

## **Serbian president visits Croatia – a symbolic act of reconciliation at the graves**

The Serbian president, Boris Tadic, paid an unofficial visit to Croatia on 4 November. Tadic and his Croatian counterpart Ivo Josipovic visited the graves of Croat and Serb victims of the 1991–1995 war. The visit is part of the process of improving mutual relations to have been initiated by Ivo Josipovic – who has been the Croatian president since this February – after two years of tension.

The presidents paid tribute to war victims in Ovcara near Vukovar. This was the first time a Serbian president visited this place which for Croats is a symbol of the cruel treatment of the civilian population by Serb troops during the conflict in the Balkans. President Tadic apologised for the massacre of around two hundred Croat prisoners of war and civilians, who had been dragged out of a hospital in Vukovar after the city had fallen under Serb control in November 1991. Tadic and Josipovic also visited the graves of Serb victims in Paulin Dvor. The spirit of the visit was mainly that of a symbolic reconciliation of the two nations.

Disputed issues in Serbian-Croatian relations are to be discussed in detail during the official visit by President Tadic in Croatia, planned for the end of November. Serbia and Croatia disagree over the interpretation of the two countries' actions during the war of 1991–1995 they both were involved in. The unresolved issues include border delimitation, the situation of ethnic minorities, the return of refugees and the accountability for war crimes.

Relations between Serbia and Croatia have worsened after Zagreb recognised the independence of Kosovo in March 2008. The warming of bilateral relations, which has been observed since the beginning of 2010, is an effect of President Josipovic's policy, which is friendly towards Serbia, and also of the progress in the process of coming to terms with the war's legacy in Serbia (including President Tadic's visit to Srebrenica). The common tribute paid to the war victims will have a positive impact on mutual relations and may make the resolution of disputes easier in the future. <MarSz>