



**BUDAPEST CENTRE**  
**FOR THE INTERNATIONAL**  
**PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE**  
**AND MASS ATROCITIES**

## **Prevention of Mass Atrocities in Practice**

### **Roundtable**

Pre-event of the VIII. Budapest Human Rights Forum

organized by the Budapest Centre for the International Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities and the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade

### **„Role of Journalists in Prevention of Genocide and Countering Extremism”**

Date: 11 November, 2015  
Between 14.30 – 17.15

Venue: Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade  
H - 1016 Budapest, Bérc utca 13-15.

## **Introductory Speech**

Gyorgy Tatar  
Chair  
Budapest Centre for the International  
Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities

The pre-event is a tradition in our activities. Each year since our inception in 2010 we organize an event in Budapest which attempts to tackle some specific horizontal dimension of mass atrocities prevention.

It is our tradition to convene in this pre-event a wide range of actors, researchers, practitioners, governmental and non-governmental agencies, international and Hungarian authorities. In the background of this idea, stood the ambition to collect the wisdom of each stakeholder and combine theory with practice. This is not the first time we tackle the role of the media in Mass Atrocity Prevention. That time we looked into the topic from the angle of how we could target and counter hate speech.

When speaking about mass atrocities in legal terms, we refer to the four crimes: genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Speaking a bit more commonly, under mass atrocity crimes we mean the crimes which are committed or even intended to be committed against a specific group of people for ethnical, religious and other similar reasons. Consequently, we speak about crimes which are perpetrated against some minority and vulnerable group of people.

Being an organization with a rather pragmatic approach, the Budapest Centre considers its mission to raise the awareness of mass atrocities and mobilize all possible actors who are able to contribute to the prevention of these crimes. We believe that journalists, particularly those being in crisis zones, are in key positions and in possession of key information. They may play key role in timely signaling threats and risks and also contributing to preventive actions early on.

From the aspect of mass atrocity prevention, we believe that journalists have among others two main responsibilities:

Firstly, they can provide information showing that behind statistics and political decisions there are human beings with individual problems, traumas and happiness, of course. They may transmit not only the facts, but they may also explain the complexity of situations and the background of the events. They may also help understand the complexity of the given situation and outline possible ways of how to pursuit universal human rights at regional and local levels. In doing so, they may generate peace and harmony, help heal traumas and wounds. But we may not forget that they also may fuel tensions and conflicts.

The second thing they can do is to facilitate dialogue among various actors and decision makers as a sort of messengers of opinions and views. And dialogues may again bring peace and result in long-term and sustainable solutions.

We came together today to discuss these issues and challenges in general terms. But in the spirit of our pragmatic and practical approach and given its actuality, I think nowadays it is impossible to convene an event the agenda of which is focused on security, human rights violations and prevention of conflicts and extremism without touching upon the issue of migration and its implications.

We have been following the events linked to refugees and migration from the aspect of mass atrocities. You may read the official position of the Budapest Centre at our website. According to our knowledge the point of departure of any process which might lead to mass atrocities is when we divide people between „us” and „them”. We consider migrants as a special category of minorities as they have specificities in multiple terms. They are strangers

in the eyes of the hosting population. Moreover, they may represent another civilization and religion. Coming from different environment they are accustomed to other habits, laws, values and rules. That multiplicity of features will have to be tackled and responded in multiple and complex manner. The threat of the process lies in the possibility that „we” separate ourselves from „them”, the migrants and refugees who evidently represent a minority in the society. Their separation and marginalization could be followed by segregation. The segregation may in turn lead to polarization within each society, and polarization may provoke hate speech and fuel hatred. And we do know that hatred is the hotbed of radicalization and extremism. That said, we see a potential threat and risk in migration from the point of view of mass atrocities. While painting the devil on the wall, I must also underline that not each division and polarization leads automatically to the tragic results outlined above.

We used to compare the globalized world to a huge village where fences and walls between people belong to the past. The mission of the Budapest Centre is not about looking backwards to the past. We look forward and work for a better future. That is without division of human beings. We are convinced that dividing lines could and should be replaced by laws and rules which ensure peace, safety and fundamental human rights.

Migration is a global challenge. Migration is not a brand new phenomenon. But the globalized world as a result of enormous progress in communication and transport has strategically improved the possibilities for people to change places. Some people decide to change place in order to escape hell. Some wish to live better. Both intentions are fully justified. The trend is unstoppable. However, we may not live in illusions. There are also those who want to misuse the current migration wave and plan to come to cause damage to us. We must be prepared and equipped to filter, stop and isolate those who come to destroy and threaten our safety and security! We must learn to live together with this new challenge and the new threats and risks accompanying it. A particularly important period will be the winter season ahead of us, therefore, we think it is of paramount significance that we discuss these issues from the aspect of mass atrocity prevention and countering radicalism and extremism during our event.

Global challenges such as migration must be responded globally. All international actors will have to show solidarity and share the burdens in that respect. Europe, the European Union may not disappoint the world either. I am sure, I will shock some people by stating that we must be proud that many in the world chose Europe for their travel and migration target as they see us as a safe heaven and as a hope for better life.

We should respond to the challenges through pursuing the shared European values such as humanity, dignity, tolerance, respect, non-discrimination and solidarity. Let me stress that these are values which are in the focus of mass atrocities prevention, too. And while we must live up to our commitments, we should make clear: our capabilities are also limited. We are able to offer home and help for all migrants under limited conditions. We can provide shelter for refugees for limited period of time. In case of need we should set priorities where families, women with children and single women should be on the top of the lists. We also wish to ensure that the laws, habits, values and achievements of our civilization will be respected by the newcomers. I repeat my previous thought because I attach particular significance to it: each side has the right to feel secure and live in safety.

We clearly see that walls can protect, indeed. But we also see that walls can isolate and divide. And we must know that isolation impedes progress; division creates space for

conflicts. We have to be able to apply a balanced approach where the benefits prevail. From the aspects of preventing mass atrocities and countering radicalization and extremism we wish to see Europe and a world which is free from dividing lines be those spiritual, mental, technical or physical. We are convinced that both migrants and hosts could feel safe in a world which is without walls.

Mass atrocity crimes are specific crimes the prevention of which requires specific approach, capabilities and capacities. Having scrutinized the capabilities of the European Union two years ago and just looking into the capabilities of five African regional organizations we do know that the vast majority of actors do not have such capabilities. We need, therefore, to harness the available resources and create synergies among those willing to contribute to the translation of the norms into practice. That is why on behalf of the Budapest Centre I wish to seize this event as an opportunity to raise the idea of establishing a network of journalists committed to mass atrocities prevention. The aim of the network would be to better explain, on the basis of information from the field, and help better understand the environment and complexity of crisis situations from the aspect of mass atrocities and share relevant information with the public. The Budapest Centre is ready to provide space on its website and human resources to further process the information received from the journalists acting in crisis environment and transmit the managed information to the relevant decision maker bodies. We are aware of the difficulties and administrative barriers we are going to face when implementing the initiative. We also know that it could not come through without the support and benevolence of headquarters. Therefore, we call on the relevant media actors to contribute to the idea. I would highly appreciate if the participants of this roundtable would express their views in that regard and help us assess realistically the feasibility and viability of the idea.

To conclude, let me underline that the management of the Budapest Centre believes that dialogue is an effective tool for addressing societal challenges including extremism and mass atrocities. Dialogue has power. It enables the participants to harmonize and synchronize diverging views. It creates collective wisdom and coherence between diverging efforts and ambitions. Without coherence there is no progress and no development. We think that dialogue is an option to effectively respond to the new challenges of migration. Therefore, we argue for launching dialogue processes across Europe at all levels ranging from top politicians and parties to the communities, between migrants and hosts where the participants are ready to hear each other and feel be heard.