

## INSTEAD OF INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, there has been a large void in our history textbooks, in historical science and journalism, in social valuation and artistic presentation of a historical fact from the recent past. This bothered almost no one as very few people knew about the feat of Diana Obexer Budisavljević. Those who dared to speak openly about her were even fewer. For more than half a century, her deed was covered by the dust of neglect, ingratitude and intentional oblivion. It was only recently that some pieces of writing have been published about Diana and that her personality and work have been evoked. As the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Diana's death was marked on 20 August 2013, information about her became more frequent, mainly in the form of reports on remembrance events or interviews with those who were saved from Ustaša<sup>1</sup> camps within the "Action Diana Budisavljević". *The Diary of Anne Frank*, published a long

---

<sup>1</sup> Ustaša – the Croatian Revolutionary Organisation (UHRO). It was established in 1929 by Ante Pavelić in Italy. The name "Ustaša" originates from an older Croatian word meaning a rebel, guerrilla. Until 1941 it acted as a fascist terrorist organisation aiming to create an independent state of Croatia (covering Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Srem). In 1941, UHRO members came to power in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). Their main hindrance was the large Serbian minority (1.8 million of total 6.3 million of inhabitants) in the NDH territory. The Ustaša "solution" to the Serbian question implied three methods: through slaughters, persecution and conversion to Catholicism.

time ago, shocked and amazed the world, while *The Diary of Diana Budisavljević* waited for 58 years – it was published only in 2003 in Zagreb, in mere 700 copies.

We are Diana's eternal debtors – those whose lives she saved, we who have belatedly come to know about her deed, and all future generations. It is no exaggeration to say that Diana's debtor is the entire peace-loving humanity. This book is only a modest contribution to the payment of that debt. Many generations remained deprived of the knowledge about the Woman Courage, about our *Magnum Mater*, who passed away without a single piece of acknowledgement. And her deed was “doubtless one of the largest humanitarian actions in the Second World War”, as historian Milan Koljanin from the Institute for Serbia's Contemporary History wrote.

Assembling the pieces of Diana Budisavljević's biography (the story about her truly confirms that reality may sometimes be more fantastic than a fairy tale), we have relied on a number of sources: short newspaper articles, reports of research journalists, historical and journalistic books – notably the following: *Bili su samo deca 1* (“They Were Only Children 1”) by Dragoje Lukić (Belgrade–Laktaši, 2000), *Putevima smrti kozarske djece* (“On Death Roads of Children from Kozara”) by Duško Tomić (Prijeđor, 1990), *Ustaški logori* (“Ustaša Camps”) by Mirko Peršen (Zagreb, 1990), *Deca u logorima smrti* (“Children in Death Camps”) by Petar Stanivuković and Jurica Kerbler (Belgrade, 1986), *Obraz – kad je smrt bila bliža od košulje* (“Saving Face – When Death was Imminent”) by Drago Šormaz (Belgrade, 2004), *Kozara, spomenik našeg pamćenja* (“Kozara, the Monument of Our Remembrance”) – collection of essays (Belgrade, 2012), research conducted by Jasmina Tutunović Trifunov, published in *Zbornik radova Muzeja žrtava geno-*

*cida* (“Collection of Works of the Museum of Genocide Victims”, Belgrade 2012), as well as Diana’s *Diary*.<sup>2</sup>

We occasionally departed from descriptions and commented on some events, comparing Diana’s endeavour with similar ones, and attempting to fathom the causes of some phenomena (for instance, the long-lasting intentional neglect). Following book announcements<sup>3</sup> published in “Politikin magazin”<sup>4</sup>, many readers contacted the publisher by letters and telephone, with some of them providing information unknown to us. We wish to express our sincere gratitude to all of them – those named and unnamed in this book, from authors of newspaper articles and reports to writers of books. It is everyone’s merit, either smaller or greater, that Diana has been salvaged from oblivion, that a book about her, dear readers, is now in your hands.

This book does not present everything that Diana Budisavljević was and did. Its volume does not allow for this either. However, let us hope that the first book about Diana Budisavljević will not remain the last one. Because Diana is the Maid of Orléans of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is only that she did not carry a steel sword in her hands like the lady from Orléans five hundred years ago, but had a large human heart in her chest, ready for unselfish sacrifice.

---

<sup>2</sup> Data and shorter quotations whose sources are not given in footnotes derive from the above works.

<sup>3</sup> The original in Serbian was published in late 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Beogradska revija, issues of 31 March and 4 August 2013.