be a consequence of the raid. Compiling these is presently under way.

The dead bodies of the Hungarians murdered here in autumn 1944 (555 names are known) were buried in the large pits of the disused brick factory on the edge of the village which were used to discard animal carrion. Rumour has it that their bones were later transported to the leather works of Kula (Kula), but there are no reliable data available in this respect. In 1994, on the 50th anniversary of this sad event, Province Representative Júlia Teleki appealed for permission to hold a commemoration at the grave of the victims – including her own father. Her appeal was declined but nevertheless she did erect a cross with the inscription, 'To our fathers, 1944–1994'.

In 1995, on All Saints' Day, László Pósa parish priest of Óbecse-Alsóváros (Stari Bečej) consecrated the resting place of the earthly remains of the victims. Since that time, commemorations have been held on this day each year. 2002 was the first year when the event was attended by Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of Voivodina, Serbian speaking Miroslav Mrnuštik. In 2011, a wreath was laid, for the first time, by representatives of Razzia 1942 Memorial Society. The crosses and the memorial plaques placed later were repeatedly knocked down or damaged by unknown individuals. The last cross was erected in 2011 with the purpose that it should commemorate Hungarian victims until the time when a more robust, permanent and worthy memento is built. This is the plan which was fulfilled when, on June 26th 2013, the cross was replaced by a memorial financed by the Serbian Government. The work was inaugurated jointly by Tomislav Nikolić and János Áder as part of the occasion when the two presidents jointly bowed their heads in honour of the victims – an act which symbolises historical appeasement between the two nations. The memorial bears the inscription 'In memory of the innocent



The metamorphosis of the memorial established over the top of a former carrion pit offers evidence that commitment to appeasement is able to produce tangible results

Hungarian victims killed in 1944–45' and features a sculpture by artist Tibor Szarapka from Szabadka (Subotica). The foreground shows a young boy clinging onto his father in front of a stone wall, while in the background is a stylised representation of the crucifixion of Christ. The surroundings of the memorial have been landscaped, and a paved ally-way leads to it directly from the main street. We hope that the system of CC cameras which will be implemented according to plan will forestall any further vandalism and grant the safety of the memorial.



'IF IT IS POSSIBLE, SO FAR AS IT DEPENDS
ON YOU, LIVE PEACEABLY WITH ALL.'

(ROMANS 12,18)

Documents
of the historical
remembrance
ceremony

The declaration by the Serbian Parliament on condemning the atrocities perpetrated against the Hungarian civilian population of Voivodina in 1944–45

June 21st 2013

1. The Serbian Republic most firmly condemns all those acts perpetrated against the Hungarian civilian population of Voivodina in 1944–45 which deprived certain persons of their lives, freedom or other rights due to their national identity, without a court sentence or other administrative ruling.

2. The House of Representatives of the Republic of Serbia most firmly condemns the ruling of January 22nd 1945 of the Committee for Identifying the Crimes of the Occupants and their Helpers, which declared inhabitants of the village of Csúrog (Čurug), Zsablya (Žabalj) District, as war criminals based on their nationality; as well as its ruling of March 26th 1945, which declared inhabitants of the village of Mozsor (Mošorin), Titel (Titel) District, as war criminals based on their nationality; except so far as it concerns the responsibility of individuals whose culpability has been proven by individual procedure. The House of Representatives of the Republic of Serbia also most forcefully condemns those acts of the state organs which passed a ruling, by analogy of the ruling about the village of Csúrog (Čurug) of January 22nd 1945, against the inhabitants of Zsablya (Žabalj).

3. The House of Representatives of the Republic of Serbia declares its conviction that release from collective responsibility

which was ascribed to certain national communities in Voivodina after WWII based on the decisions of the state organs of the time serves the interests of increasing the spirit of tolerance and mutual appreciation among national communities and all citizens of the Republic of Serbia.

4. The House of Representatives of the Republic of Serbia condemns the sufferings of innocent victims from other nationalities in Voivodina which took place during and after WWII.

5. The House of Representatives of the Republic of Serbia champions the full-scale rehabilitation of those innocently convicted and of innocent victims, not questioning the individually established responsibility of persons whose culpability has been or is to be proven through a lawful procedure in front of an independent tribunal.

6. The House of Representatives of the Republic of Serbia expresses the willingness of the Serbian Republic to continue the process of further expanding human and minority rights and civil liberties and calls on all state organs and citizens to contribute fully to creating and strengthening the conditions for a life based on civil equality and full respect for human and minority rights and liberties.



Speech of János Áder, President of Hungary at the session of the Serbian Parliament, June 26th 2013

Thank you!
This is the only word that is worthy of this day.

This is perhaps further accentuated by the fact that today is the first time that the President of the Republic of free Hungary addresses the legislature of the free Serbia.

Esteemed Mr President, distinguished National Assembly,

When I express to you my thanks and my appreciation, I do so, representing Hungary. On behalf of our entire political nation, on behalf of every one of my fellow-Hungarian compatriots. On behalf of every well-meaning virtuous persons, who reject



inhumanity and injustice, wherever they should live, Serbian or Hungarian or belonging to any other European nation.

I express my gratitude and appreciation to you and to the people of Serbia on behalf of all those who not only believe in the word of mutual respect and appreciation, but are also ready to act for it.

Esteemed Members of Parliament,

All those who can step out of the shadows of past's painful mistakes and inhumanities are the ones who stand on the side of the future and of a common future. You have done this.

Anybody following moral commands will have the strength to utter the truth. You have done this.

Virtuous people will have the courage to say what they believe to be correct at the bottom of their heart. And you have listened to your hearts.

Esteemed National Assembly,

Last week you took an important, historic step.

You realised that whatever was messed up earlier by politicians, will have to be rectified by today's politicians. However painful it was, you said what seemed to be unspeakable for 70 years. You said the unavoidable, important truth dictated to humanity by common sense and morals for thousands of years.

You said that the principle of collective guilt is untenable. You said that there may be individual sinful people, but not an entire nation of people. You have said that the National Assembly of Serbia and the well-meaning people of Serbia do not identify with the crimes and misconceptions of the past, which have caused so much human suffering.

Your decisions make it clear and unquestionable once and for all to everybody that the legislature of the free Republic of Serbia is ready to make amends to the innocent Hungarian victims who were exterminated during the ethnic carnages of WWII in Voivodina.

After seven decades, the declaration adopted by the National Assembly a few days ago, will not only close one of the 20th century chapters of pain and shadows of our common past, but will also open new 21st century perspectives in the relations of our countries and our people.

Your decision is a manifestation of your commitment to European values. This is a decision which points beyond itself in significance, since you are setting an example for everybody.

You are setting an example on how those living today can and should do everything possible to reinstate the balance of morals tipped earlier in the world.

Your act is a true human gesture, because it tells every well-meaning person that those capable of sharing in each other's grief are bound together in a strong alliance and spiritual bonding. Those turning to each other in mourning will also share in each other's joy in the future.

The new 21st century Central Europe will be born of such gestures. Gestures about understanding and about accepting each other, about co-operation, about stating the truth and the respect for each other and universal human values. Such values constitute the foundations of a reunifying Europe.

It is important that you should know, you can count on us Hungarians as friends and partners in your successful accession to the European Union and we are ready to provide assistance to this end. Let me share with you now our most important lessons learned so far.

Our experiences have shown that the community that you will also join one day is not only a community of abstract values, but of allies thinking about a common future, who are willing and ready to act together. Nobody can expect much success in the Europe of co-operation alone, but countries acting in an alliance of partnership may gain numerous advantages.

The adoption of the declaration in the National Assembly constitutes an important new kind of step and a forward looking alliance forging in the activities of our countries built on co-operation and good neighbourly relations.

Such a forward looking alliance forging is made stronger by such decisions and words said by Mr Nikolić, the President of the Republic of Serbia on his visit to Budapest.

He said the following: 'We have opened a new page in our relations. We have closed the door on our misunderstandings. In the interest of our children, Hungary and Serbia.'

The President also emphasized that 'we have to relieve future generations of the burdens of the past; the time has come for mutual apologies and forgiveness.'

I also share this opinion that the time has come for mutual apologies.

The free and democratic Hungary condemns all those Hungarians who have committed crimes against innocent Serbian people, only to aggravate the sufferings of WWII. In my capacity as the President of the Republic of Hungary, I take this opportunity to apologise for the crimes committed by Hungarians against innocent Serbians during WWII.

Although no one can make crimes committed null and void, we still believe that forgiveness after mutual apologies is something that can point even beyond reconciliation.

Because we do not wish to live side by side, but instead in a community of Central European people. We, the Hungarians and the Serbs of today stand in unison on the side of innocent victims. We do not wish to leave a legacy of death, lies and hatred to our children, but instead one of life, justice and co-operation.

I wish for this to happen. Let us do our utmost in the future to ensure that this truly happens. You can always count on me and on Hungary as a good neighbour and a good ally.

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts with you. You honoured me with your attention.



János Áder and Tomislav Nikolić outside the Orthodox church of Csúrog (Čurug)

Address delivered by János Áder, President of Hungary, at Csúrog (Čurug) after a joint ceremony of laying a wreath and paying homage June 26th 2013

Those who commemorate the past are taking care of the future. Those who call sin by its name are serving a life of morality. Those who speak the truth will win the mercy of Providence.

Mr President, dear friends gathered in remembrance!

The place where we are standing is one where people have died. Their death was the irrevocable and irreparable consequence of inhuman actions and inhuman impulses.

Seven decades ago there was blood running in the streets of Csúrog (Čurug). The blood of women who had been raped, the blood of men young and old. The blood of children and babies. Hungarian and Serbian people have died here. Innocent Serbs in 1942 and innocent Hungarians in the winter of 1944–45. Innocent Hungarians, victims to the fact that some people believed that the innocent victims of their nation must be avenged by shedding the blood of innocent victims of another nation.

What happened in the winter of 1944–45 here and in the surrounding Hungarian villages was part of a mass-scale campaign of revenge. Bloody revenge for things perpetrated by other Hungarians several years earlier against innocent Serbs. This revenge was conceived in sin and was immoral, just like the extinction of all Serbian lives was conceived in sin and was an immoral act.

The moral order of the world will be toppled unless we understand that punishing sinners can be the only moral act. We would be sinning against ourselves, each other and those following in our wake if we failed to understand that there is no more sinful action than killing innocent people. Seven decades ago the mortal screams of those innocent people who were tortured and humiliated rose to the skies, but the moral order of the world also went off track.

We needed to wait 70 years before we could look into each other's eyes and jointly say: sin has no origin and no national-



It is a fact of symbolic significance that the memorial at Csúrog (Čurug) to the Serbian victims was restored from donations by the Hungarian government while the memorial to Hungarian victims was financed by Serbia

ity. There are no sinful nations. There are only sinful acts, sinful impulses, sinful people.

Just as in the case of victims, the important question is not whether they were Serbs or Hungarians but that they were innocent, all of them.

If God looks down on us right now, he will see that the souls of all those innocent Serbian and Hungarian people are with us today. We must embrace them in our souls, since they were all brothers and sisters to us. Let us tell them that we take no community with sin. Let us tell them that if we could turn back

the wheel of time we would relentlessly oppose the forces so destructive to them. Let us tell them that we, people living today, mourn them as brothers and sisters because we, Serbs and Hungarians, look on each other as brothers and sisters.

Today is a day when we turn toward each other. We look each other in the eye and say, it matters what we leave as a legacy, what sort of memories we cherish and what we pass on to our descendants.

We cannot pass on a legacy of failures and grudges laden with dark emotions, only one of mutual respect and justice.

Address given by Tomislav Nikolić, President of the Republic of Serbia at Csúrog (Čurug) after the joint ceremony of wreath-laying and homage June 26th 2013

Mr President! Dear Friends! Ladies and Gentlemen!

'If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all!' – this is a profound truth found in the Letter Written to the Romans, a section of our common Holy Scripture. This succinct teaching contains a wisdom boiled down through centuries. It is followed by an endless list of innumerable innocent victims amassed through human history. Learning from this as much as from a past of almost one thousand years, it is the shared responsibility of Hungarians and Serbs toward each other to build their present and their future on the foundations of the noblest traditions of co-existence, in peace, understanding and Christian love. These two neighbouring peoples and their states have been exposed in the past to the constant changes in universal European history. Living at the crossroads of the highways of spreading civilisations and in an exceptional geo-strategic position, these nations often suffered stormy wars and devastations. Most often they fought in alliance against their shared enemy. Nevertheless, there were also times when Hungarians and Serbs found themselves

on opposing sides – with tragic consequences. While they were founding, consolidating and protecting their own states, from the Middle Ages right into the present, there were several planes on which Hungarians and Serbs established close ties: in culture, science, education and the arts. The first significant connections between our states and nations emerged in the 13th century through marriages between rulers from the Nemanjić dynasty and Hungarian princesses. Intensifying relations between our ruling families resulted in a better mutual understanding and deeper co-operation between the two states. As the Ottoman Empire expanded throughout the 14th century, Serbs and Hungarians found themselves in the role of the protecting bastions of Europe and Christianity. Fighting the supreme power of the Ottoman army and the emerging world power, our forebears put up a heroic struggle to defend their states, fortifications and cities and protect their cultures and civilisation. Knowing this it is no surprise that in one of the loveliest spots of Belgrade castle, which offers a fabulous view of the estuary of the Sava and the Danube, stands a memorial in honour of the Hungarians who, headed by the

glorious János Hunyadi, protected Belgrade, shoulder to shoulder with the Serbs, in 1456. The collapse of the Serbian Empire in the 15th century and a few years later the fall of the Hungarian Monarchy meant the beginning of a period of occupation which was to last for centuries and, at the same time, of a continued struggle for liberation. We know of many examples of the heroism that our forebears showed during the Austrian-Turkish wars of the 17th-18th centuries. A most determining influence on our history were the two great waves of migration when the Serbs moved into northern territories. The first of these took place in 1690, headed by Patriarch Arsenije III. The great war of Vienna, which ended with the famous truce of Karlóca (Sremski Karlovci) in 1699, testifies to the true patriotism and love of freedom of these two nations. During later times, in the 19th century under the rule of commander Karadjordje and Miloš the Great (Obrenović), our forebears jointly persisted in their will to create their own independent states. In my birth town there is a theatre which was named after Joakim Vujić, the founder of Serbian drama. Vujić was a good friend of noted Hungarian dramaturg, director and actor István Balog. Balog's stage play *György Cserni* was a celebration of the great Serbian uprising and Karadjordje so overt that the Austrian authorities banned the performance. Joakim Vujić gave his friend István Balog his Serbian poems about Karadjordje. Later, Balog was to play the main role in Vujić's play *The Parrot*. All of this happened a mere two centuries ago. The rich cultural ties which developed during the centuries and which mainly came about against a background of bitter struggles for survival and liberation were hallmarked by grand personalities who contributed to rendering our culture and art widely known and significant in a European context. The unique example and symbol of connections between the two nations was Aleksandar Petrović, better known as Sándor Petőfi, whose poems celebrate world freedom. A great many educated Serbs were active in the area of contemporary Hungary, and went on to

enrich their own country by their rich life experience and the knowledge they acquired at prestigious schools north of the Sava and the Danube. Proofs of the centuries-long presence of Serbs in Hungary and Hungarians in Serbia form a valuable part of our cultural heritage in Serbia. The town of Szentendre near Budapest in Hungary or the castle of Bács (Bač) are but two examples of enriching connections between these two neighbouring nations.

Mr President! Ladies and gentlemen!

The dynamic and often even tragic course of the history of this region has meant that from time to time our two states and nations were on opposing sides. The tragic events of our shared past are related to the fights of the two World Wars and the fatal developments of those times. The two wars which assumed an international magnitude were characterised by hostility between our two nations, the destruction of towns and villages, the destruction of innocent civilian population and the annihilation of cultural heritage. The tragic years of the war serve as a historical warning which reminds us to this day that peace and mutual understanding are core values in life. Every innocent victim, regardless of nationality, gender or age, is worthy of being remembered and saved from oblivion. Every single flower we lay at the place of execution of our compatriots, or the hand we reach out in the spirit of appeasement, show our awareness of civilised values and commitment toward our joint present and future. Therefore we must not forget that every victim, but even every criminal, has a first name and a surname. Our sense of responsibility about what happened and our commitment to creating the conditions of undisturbed co-existence and co-operation in the future reflect that we hold objective knowledge about the history of our region. The past cannot be changed but we can learn from it. Acknowledging what happened, accounting for the causes and consequences of those tragic events and identify-

ing individual responsibility in the crimes that had been committed – these are the challenges facing this generation. Above all else it is a basic human obligation to remember; not to forget but to forgive each other. We are doing this sincerely, jointly, and with equal commitment. The conditions are now available to submit our past to critical historical research, primarily to the experts who have united their forces in the Joint Committee of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The support they receive from both sides for their activity is the most significant contribution to further improving our friendly and neighbourly relations.

Mr President! Ladies and gentlemen!

The Republic of Serbia is committed to building its present and its future on the principles of freedom, equality, human rights and good neighbourly relations. As members of an old European nation with a great deal of suffering in its past, we are fully committed to contributing to the further development of the family of European nations. Co-operation with European countries and particularly the neighbouring countries is seen by Serbia as the token of its own future and of

progress for the entire region. Therefore maintaining close and friendly relations between Serbia and Hungary, based on mutual appreciation and understanding, is an important prerequisite of the undisturbed and balanced development of the states in this part of Europe. The Republic of Serbia is prepared for this kind of long-term co-operation with its neighbours and, Mr President, we look on your visit to our country as a symbolic milestone indicating that we have moved into a more intense and successful new stage of this co-operation. The citizens of Hungary and Serbia, aiming to base their future on many past precedents of co-operation and joint action, need to act with responsibility toward each other and the other European nations and countries.

May posterity remember the events of this day, dedicated to innocent victims among our forebears on both sides, as the symbol of the sincere appeasement of our nations and the token of our mutual and honest striving as neighbours to do even more for closer ties, better connections, understanding, co-operation and friendship between the two nations.

Thank you.

