

TEXT OF THE SPEECH OF DR EFRAIM ZUROFF AT THE  
PRESIDENTIAL RESIDENCE IN ZAGREB, 1 FEBRUARY 2010:

Your Excellency President Mesić,  
Fellow honorees, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor and privilege to receive this decoration. Who could have imagined when the Wiesenthal Center began its activities in Croatia 15 years ago, that we would reach such an occasion.

So allow me to thank you President Mesić for this important recognition. But even more important, I want to thank you for your courage in helping Croatia face its Holocaust past and in building a better future by your unequivocal stance against neo-fascism and Ustasha nostalgia in all its manifestations, no matter how popular or innocent they may seem to be.

One of the greatest books of wisdom in the Jewish tradition is called Pirkei Avot, Ethics of the Fathers, a compilation of wise sayings that offer guidance on how to conduct one's life and deal with the wide variety of challenges faced by countries, societies and individuals.

In the initial chapter, there is an interesting debate regarding which values are most important for the existence of the world.

One view, that of Shimon ha-Tzadik (Simon the Righteous) is that it is Torah (the commandments), avoda (the worship of G-d) and gemilut chassidim (charity) which are the key principles which keep the world going.

But there is also another opinion, that of Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel who says that it is din (justice), emet (truth) and shalom (peace) which are the critical values which sustain the world and enable it to continue existing, and it is this view which I think applies best to Croatia today.

Democratic Croatia prosecuted and punished Dinko Šakić, a commandant of the infamous Jasenovac concentration camp despite his professed love of this country. His trial was the most significant legal action ever taken against a local Nazi collaborator in post-Communist Europe, and that is the element of din (justice).

President Mesić's tenure as president represents emet (truth) as he always told the truth and fought against all attempts at historical revisionism.

And it is these two elements of justice and truth which will bring shalom (peace), a peace which will see a flourishing Croatia fully integrated into Europe and one whose relations with Israel and the Jewish people will continue to flower.

Hvala President Mesić.  
Hvala Hrvatska.