OPEN LETTER TO
JOSEPH BIDEN, THE U.S. VICE PRESIDENT,
JOHN KERRY, THE U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE,
FEDERICA MOGHERINI, HIGH REPRESENTATIVE OF THE E.U. FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY POLICY,
JOHANNES HAHN, E.U. COMMISSIONER FOR EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD
POLICY & ENLARGEMENT NEGOTIATIONS,
THE EUROPEAN UNION FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL,
THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
AND
THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

As former representatives of the United States government, authors, human rights activists, and academics who have closely followed the breakup of the former Yugoslavia and Serbia’s subsequent efforts to resolve the many war crimes committed during that period, we are deeply concerned by the slow pace of Serbia’s domestic war crimes prosecutions, including its failure to resolve the murders of Ylli, Agron, and Mehmet Bytyqi, three brothers who were executed and dumped on top of a mass grave seventeen years ago today.

Since the position’s inception in 2003, the Serbian war crimes prosecutor has indicted no senior Serbian military or police officials, no government officials, and no persons of any rank involved in the removal from Kosovo and reburial in Serbia of more than 900 Albanian bodies – a deliberate “cover-up operation”. Prosecutors filed only seven indictments in 2014, the majority of which were the result of complete investigatory files transferred from prosecutors in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2015, they only issued two, neither of which was confirmed. This is not a record to be proud of.

In the Bytyqi case, a Serbian President and the two most recent Prime Ministers have repeatedly promised resolution since 2006, but have failed to take adequate steps to secure this result. Instead, reports indicate that a primary suspect has intimidated witnesses and remains close to senior members of the current government.

International and domestic NGOs, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the European Commission, have diagnosed numerous problems with Serbia’s war crimes record. Uniformly, each cites a lack of political will and political interference as impeding accountability.

Similarly, witnesses will never come forward and cases will not be resolved when government Ministers host “welcome home” parties for returning convicts of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and suggest there be a political loyalty test when selecting the chief war crimes prosecutor.

Though the ICTY is winding down, the hard work for its countries of focus is nowhere near complete. Across the Balkans, tens of thousands of victims and their families deserve closure. Henceforth, only domestic prosecutions will have the ability to deliver them justice.
To date, Serbia’s record has been a dismal one that is ultimately unacceptable. Therefore, we urge you and the entities you represent to take constructive steps to ensure better commitment and effort by Serbia’s leaders and institutions to resolve war crimes cases, including the Bytyqi Brothers case. This issue should be raised as part of your continuing dialogue with the Serbian government, parliament and civil society leaders.

Sincerely,

Ambassador Robert L. Barry (ret.)  
former U.S. Ambassador to Bulgaria and Indonesia  
former Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina

Tanya Domi  
Adjunct Professor, Columbia University  
Advisor, Freedom House

Praveen Madhiraju  
pro bono advisor to the Bytyqi family

Nataša Kandić  
Founder, Humanitarian Law Center  
Coordinator, RECOM process

Sonja Biserko  
Chair  
Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia

Sandra Orlović  
Executive Director  
Humanitarian Law Center

Jelena Milić  
Director  
Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies

Milica Kostić  
Legal Director  
Humanitarian Law Center

Goran Miletić  
Program Director for the Western Balkans  
Civil Rights Defenders

David Tolbert  
President  
International Center for Transitional Justice
C. Dixon Osburn  
*Executive Director*  
*Center for Justice & Accountability*

Fred Abrahams  
*Author & Researcher*

Kelly Dawn Askin  
*former Senior Legal Officer for International Justice*  
*Open Society Justice Initiative*

Nina Bang-Jensen  
*former Executive Director, Coalition for International Justice*  
*Senior Peace Fellow, Public International Law & Policy Group*

Kurt Bassuener  
*Senior Associate*  
*Democratization Policy Council*

Holly Cartner  
*Human Rights Lawyer*

Stefanie Frease  
*Senior Associate*  
*Democratization Policy Council*

James R. Hooper  
*Independent Consultant*

Maxine Marcus  
*International Crimes Prosecutor and Investigator*  
*Expert in Transformative Justice for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*  
*Formerly Prosecuting Attorney at ICTY*

Pamela Merchant  
*former Executive Director*  
*Center for Justice and Accountability*

Glenn C. Nye  
*former Member of Congress & U.S. Diplomat*

Dr. Valery Perry  
*Senior Associate*  
*Democratization Policy Council*
Florian Bieber
Professor
University of Graz

Robert Kogod Goldman
Professor of Law & Louis C. James Scholar
American University Washington College of Law;
former President, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

András Riedlmayer
Bibliographer, Documentation Center for Islamic Art and Architecture, Harvard University
Editor, International Justice Watch

Naomi Roht-Arriaza
Distinguished Professor of Law and Thomas Miller Chair
University of California Hastings College of Law

Daniel Serwer
Professor
Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies

Dr. Paul R. Williams
Rebecca Grazier Professor of Law and International Relations
American University

Laurel E. Fletcher
Clinical Professor of Law & Director of the International Human Rights Law Clinic
University of California, Berkeley, School of Law

Aida A. Hozic
Associate Professor of International Relations, Department of Political Science
University of Florida

Dr. Paula M. Pickering
Associate Professor of Government
College of William and Mary

Gabor Rona
Visiting Professor of Law
Cardozo Law School

Susana SáCouto
Executive Director, War Crimes Research Office
American University Washington College of Law
Milada Anna Vachudova  
*Jean Monnet Chair of EU Studies & Associate Professor of Political Science*  
*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

Dr. Arnaud Kurze  
*Assistant Professor of Justice Studies*  
*Montclair State University*

Nenad Stojanović  
*Visiting Research Scholar*  
*Princeton University*

Jasmin Hasić  
*PhD Candidate*  
*Université libre de Bruxelles and LUISS Guido Carli of Rome*

Jessie Hronesova  
*DPhil Candidate in Politics*  
*University of Oxford*