

Interview in internetkrant Sarajevo-x.com

On Thursday the 29th of May 2008 the Bosnian channel RTVFBiH broadcast the groundbreaking documentary by Dutch public broadcaster IKON 'The Greek way'. This documentary was made by Ingeborg Beugel, and proves the involvement of Greece in the Srebrenica-massacre and the Yugoslav-war.

In the film Ms. Beugel has an encounter with Mr. Alexandros Lykourazos, former conservative MP and hotshot lawyer in Athens. He openly states that he denies the fact that more than 7000 men and boys (and women and children) have been slaughtered in Srebrenica. At the time he used his personal friendship with Milosevic and Karadzic in his electoral campaign to become an MP. Despite all this, Mr. Lykourazos was recently invited by the renowned Woodrow Wilson Institute to be the Chairman of an important event on the 15th of May in Athens.

This has led to the indignation of many, amongst whom Bert Bakker, Former Chairman of the parliamentary investigative committee on Srebrenica in the Netherlands. He, and many other concerned prominent people, have written letters to the Woodrow Wilson Institute to strongly insist on cancelling Mr. Lykourazos' invitation. But to no avail. Mr. Lykourazos proceeded to be Chairman of the event and all the protest letters were ignored.

The involvement of Greek banks and citizens in the financing of Milosevic' regime has been proved. The Greeks were found guilty of smuggling weapons and oil during the UN-embargo, and Greek citizens were active as mercenaries in Srebrenica. Until this day, the Greek government refuses to investigate the involvement of Greek citizens and institutions in the war in former Yugoslavia.

Questions for Ingeborg Beugel

1. Ms. Beugel, you were deeply involved in Bosnian war during the nineties by reporting for different Dutch media outlets. After more than one decade from the war's end, what do you think from distance about what kind of war that was, what was the nature?

At the time it looked like a devilish machinery put to work by Milosevic, who wanted to continue his power and the Serb administrative hegemony in Former Yugoslavia. He machiavellistically managed to fill the country's vacuum, created by the fall of communism, that resulted in a deep sense of loss of identity in the hearts of many people, with intense feelings of nationalism. His famous statement on the 24th of April in 1992 to the Serb minority in Kosovo Polje on the Field of Blackbirds: "You will not be beaten again," still marks his dramatic - and in a way genius - change from communist party leader to fanatic nationalist.¹[1] The consequences were far from genius: no plural party system, war, ethnic cleansing, destruction and a people lost for many generations.

At the time the world was already dramatically changing: during the nineties globalization, technological progress and the appearance of computers and internet were taking over the world with dazzling speed. Nationalism - and religious and ethnic racism - is not only a cancer in any society, a false 'discourse' from some apparatchiks to blind the people in order to keep their power, it is also a phenomenon that isolates a society from the rest of the world and its progress. Thanks to Milosevic, Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina 'missed the boat'. Many regions in Former Yugoslavia are now struggling to survive whereas they could have been flourishing like the rest of the EU. (And it is incomprehensible and painful to see that Belgrade and Banjaluka still don't seem to understand that by opposing globalization, by sabotaging the International Tribunal, by not getting Karadzic and

¹[1] As shown in "Death of Yugoslavia", see:
<http://video.google.com/videosearch?q=death+of+yugoslavia&sitesearch>

Mladic to The Hague and by ignoring fundamental rules of democracy they still hinder their peoples chance for prosperity. The Serbs are still, today, as Mischa Glenny (BBC) once said, 'walking to the future backwards'.)

When I look back at the war now, ten years later, I see an even bigger pattern. Because the question remains: how could Milosevic mobilize so many people? How could the spiral of hate and violence, also from Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosnians, continue its destructive path for so long? With a more distant, lets say 'helicopter view', I am now convinced that it was also a war from the **backward countryside** against the more **developed city people**, from peasants against intelligentsia. I remember Sarajevo and Prishtina in the very early nineties with booming universities and modern, internationally interested citizens, very different from Belgrade. The intelligentsia that mattered in Belgrade opposed Milosevic quite quickly, but was immediately silenced and chased away. Many great Serb minds still live in Diaspora all over the world and they feel that Serbia is not their country any more. And it is no surprise that the overthrow of Milosevic in Belgrade was done by the students (Otpor), although, unfortunately, their victory didn't last long enough.

After all this time it looks like the more isolated, less educated Serbs took - unconsciously - their inferiority complex, anger and wrath - because of the fact that they had been excluded from development and progress by their leaders - out on the cities of Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo. And in the end, on the whole country. It is the irony of history that by doing so, they isolated themselves even more and continue to do so.

Worldwide we witness a definite movement from countryside to cities. This year for the first time in history, the population of cities is bigger than the population in the countryside. Not always with positive results, one of the gruesome side effects of globalization are the endless slums in monstrous cities like Sao Paulo and New Delhi. But the fact is: it happens and no one can stop it. The Serbs (and Croats) at the time couldn't stop it either.

2. You stayed dedicated to Bosnia and Herzegovina even after the war. In 2002 you made a documentary named 'The Greek's way' showing to the general public support that Greece unselfishly gave to war criminals such as Ratko Mladic. Simply, why did you do it?

I was very much in love with a Greek man who was the advisor of Melina Mercouri, at the time the Greek minister of culture, known in Holland not only as a former film diva, but more as a Jeanne d' Arc against the Greek dictatorship. I went to interview her in 1983 and met my later husband. I lived for some years among the political Greek elite and I was impressed: the people around the very first Greek socialist prime minister Andreas Papandreu, like Melina and others, were highly intelligent, full of enthusiasm and idealism, internationally oriented and extremely cosmopolitan. It was a time of hope and progress after the dark years of dictatorships and corrupt, selfish right wing governments. Not only did Papandreu make a total mess of everything - by the end of the eighties the socialist government turned out to be as inefficient and corrupt as the others - but to my great astonishment I saw in the nineties the Greek people ignoring totally what was going on in their neighboring country. The Greek press - with some very few and very courageous exceptions - blindly copied the Milosevic war propaganda. The Greeks had no correspondents in non Serb regions - NONE -, only in Pale and in Belgrade. They refused to read foreign newspapers or get informed through the internet. When they did, they disregarded foreign reports on ethnic cleansing as coming from a world wide ' Jewish, Vatican an Turkish conspiracy' - it sounds as laughable now as it did at the time. During discussions about what was going on in Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia and Kosovo, I lost many of my Greek friends, because

they simply did not believe what I had witnessed with my own eyes when I was traveling through Former Yugoslavia and Albania in order to make my reports. They referred constantly to conflicts and unresolved Balkan matters in the Middle Ages and refused to look at the present.

Once, in 1994, I traveled with a group of Greek civil servants to Banjaluka and Bihac. The group wanted to give aid to their 'orthodox Serb brothers', it was accompanied by many Greek journalists of the best Greek newspapers. I was the only foreigner. We drove through villages and towns where thousands of Muslims had been chased away, but the Greeks were only interested in destroyed orthodox churches. In one town I found a last Red Cross food distribution point, in some garage. Very sick and underfed Muslims, old people who were too weak to flee, got flour in plastic bags, their only food, because they couldn't buy anything from the Serbs. I dragged my Greek colleagues to that place. They saw what I saw, they heard what I heard: stories about rape, burning houses and ethnic cleansing that were corroborated by the Red Cross people - anonymously, because they had to stay neutral. On the way back I was suddenly an outcast in the bus, my Greek co-travelers now saw me as 'the enemy' and they even discussed the possibility to kick me out and leave me behind at a roadblock of drunken Bosnian Serb soldiers. I was 'saved' by two colleagues who finally stood up for me. Back in Greece I looked in the papers to see what my colleagues had written. Their stories were completely different from mine. The Red Cross scene was described nowhere, nothing about the town where 20.000 Muslims had to leave, nothing about the misery of the Muslims, only heartbreaking stories about the hardship (which was also true) of their Serb brothers. I was flabbergasted. How could the **press of a full EU member be so biased?** I called some of my Greek fellow journalists to ask them why. Most of them answered that if they would write what I wrote, they would lose their job. From that moment on I wanted to write and report about the Greek attitude towards the war in Yugoslavia, but my Dutch employers were not interested: Greece was in the periphery, the focus of Dutch attention was on Bosnia and the war itself.

Of course I heard during all that time the Greek **arguments about the danger of a 'Muslim axe' around Greece** - the far fetched possibility that Kosovo would join Albania to make a Great Albania, that would then 'sandwich' Greece with its old enemy Turkey. Of course there was the Greek argument of orthodox solidarity and the old hatred against Muslims, allies of Turkey. But I never bought it. The Greeks fought with no 'orthodox love' at all their Macedonian brothers over the name Macedonia. And as far as their deep historical feelings of trauma and hatred against Muslims go: Greece was at the time the only anti Israel and pro Palestine EU member with excellent relations with Kadafi and other Muslim Arab countries. Greece's anti Muslim Bosnian and pro Belgrade feelings seemed much more inspired by historical anti American feelings. The U.S. betrayed Greece after World War II, contributed to the Greek civil war from '45 to '49 and supported the Turks in Cyprus. So: if the Americans were pro Bosnia and anti Belgrade, the Greeks were the opposite.

In the meantime Greek nationalism was growing. My son of 6 years old one day came back from school 3 hours late, he was excited and his cheeks were flushed. When I asked him what he had been doing, he explained that he had had a great time: the teachers had taken all the kids to the harbor - we were living on the small Greek island Hydra at the time - where they had to demonstrate. They were given banners and had to shout "Europe, hands off Macedonia, Macedonia is Greek". My son had no idea where and what Macedonia was, he was too young. When I went to the school to complain about this indoctrination of innocent little children - they might as well, for the sake of argument, have told my son to shout that all homosexuals should be killed or women are not allowed to work - I was told that if I did not like their Greek education, I should move back to Holland. When after Srebrenica I saw many Greeks openly denying what had happened there, I did.

With pain in my heart, because I also, in spite of everything, loved Greece very much - and still do. I just did not want my children to grow up in a country so blind and so nationalistic. I started to work for a well rated current affairs magazine at Dutch Public TV (KRO Netwerk) and because of my background I was sent regularly back to the Balkans.

Then something funny and incredible happened. In the summer of 1998 I was back in our house on Hydra for holidays. While I was lying on the beach, I saw helicopters above the island. In town I heard a strange story about the local pharmacist who had gone swimming with his family in the bay of Molos further down the coast, in front of the mansion of a Greek industrial tycoon. Suddenly armed frogmen emerged from the water and chased them away at gunpoint. He was furious, but got no explanation. There was a strange atmosphere on the island, I couldn't put my finger on it, but I was on vacation and let it pass. Two years later, in 2000, a friend of mine on the island made a slip of the tongue. She said something like: 'you know, that was the summer that Milosevic was spending his last vacation on the island.' Then I found out that Milosevic and his whole family had spent 4 weeks in 1998 as a guest in the mansion at Molos, where he was brought in great secrecy and guarded by Greek and Serb armed personnel, under special protection of the Greek president. Many people on the island had worked for the family during that time and nobody had told me or other journalists. The whole island had been sworn to secrecy.

I was devastated. How could I, an eager journalist, have missed that? I felt a strong urge to somehow, some day, do something about this amazing discovery.

But time passed. The worlds' focus moved to 9/11, Afghanistan and Iraq. The attention for what had happened in Former Yugoslavia was fading fast.

In Holland things were a little bit different: because of what the Dutch blue helmets (UN-soldiers) had (not) done in Srebrenica, the government had required a study about Srebrenica. When the report came out in the beginning of 2002, the conclusions were so devastating that our prime minister resigned, along with the Dutch government. Elections were held and a parliamentary inquiry commission was installed. But still, who in Holland would be interested in Greece's attitude during the Yugoslav war - and in Milosevic's last vacation on a Greek island? And who would be interested in my story? I was just a small journalist with a strong opinion to which nobody wanted to listen.

Then Mr. **Takis Michas** called. Out of the blue. Like a deus ex machina. He was one of these very few courageous Greek journalists who had dared to voice another opinion, something that had made his life in Athens very difficult. He told me he had written a book: ***The Unholy Alliance, Greece and Serbia in the nineties***. All I wanted to talk about was in that book. And more: he had found out **that Greek mercenaries had participated in the slaughter of Srebrenica**. This was my chance. I changed networks, and also from TV current affairs to IKON TV documentaries. My new employer was suddenly very interested in this, until then, unknown story about Greece's role in the Yugoslav war. In October 2002, during the municipal elections in Greece, I could finally make my film: **The Greek Way**.

Sometimes it takes many years to make a film. You must be patient and hold on to your idea, even when it seems hopeless.

My film caused a tremendous outrage in Holland. Many Dutch go to Greece for vacation and they had had no idea. People in Greece were very angry with me and of course it was never shown on Greek TV. **I am very proud that now Bosnian TV will show it (as I have heard). But it is probably more important that it will be shown in Serbia and Greece. I keep hoping.....**

3. You paid attention to support that came to Bosnian Serbs from Greece but most of the world disregard it and focus more on Islamic fundamentalism in

Bosnia. Do you think that Greek's part is passé at this moment or have some unfinished business yet about telling the full story?

The Greeks still have a lot of work to do: no democracy can be self respecting if it doesn't look honestly at its past. In Holland we had to do that with World War II, just like the Germans. And of course we have our shameful past in Indonesia and Suriname. It took us years, it is still a 'touchy subject'. And we still have our black history in Srebrenica, but at least some people took political responsibility there. It is especially amazing that Greece AFTER World War II, in modern times, as a full member of the EU could be so blind in the nineties about the war in Yugoslavia. When I made my film in 2002, a candidate from the socialist PASOK party who wanted to be mayor in some district at the outskirts of Athens, pictured himself on his electoral brochure next to Karadzic. He had organized Karadzic's visit to Athens, that was supported by the religious and political Greek elite and thousands of citizens, in 1994. Karadzic was still in power. But in 2002, he was officially indicted and after Osama Bin Laden together with Mladic the most wanted man on the planet. How can a modern Greek politician, in order to get more votes, show himself at the side of a war criminal? Obviously because he expects voters to approve. Many people I know have by now changed their opinion. But there is still no Greek politician who will speak openly about what was done to **the Muslim Bosnians** and to Kosovo. There are still people like Mr. Lykourezos, former conservative MP and hot shot lawyer in Athens, who openly denies what happened in Srebrenica and is proud to show pictures of himself with Mladic, Karadzic and Milosevic in his office - one wall is covered with them. And still most people on Hydra do not regret having had Milosevic as a guest on their island. Mercenaries who participated in the killings in Srebrenica are known, but not brought to justice. Greece's collaboration with the Tribunal is still very poor. It is all in my film. When you watch it, you will see how much 'Greek unfinished business' there still is ...

4. This documentary stayed actual up to this very moment. War criminals are still at large and even they still enjoy support. How do you explain this?

I can not explain it. It is shameful, incomprehensible and very bad for Greece's reputation and image. The Greek are proud and nationalistic. Its difficult for them to admit to such a big mistake. When the press in a country tells lies to its people for over a decade, when no politician or public figure stands up to correct things, the process of acknowledgment and recognition will be very slow. One day someone in Greece should apologize. As I said, I keep hoping....

5. How did you receive information that Washington-based Woodrow Wilson Center is planning to invite Ratko Mladic's lawyer and friend to present its annual awards for greatest achievements in the field of humanism?

Takis Michas sent me a mail. I immediately mailed every one important I know. I herewith include the mail Mr. Bakker wrote to the Wilson Center at my request - Mr. Bakker is a former Dutch MP and former chairman of our parliamentary inquiry commission about Srebrenica:

----- Original Message -----

To: sharon.mccarter@wilsoncenter.org

Sent: Thursday, April 10, 2008 13:39

Subject: your event on May 15, Athens

Dear Ms. McCarter,

It came to my notice that your institute is planning to have Mr. Lykourazos to chair the event on May 15.

This would be a serious mistake. As former chairman of the Netherlands parliamentary committee of investigation into Srebrenica, I was shocked not only by this planned role of Mr. Lykourazos, but by the way you explain this choice as well in several emails that have been brought to my attention. It is really without any doubt now, that the support by the Greek nationalists for the alleged war criminals Karadzic and Mladic was wrong and outrageous. Mr. Lykourazos is a representative of this Greek attitude, and I think it cannot be rejected seriously and firmly enough.

These days, the world is protesting against the way the Chinese are behaving in Tibet. People all over the globe are standing up for that right and just cause. In this light, however, it's unbelievable how the recent genocide on the people in Srebrenica by the (Bosnian) Serbs can be so easily forgotten and neglected. The fact that Mr. Lykourazos is supported by many Greek people is really of no importance in your defence. It doesn't make his or their views more acceptable or right.

I urgently suggest you reconsider the participation and chairmanship of Mr. Lykourazos, thus avoiding the stain and blame of history to come over your respectable and important institute. Knowing the reputation and objectives of the former president Woodrow Wilson as quoted on your website, you can really not hold on to this.

Yours faithfully,

Bert Bakker
The Hague, the Netherlands
Former Member of Parliament D66 party (1994-2006)
Former chairman of the parliamentary investigative committee on Srebrenica.

6. Six years after your documentary you had some strong comments about the situation regarding war criminals and the case we just mentioned. How come? It is a trend not to care any more about it.

What do you mean? Its not MY trend. I do care. And many, many people like me care as much and as well.

7. What actually keeps you interested in the Balkans and Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular?

It has been such an important part of my life, how can I ever forget? And how can I forget the friends I made in Belgrade, Sarajevo, Prishtina and Skopje? My daughters best friend here in Amsterdam is a Muslim refugee from Serbia, her mom and I still talk about what happened when we meet. My wonderful cleaning lady is also a Bosnian refugee, with her husband and her two daughters. I fought for 7 years to help them get their Dutch residents permit. (They recently got it! The trauma of having to fight for a stupid piece of paper for so many years after all the hardship she and her family had to endure was an added traumatic experience, one that doesn't make me proud about my own country at all...) The war might be over, its still everywhere around me.

8. Today you also work for Dutch media. Can you tell us is there an interest for this region beyond what is war crime, UN's Tribunal in the Hague and war misery in general?

I find a general worrying disinterest in the West in what is going on in the world. In Dutch Public TV, terrorized by ratings, broadcasting a lot of entertaining crap, some people like me and many others, fight very hard to keep informing the public about serious matters. There is less and less money for travels abroad, documentaries are broadcasted only late at night when everybody sleeps and Dutch journalists get

to hear more and more that the subjects they want to report about 'should have a Dutch angle or connection'. Ridiculous and very short sighted in these times of wars and globalization. When our future queen Maxima (who comes from Argentina) goes shopping in Buenos Aires, the whole press flies out. When we want to make a report about how the Argentinean middle class is fading with the speed of light, nobody seems interested. But believe me, my colleagues and I keep fighting and sometimes we win. Once again, I keep hoping Maybe one day this 'trend' you mention will change.

9. Were you visiting Bah after the war or lately, and impressions about the situation here do you have?

In 2003 I made another film, a film about the in my opinion scandalous refusal of the Dutch parliament to hear witnesses, widows from Srebrenica, in The Hague during the parliamentary inquiry. So I brought the inquiry to Tuzla: I took videos of the hearings to the widows of Srebrenica and registered their comments about what was happening in Holland. I met Hasan Nuhanovic, the famous translator to the Dutch UN-battalion who lost his parents and brother in the hell of Srebrenica, because the Dutch military refused to protect them. He made me understand that the war is far from over: all the 'little people', the policemen, jail guards, soldiers who actually killed and raped are still free. Some big fish might be in jail in Scheveningen, but what about the policeman who killed his mother? Some friends and colleagues of mine made this huge project, trying to reconcile people who were estranged from each other during the war in Yugoslavia: VIDEO LETTERS. My husband and I helped them a little bit, so they invited us to the premiere in Sarajevo in 2005. I saw that some people are ready to reconcile, but too many are too traumatized to even consider it. So there is a long way to go. I repeat myself: I keep hoping!