

A Word from the Editors

Wars, marked by the extensive use of organized violence, have left the deepest, negative, imprints in the history of mankind. In contemporary warfare we have reached the point where the overall survival on Earth comes into question. Therefore, it is not surprising that various social and creative activities were initiated worldwide, focusing on finding the ways to stop armed conflicts, to diminish their destructive outcome, and primarily - to protect war victims.

After the Second World War, based on a number of features, the European continent was seen as an international area distinct by the largest number of established security systems and standards, and by highly developed awareness. In accordance with this, a public belief that was created, considered Europe immune to international armed conflicts.

Regrettably, Serbian armed aggression (1990-1995) had not only put an end to these misconceptions but raised a justifiable doubt about the concept and purpose of European and worldly protective and humanitarian systems, based on the very act of aggression as well as on the situation in which Serbian aggression was conceived and carried out. All international war rules and humanitarian conventions were drastically violated, and certain crimes committed by Serbian formations had not been anticipated even by international law.

In the course of Serbian armed aggression, the most extensive destruction and human suffering, almost an ultimate concentration of evil of its own kind, took place in Vukovar in 1991. This fact was early recognized in both Croatia and internationally, and the phenomenon of *Vukovar '91* was attributed its deserving symbolic values. However, due to various causes and motives, confrontation with the phenomenon of *Vukovar '91* in terms of needed scientific researches was avoided at the level of Croatia as well as at the level of international structures. Furthermore, a con-

tinuous stigmatization of the Croatian Homeland War as the crucial element of the contemporary Croatian national identity is obvious.

In this situation *Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences* initiated in 1998 a symposium entitled *Vukovar '91 - seven years after* which is afterwards held every year. Prominent scientists and public figures from Croatia and abroad had participated at the symposia with their presentations on different aspects of the events and significance involved in the meaning of *Vukovar '91*.

This proceedings includes papers that were presented at international symposia *Vukovar '91 - ten years after* (in 2001) and *Vukovar '91 - eleven years after* (in 2002). The title of the first symposium was *International Echoes of Vukovar '91* and of the second *Human Rights and Concentration Camp Experiences*. The papers in the proceedings do not follow their actual order of presentation but are classified according to their topics in four different chapters making up a consistent and comprehensive book.

The papers, provided in Croatian and English, opened up a question of international reverberations and significance of *Vukovar '91* and as such, represent a valuable contribution to a better understanding of these tragic events and their long-term consequences. We most ardently hope that this proceedings will have its share in the universal efforts to prevent tragic experiences like *Vukovar '91* in the future.

Editors