



**Address by H. E. Mr. Tomislav Nikolic,  
President of the Republic of Serbia,  
at Staro Sajmiste Memorial Park  
Belgrade, 27 January 2015**

Distinguished representatives of the National Assembly  
and the Government of the Republic of Serbia,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Civil unrest across Europe, an increasing number of extremist movements and the conflict in Ukraine are all reminders to us to remember the suffering of the Serbian, Jewish, Roma and other peoples in World War II. The horrors of the First and Second World Wars that changed the course of civilization and left an indelible mark upon the history of mankind should be re-examined from different angles. The more so because they are not only disasters, judging by their essence and consequences, but also for the sake of eliminating similar or the same causes that might bring about similar effects.

The Holocaust is the most shameful and repugnant phenomenon in all of human history. It is unique according to fanaticism and cruelty, and it claimed over a very short period of time immeasurable human lives, which must not fade into oblivion. And the time passes without providing an answer to the question as to whether silence on the crimes is the result of condoning or of fear. Unfortunately, the answer to that question is more and more distant.

One thing is certain: If we are human, we cannot allow the time to obscure the truth and change our attitude towards this world's evil. To minimize figures and alter facts by pushing other people's suffering into the remotest parts of our heart is to forget that those people had their names, faces and lives.

Dear friends,

Human existence goes hand-in-hand with suffering. What was created through perennial struggle with the elements, people destroyed by conquering territories belonging to others, through mass murders, looting of property and war horrors. In the

20<sup>th</sup> century, we shamed ourselves by fighting two World Wars which were remembered as the worst devastations in terms of their scale and ferocity in all the history of humanity. World War II, which will be the reason for our getting together here as long as Serbia exists, has left the mark of bald evil. More than 55 million people were killed and one nation faced extermination and perishing. That was the courageous and proud people of Israel.

Serbia points out its commitment to the Statement of December 2014 made by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. The Holocaust has been for decades now the subject of study of lawyers and historians. The former have studied it in their efforts to have justice done and to punish the perpetrators and their accomplices, while the latter are in search of the truth that will answer the questions, remove doubts, explain the causes and expose the purpose of the crimes committed. Doubting facts and evidence is neither possible nor permissible, but the quest for explanation and the study of the downfall of morals and the disease of the human mind, go on regardless. Fascism has brought people, through discipline, to commit unforgivable crimes and mobilized masses on the path of self-destruction. Fascism managed to blend the incompatible: the interests of major capital, politicians and the poor.

Hitler's ideology and propaganda revolved around the simple and one-sided thesis of telling a lie first and then repeating it incessantly. Hitler misled the masses in a cabaret style by adding a suggestive but hypnotic spice to his speeches. "Our German people needs the suggestive power lying in self-confidence. This self-confidence must be instilled in the young members of our nation since childhood. The training must be based on the conviction that the German young man is unconditionally superior to others. This implies self-confidence without experience and acceptance of suggestions while ignoring own observations".

The backbone of Nazi ideology was the super-man, Caucasian of godly attributes, having little pensive elements; they were all given beforehand. The enemies epitomized first and foremost in the Jews were those electrons countering the role played by the ideological proton. Why have they been chosen? Perhaps, the perilous feature of that minority was that they were overrepresented among prestigious occupations, especially in the arts, finance and science. This fact had its social and political causes without putting any blame on the Jews whatsoever. The Nazis described them as a bunch of alien usurers and parasitic philistines, hostile to anything German. They depicted better-off Jews as initiators of wrongdoings against the Germans and as the cause of the economic downturn and inflation of the 1920s.

This is how Sloterdijk pinned down the roots of this hatred in the right way: "By mass killings, the fascists wanted to smash the mirror that the Jewish nation, by their mere existence, held in front of the fascistic arrogance. For a fascist, the inflated heroic Mr. Nobody could be best seen through by the Jews who, taught by their own tradition of suffering, were ironical of any demonstration of force".

Eine kühne Jude (the insolent Jew) became the main watchword of fascism. It was an adaptable, unimposing, and persistent living philosophy of the Jewish people that the grand German fascists resented so much to build extermination camps for those who stood in the way of their excellence.

In addition to the alleged moral, religious, racial and practical justification, the Jewish people were portrayed as the most responsible culprit for all their misfortunes, serving as the basis for German unification. Himmler gave instructions to his underlings in this way: "All the Jews we can lay our hands on must be exterminated without exception. If we fail now to destroy the biological basis of Jewishness, they will destroy the German nation one day"...

Anti-Semitism was to serve as an idea that will bind together all of the German people and strongly unite the whole of Europe under German leadership. Anti-Semitism spread even beyond German borders by propaganda identifying the Jews as culprits for all the problems and the hard living conditions. This thesis is of course false; it was launched in order to incite anti-Semitic sentiments among other nations as well, nations that will themselves be the next in line for extermination in the next wave.

As the war years elapsed, the mass annihilation techniques advanced and the most fragile hearts turned into stone. Lines of innocent people entered death chambers to the tunes of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. "Move", hissed a German soldier nervously at the camp inmates, as they entered the gas chamber. "It will take about 12 minutes; they are scratching and scraping, but to no avail", said the head of the camp to his new colleague. "When you open the door, the sight will not be very pleasant, but the job will be done", he noted mechanically. Everyone fabricated their own reasons for such extermination of Jews: Himmler considered it clearance of lice, Eichmann saw it as a political instrument and for the Fuehrer it was the beginning and the end of his view of the world.

Dear friends,

There were around 35 000 Jews living in Serbia alone before the outbreak of the Second World War, experiencing, under occupation, phases of discrimination, deprivation, plunder, to the ultimate goal of total extermination. In all the territories of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia more than 67 000 Jews and 650 000 Serbs were killed. Staro Sajmiste, where we are now standing, is one of the sites of execution which reminds us also of the tragic fates of the innocent people that went untold, as the mouths of the victims were eternally silenced. Are there any words that could describe that suffering, can we fathom what had happened before the eyes of victims and their executioners?

Distinguished guests,

Serbia will never forget the crimes committed against its own and the friendly Jewish people. I will recall that this year we are marking an important common anniversary: the anniversary of defeat of fascism.

Wired fences of the camp for the extermination of a people were pulled down 70 years ago. There were people behind the walls who, in order to survive, built walls inside them, people who no longer believed that life was possible, that freedom was possible. The efforts to reveal the truth of the plight during the Holocaust have been made for seventy years, and to familiarize the greatest possible number of people with the truth. Will the truth be remembered by the future generations, depends on each and every one of us. For this reason, insistence on commemorating the anniversary of the defeat of fascism is more important today than ever before.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Nowadays, regrettably, we can hear again the dismaying slogans cried out by a large number of ultra-rightists: “Germany to the Germans, we want history which does not exaggerate the German share of the blame for the wars”, and demands for a more equitable apportioning of responsibility for the causes and consequences of the wars.

The modern-day friendly Germany is grand and committed to freedom. It is the backbone of the European Union, united with the whole world in the struggle for a just world where people are equal. Therefore it continues battling against the revival of those ideas that threatened to shatter mankind by sparking off WWII.

At no cost will modern Serbia take part in mindless annihilation, for it too suffered throughout the two World Wars, and hosts many friends among the members of the Jewish people, the people whose blood, mixed with the Serbian blood, had soaked this land. We will do everything in our power not to become collateral damage of anyone’s aspirations to fulfill their interests. We will do everything to make Serbia, as author Simovic writes, “rise from the ashes where thrust, unite if shattered to pieces, recover its vision if blinded, revive from all the tombs and sufferings if killed, tortured, and set ablaze, slaughtered, trampled upon, hanged and crucified, buried in tombs marked and unmarked”,

**live the life worthy of a human being, so that its people fear nothing, gathered under one flag of freedom!**

**May His grand Name be glorious and sacred!**