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SERBIA IN THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF NATIONALISM

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Introduction

This study of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia is an effort to bring to light new forms of nationalism in the post-October Serbia and thus show that Serbia has not managed yet to find an alternative to its nationalism.

The third failed presidential election in Serbia elucidated the political scene that has been rather blurred up to then. The outcome of the election finally negated the thesis about Serbia's democratic potential and tradition – a thesis that, due to the Serbian elite's skillful maneuvers – blocked a deeper insight into the society's state of mind. The Serbian elite's endeavor over the past twenty years to create a new cultural model – marked by the totalitarian thought – still figures as the biggest obstacle to democratization. Nationalism did disappear in the post-October 5 Serbia but just appeared in a new form. However, it is easily detectable whenever the issue of facing the past or the one of thorough reforms are on the table.

The past has been rationalized – a rationalization ranging from negation of crimes and the Greater Serbia project to blaming the communist for everything. Military defeat and the past developments that never resulted in a bottom line, persistence in the Greater Serbia program, identity crisis and overall frustration revived traditional conservativeness. Characteristics of the Serbian conservativeness are as follows: an absolute lack of economic thought, reluctance to make economic progress, absence of political pluralism; democracy perceived as anarchy; and xenophobia. Given that a value system as such is contrary to the contemporary attainments of European societies, any new government will be faced with a dilemma: to opt for Europe or to opt against it.

As a heterogeneous coalition (composed of anti-war and radically nationalistic parties alike) the DOS had just one common denominator: to oust Milosevic. This explains its later stumbling when it came to fundamental political decisions and Serbia's reformist course. Over the past three years, Serbia's political scene was flooded with scandals and affairs that not only weakened political parties, but also, in a way, turned the very idea of parliamentary system senseless. And yet, strategically planned and promoted by Premier Zoran Djindjic, a reformist wing emerged from the coalition. Strongly supported by the international community, this wing turned rather efficient, managing even to push forward Serbia's relations with its neighbors – a fact that greatly influenced the region's dynamism. Unfortunately, the Djindjic assassination not only blocked or slowed down the entire reformist endeavor, but also dealt a deathblow to such an alternative trend. Also, clinging to ethnic and centralistic principle jeopardizes the Serbia nationalists are looking forward to. Negating Serbia as a composite state provokes its further fragmentation.

Unwillingness to face the past impeded the establishment of the so much needed moral backbone of the society. Commercialization and vulgarization of The Hague Tribunal made it possible for the “defeated forces” to consolidate their power and make a political comeback. The fact that Milosevic and Seselj figure on two candidates' lists for the early parliamentary election scheduled for December 23, 2003, perfectly fits into such perception of the recent past.

Unrealistic assessment of international developments and the situation in the region, wrong perception of neighbors and wrong self-perception persist though the overall discourse has taken another form. True, the Greater Serbia project was routed but Milosevic's logic won: multiethnic and multicultural fiber of the Balkans has been torn asunder, and it will take decades for it to recover. That logic emerged victorious because of, among other things, delayed reaction of the international community, its failure to grasp the process that led to disintegration of ex-Yugoslavia and the fact that the very existence of Republika Srpska still weighs down the completion of the same process. For, by establishing Republika Srpska, the international community has practically sanctioned the war crimes and genocide that are now in the dock before The Hague Tribunal.

Political Continuity/Discontinuity

The Premier Djindjic assassination was a shock that spontaneously, rather than by some scheme, led to a nationwide consolidation – a consolidation in terms of the reforms he had initiated. However, immediately after the state of emergency was lifted, the true effects of this tragic murder begun to come to light. Fundamental reforms stalled, the cooperation with The Hague Tribunal – and thus, indirectly, facing the recent past – is once again questioned, the same as the policy pursued by the government that – in spite of all its objective limitations, frequent meandering and counterproductive moves, in Serbia with no other valid options proved itself as the only alternative for Europeization.

The Premier Djindjic assassination could have been a watershed in public perception of the policy of crime and thus of recent history in their true light. Unfortunately, judging by the counts of the indictment submitted against direct executioners of the crime this will be another missed opportunity.

Zoran Djindjic's tragic death (the same as that of Ivan Stambolic) is the paradigm of the post-October Serbia's continuity with Milosevic's regime – a continuity built up on crime. The murder not only bared the actual state of affairs burdened with Milosevic's vast and dangerous legacy, but also the fact that DOS – a fragile coalition as it was from the very start – had poor chance to come to grips with this legacy. No blood was spilled on October 5 only because there was an all-inclusive consensus to have Milosevic ousted. Serbian nationalists' interpretation of October 5, whereby Serbia "dreading further sanctions and political pressure decided to replace its position of 'a European pariah' with the one of an European protectorate," almost perfectly fits into the very core of October 5 developments.

The Premier Zoran Djindjic assassination of March 12, 2003, was an assault on the government's overall reformist policy, and on its reform-oriented wing in particular. The assassination testified that Serbia is a hostage to organized crime and bared its fragile stability and internal security. The Premier was gunned down at the point when he was getting prepared for a showdown with organized crime and mafia that have obstructed the cooperation with The Hague Tribunal and the reform process ever since the DOS coalition came to power. As a watershed in politics-organized crime hookup, the Djindjic assassination called for reinterpretation of the events of October 5, 2000.

The DOS missed the unique opportunity of October 5 for a radical breakup with Milosevic's legacy. Differentiation within the DOS in this matter practically bought time and opened vistas to consolidation of Milosevic's financial and economic mafia that had a significant, if not crucial pull on developments. The Serbian society was impregnated with crime. The hookup between organized crime and the Socialist Party of Serbia's (SPS) nomenklatura was more than obvious, the same as their many joint ventures. The national question turned to crime resulted in crimes in the neighborhood and, in Serbia proper, in crime-imbued police, customs administration and other institutions. The state control system created a favorable setting for organized crime's smooth operations, which led to the crime-the police-the prosecution-courts hookup.

The months-long media campaign against the Premier proves it was all about a scheme involving parts of the former regime, but parts of the DOS as well. Denial of war crimes is a common denominator of a "natural coalition" as such. It's about a tendency to maintain *status quo* at all costs. Along with getting consolidated, the "patriotic bloc" launched a campaign to reinterpret the last decade, but the entire 20th century as well. So communists and Slobodan Milosevic are blamed for everything that happened over the past decade. In parallel, the Tchetnik movement is promoted and presented to the public as exclusively anti-fascist. This is the pattern that sets benchmarks for Serbia's future: for, "over the 20th century, Serbs went astray twice – firstly when they opted for the Yugoslav idea, and then when they chose communism." The "patriotic bloc" sees "integration into Europe" as utopia and equals it with the Yugoslav idea and communism.

The attempt to rationalize the defeat is what basically marks today's nationalism in Serbia. On the one hand, the illusion that the actual territorial solution is not definite is publicly stirred, while, on the other, the responsibility for the fact that the national question had been turned into a crime is shunned. While the Left, as usual, claims it has nothing to do with nationalism, the Right meticulously adds new forms to it and labels it as democratic. Now when the role of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the promotion of the Greater Serbia project is increasingly bared before the Hague Tribunal, academicians are preoccupied with minimizing the *Memorandum's* impact on shaping Milosevic's policy. Today's nationalism mostly sources from some influential circles within the Belgrade University, particularly from the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Political Sciences, and the Faculty of Philosophy. These circles do not deny that crimes took place, but their strategy is focused on reinterpreting, i.e. minimizing the responsibility of the Serbian side. This is how not only the recent past is remodeled, but also young people's perceptions shaped.

Some nationalistic circles that considerably influence the overall social atmosphere are deeply in thought about the issue of "what is it Serbs should do in 10 years to come?" They appeal to Serbs to manifest their national solidarity, since "the idea of the St. Vitus Day and celestial Serbia has been demonized and vulgarly assaulted," and call them to maneuver "for the sake of survival," while bearing in mind long-term goals. While waiting for "the US to lose interest in the maintenance of the new Balkan order," "Russia's comeback as a big power," and "West Europe to lose its present missionary appetite for creating hybrid nations," Serbs should get ready, they say, to review their historical defeats. Until all this happens, "Serbian spiritual and moral renewal" should be seen as preconditions to the nation's biological recovery and cultural survival.

Such messages clearly indicate the following strategy: Serbia should not allow to have its future options restricted by joining the Partnership for Peace or NATO; it should not formally accept the status of a state with limited sovereignty; it should not eliminate its armed forces; it should not permit that a constitution, which suits the incumbent authorities dwindle its future constitutional and political frame; and, the status for Kosovo should be tackled only once the Serbian state turns stable. Further, the course of radical economic reforms (based on Washington consensus) should be renounced, the same as “the naïve belief by market-oriented fundamentalists” that stabilization, liberalization, and privatization would “automatically solve all problems.”

All this is about the cowardice of the political elite and its incompetence to offer Serbia a vision of a modern society, based on the values of contemporary civilization. Therefore, to serve the needs of petty politics, nationalism is just being redesigned and thus it unavoidably assumes its notorious populist forms. Only recognition of defeat and a start-up of a serious public debate may fuel Serbia’s potential for change. The option for an independent Serbia – though not for an independent and offended Serbia, as perceived by the G17 Plus - is the only way to catch the train of reality, i.e. to accept the defeat.

Serbian neo-romanticism of the late 20th century obviously neither counted on future nor met the imperatives of modern times. The revival of Kosovo and Jasenovac myths just added to the distorted perception of the past. Simultaneously, this meant that nothing would be done in terms of challenges facing Yugoslavia and its various nations. Slobodan Milosevic’s devastating policy of nationalism and populism further wasted the potential and energy implied in any necessary change. Exhausted Serbia is today weighted by its own nationalism: the anachronous nationalistic project failed to assemble all Serbs in a single state. Moreover, Serbia’s borders are still undefined.

Sources of Nationalism in the Post-October Serbia

The Serbian nationalism of the late 20th century has a scant ideational core made up of stereotypes on the “chosen people,” “holy land,” “bloody and primal foe,” and the mission, i.e. a leader. Apart from rational political elements, this scant notional core also includes those the nature of which is ideological, religious, mystic and pathological. These elements are mutually linked in a blurred, instable and dynamic, i.e. polyvalent. The prevalent “liberal” or “democratic” nationalism in today’s Serbia is neither a civic nor a reform option, but the mask of a national trauma or humiliated nationalism.

The bottom line here is whether Serbian nationalism with such scant core is able to overcome all social, confessional and regional limitations, given that it itself emerges from the same limitations. Thus Mihailo Markovic, fully in line with this humiliated nationalism, says over an interview, “We have planned everything well, except for the irrational international factor!” However, by contrast from Hitlerism, Serbian nationalism, just like other nationalisms in these parts, has not been defeated. Apparently, all have won and all have been defeated, which just further blurs the situation. That is why, as seen from such nationalist angle, the trial in The Hague is perceived as re-tailoring of history. Like Jünger wrote, “The progenitor of this nationalism was war, but it was born of the conscience of the communities of blood; it wishes that blood comes to power.” Today’s Serbia is in an ambivalent situation (a statement that probably applies to

the entire region) – it is neither utterly defeated nor victorious. Today's transfer (transitional) nationalism has reached a substation somewhere between crime and vague contours of a post-national society, between organic and constructive nationalism, which has it that state creates the nation, rather than the other way round. That is why the prevalent Serbian liberalism is in effect nationalism, without a nation and without a state.¹

Nationalism and Post-Nationalism

Serbian nationalism should be viewed from two of its levels. It is a concept, an ideology with a historical foundation. It shall go on existing at that level for quite a long time, since ideologies are not easy to change. Then, Serbian nationalism is also a political project, i.e. applied ideology. As such, it was at work over the last two decades of the 20th century. That's an accomplished task. A sum of phenomena characterizing the present moment would be more appropriately described as post-nationalism. Without this specification, the causes and consequences are difficult to differentiate. This differentiation is, moreover, made more difficult by a number of reasons.

First, the project of Greater Serbia drew a consensus unparalleled in modern Serbian history. The rounding off of the Serbian state territory within ethnic borders enlisted the entire Serbian national corps in the whole of the former Yugoslavia. The wars proved that the project was irrational and the Serbian question complicated, all of which is reflected in the current position of the Serbian people.

Second, the above-mentioned national project is indivisible from the social one. Before the wars, an alliance of state socialism and nationalism was created through the anti-bureaucratic revolution. That was yet another in a series of cyclically repeated refusals of economic, political and social reforms. This refusal was paid not only with a fifteen-year delay in transition, but also with new difficulties in conceiving a reform strategy.

Third, after October 5, a balance of politics pursued in the previous period has not been drawn. Moreover it could not have been drawn due to the above-mentioned consensus. That accounts for the different interpretation of the change of October 5. The forces of continuity saw the way to preserve a political project in the removal of the key person of the regime, while the reformist forces were practically conducive to discontinuity. It turned out that the Europeization of Serbia was fatal for the nationalist project. It had to be reduced to its archaic substance, the reactionaries. It lost its aggressive power and entered a rotting stage. The assassination of a pragmatic reformer was one last attempt at its revitalization. But the new consensus, which is only possible to reach on the reforms and joining the European Union, has not been reached. Serbia is increasingly propelled towards the reforms by the international community and decreasingly so by its own energy. The banalization of political life prevents the perception of real dilemmas facing the Serbian society.

¹ Based on the Nenad Dakovic's discussion at the round table titled "Nationalism Changes Its Clothes," July 15, 2003, Belgrade.

Fourth, the approach to the Hague tribunal is Serbia's test concerning its recent past, i.e. the nationalist project. The Hague is dismantling this project and writing the history of wars for the unification of the Serbian nation. The reformist forces themselves did not perceive the issue of sanctions for the committed crimes in any other way than as a bargaining chip. Disregarding the moral dimension of crime is, as Nenad Dimitrijevic rightly concludes, a delusion of the reformers. More than that: it arises doubts as to their real resolve to split with the project that had crime as its constituent part.

Fifth, ignoring the change in the neighborhood is a reflection of the old consensus, i.e. refusal to acknowledge a new reality that deprives the nationalist project of its power.

Thus, the new initiatives from Croatia are met with suspicions. Serbian nationalism has for decades instrumentalized the genocide against the Serbs in Croatia in World War II through the fact that no Croatian official has ever offered an apology. And now the speech President Mesic gave in Jasenovac goes almost ignored by the Serbian media. Except for *The Helsinki Charter*, the integral version of the speech is nowhere to be found. The visa regime has been changed and the Serbs invited to return to Croatia: the invitation was preceded by a series of laws (on property, reconstruction of houses, etc). In response to all this come the claims such as "This is not sincere," or "It's only the doing of the international community." If in previous times books (Kocovic, Zerjavic, Goldstajn) were of no avail, and now neither are the long awaited apologies, one cannot but wonder what it is that we really want.²

The Role of the Serbian Orthodox Church: Generating Nationalism

Once Slobodan Milosevic was ousted and the new regime – overtly indicating that its legitimacy derives from anti-communism – came to power, all the barriers were removed to the already ongoing process of the Serbian Orthodox Church's comeback in public life. That was the startup of a speedy removal of the principle of secularism at all levels of the state and society.

In the post-October period, overtly supported by top officials of the new regime, particularly by the then federal president, Vojislav Kostunica, the Serbian Orthodox Church begun to growingly force itself as a supreme moral and ideological arbiter in matters ranging from education of children to the overall culture and civilizational values of the society as a whole. The ideas that are thus advocated are marked by archaism, collectivism, xenophobia and anti-Western bias. The manner in which these ideas are promoted is marked by high degree of intolerance and even aggressiveness.

An extreme intolerance to everything belonging to the Western culture is what the Serbian Orthodox Church messages its believers. The Church thus follows in the footsteps of its newly revived idol, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic, whose interpretation of the modern history of Serbia boiled down to a complot the purpose of which was to "turn the liberated Serbian paupers into the paupers of the rotten West."

² An excerpt from Latinka Perovic's keynote address at the round table "Nationalism Changes Its Clothes," July 15, 2003, Belgrade.

The Church's encroachment upon the public sphere is justified by its concern for people's spiritual health, and the need to have all areas inhabited by Serbs spiritually, culturally and politically marked as Serbian. So, as of lately, churches the shape of which has nothing to do with the prevalent architectural style are being constructed throughout Vojvodina. Eager to expand its influence, the Serbian Orthodox Church not only disregarded the specificity of the Serbian Eastern Orthodoxy in Vojvodina, but also challenged the state by putting forth that the Mt. Fruska Gora should be proclaimed a holy place. The Church was obviously not bothered by the fact that the state had already proclaimed the Mt. Fruska Gora a national park, or that there was no canon on the grounds of which it could be proclaimed a holy place.

Ongoing developments point to clericalization of the society and the Church's intention to play a guiding role in it. This is probably best illustrated by the scandal related to anniversary of the infamous "Novi Sad raid" (in the WW II). Should President of the Vojvodina Assembly Nenad Canak address the memorial service, said the Church, it would organize a commemoration of its own. Further, addressing the second assembly of the Svetozar Miletic Serbian National Movement, Bishop of Backa Irinej (Bulovic) said, "The very idea of our nation's congregational unity, and its national and cultural identity is in jeopardy," adding "It (the nation) is now more threatened from the inside than from the outside, and is threatened by people of burned conscience...by Serbs who deny their own national identity and are, as a rule, atheists...In brief, was the Church intent to do something to stop these people's doings, exorcism would be the only solution."³

As it perceives itself as a strong factor of integration, the Serbian Orthodox Church opposes the idea of Vojvodina's autonomy.⁴ The assembly of the Svetozar Miletic Movement referred to in the paragraph above also requested an early election for the Vojvodina legislature. The request was based on the claim that the Vojvodina legislature and Vojvodina Serbs were not even in minimal accord.⁵

The Church's reaction to ever more frequent sacrileges of Catholic graveyards, particularly in Novi Sad, is also most illustrative. The Secretary of the Backa Eparchy said this act of vandalism (in Novi Sad) should be ascribed to "excessive liberalization" of the town hosting the Exit Music Festival for three years in a row. The Secretary equaled the sacrilege of the Catholic graveyard with this music festival by saying, "We are all aware that it is, in a way, a hotbed of narcotism and vices of all sorts."⁶ Actually, the Exit is the biggest music festival in the Balkans assembling performers from all over the world and visitors from the entire ex-Yugoslavia. It is obvious that what most bothers the Church is the festival's liberal spirit and its openness to "the Other." Instead of pointing a finger at the Exit and liberalism, the Church representatives should better blame nationalism for the sacrilege of the Catholic graveyard – i.e. the nationalistic policy they used to back wholeheartedly.⁷ For, this is the same policy that never

³ Nasa Rec No. 6, p. 2, February 15, 2003.

⁴ Namely, the advocates of Vojvodina's autonomy are criticized for wanting to establish a separate church.

⁵ See "Human Rights in the Shadow of Nationalism," 2002 annual report of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, p. 85, Belgrade.

⁶ Gradjanski List, October 2003.

⁷ "Wherever Serbian blood is split, and wherever Serbian bones are buried, this must be Serbian territory," said Bishop Nikandor. See "War Cross of the Serbian Church: Facing Democracy" by Mirko Djordjevic, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade 2002, p. 79.

restrained from turning Serbian “graves and bones” into the instruments of political mobilization and nationalistic homogenization.

The Serbian Orthodox Church strongly opposes The Hague Tribunal and actively participated in its disqualification by labeling the Tribunal as a political and quasi-judicial institution.⁸ Insistence on the Tribunal’s ethnic bias proved to be sufficient to assemble a variety of factors – mundane, ecclesiastical, political, military and civil. The initial denial of the Tribunal and war crimes was later on replaced by reluctant cooperation with it and the ongoing relativization of crimes. Disclosure of mass graves in Serbia boiled down to a generalized showdown with the former regime and blaming communists, rather than resulted in the readiness to face the past. However, the strongest resistance to the cooperation with The Hague Tribunal is manifest when it comes to extradition of officers of the former Yugoslav People’s Army. This is probably best illustrated by latest indictments against four army and police generals.⁹

The Church never condemned or criticized the fact that the regeneration of nationalism is growingly manifested through crime. Frequent releases issued by the Church’s Press Service weekly repeated a cliché boiling down to a phrase, “With increasing frequency, more or less the same centers have been mounting campaigns against the Church.”¹⁰ The centers referred to are the NGOs and public figures that critically observe the developments in and about the Church. However, there are no campaigns whatsoever, leastwise those grounded on militant atheism. From the early 1980s, the state and a substantial portion of the society have manifested a remarkably favorable disposition towards the church. Not only believers, but also layman - and especially the state – build a temple in Vracar downtown area of Belgrade. The above-mentioned Press Service is in bad need of such “campaigns” even when it is clear that the highest church officials (Synod) are rather inapt to cope with a considerable part of the public opinion. Tensions are thus fabricated. This is done not only from within the Church but also from without it, particularly by increasingly influential “para-church formations.” For them, Karadzic and Mladic are cult figures of a kind. The two “shall never be arrested,” according to Bishop of Sabac and Valjevo Lavrentije, “as they are sheltered by the people.” Dubious warriors are thus turned into heroes and harboring them proclaimed a virtue.

Only recently – in May 2003 – *Studenica Declaration* of the Serbian Orthodox Youth Summit came out of press, along with another document, which merits attention in every respect. This document, titled *A Letter to Haralampi on St. George's Day*, is signed by two bishops. The latter is, naturally addressed at Haralampi – Dositej's corresponded with - but also to the governments of “all Serbian territories.” Dositej is accused as a founding father of a Western “godless school,” while all those who follow in his footsteps “look for the sun where it sets down.” The letter lists all those who brought evil on Serbian nation such as the “followers of Vuk, Markovic and Skerlic, communist ideologists and modernists.” Cultural tradition with identity determinants has thus been reduced to a

⁸ According to Metropolitan Amfilohije, The Hague Tribunal is a mouthpiece of those that bombarded Yugoslavia and are eager to thus “justify their evil and crime before God and history.”

⁹ The rally to support Police General Sreten Lukic was organized by the police, and backed by Premier Zivkovic himself. According to what Minister of the Interior Dusan Mihajlovic said over the interview with the issue of October 10, 2003, of the Novosti daily, Serbia would be lost if the four generals were extradited to The Hague, since “it would be deprived of both the police and army.” Minister Mihajlovic said, “I will certainly not be the one to extradite General Lukic.”

¹⁰ Danas, July 7, 2003.

paragon and all who fail to comply with this monistic pattern are called “Euro snivelers.” This term is what the most reverend bishop A. Jevtic will be remembered by. And such primitive pattern is currently operational. What it offers is “sound nationalism, evangelistic and organic,” which is also referred to as “St. Sava’s evangelistic nationalism.” No one has ever derived nationalism from synoptic, or even apocryphical gospels. This is for the first time that a thing like that may be heard. All this is done deliberately - to reinforce an ideological pattern, which is essentially anti-cultural.

Another example is still more unusual and comes from Kosovo and the recent celebration of St. Vid’s Day. Never before throughout its history has the Church stood against education, enlightenment or culture. It used to oppose the remnants of pagan consciousness that revives aggressive nationalism. It bravely resisted the inclusion of the pagan Vid’s Day into the Church calendar. However, this church holiday was included, but only after the battle of Kumanovo 1913, since it did not stand for a “command holiday.” The holiday has nothing to do with the Roman Catholic Church’s celebration of St. Vitus Day – or with Eastern Orthodoxy, as the pagan god, Vid, is “unknown to the Eastern Orthodox tradition,” according to the new *Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodoxy*. This did not prevent reverend Jevtic to say in an interview that it was a Christian holiday since “here perished the holy martyr Vid, for whom this day is celebrated.”¹¹

This need to follow a model of anti-Christian and pagan nationalism is felt around the church and afar from it. Legend and superstition are combined with inferior conservative politics. Thus a kind of a “St. Sava’s Orthodoxy” is being created though it has nothing to do with St. Sava. So it happens that Vojislav Kostunica, until recently the head of state, said in his message to the nation supports a “middle way.”¹² That is an idea of Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, our “pathfinder,” according to Kostunica, whose proposal to introduce a *Day of Struggle against Culture* was opposed by the Church. This is precisely what is advocated now by of part of the church hierarchy, but also by the laymen-ideologists who call themselves “patriotic forces.” This hookup between parts of the church hierarchy and para-church and para-state structures encourages the most aggressive nationalism. Nationalism is deliberately produced to push us into self-isolation from the world, from Christians who are just different from us. The misunderstanding between these forces and the substantial part of the public is presented as a dangerous tension that weights the public life of a country, which has not yet healed the wounds of four lost wars.¹³

Nationalism in the Army

Nationalistic activities of national institutions such as the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Army – that act almost as a unique organization – permanently generates nationalism in today’s Serbia. The Church has practically overtaken the Army’s role in Republika Srpska, Montenegro and Kosovo. Given that the dispute on the autochthony of the Macedonian Orthodox Church is still under way, the Church’s strongly influences developments in Macedonia. And, if one bears in mind that Serbian Eastern Orthodoxy

¹¹ Vecernje Novosti, June 29, 2003.

¹² Politika, January 5, 2002.

¹³ Three last paragraphs of this section are based on Mirko Djordjevic’s keynote address at the round table “Nationalism Changes Its Clothes,” July 15, 2003.

equates the Church with a nation, its dispute with the Macedonian Church is actually a refusal to recognize the Macedonian nation. The two institutions, therefore, are crucial when it comes to the maintenance of the delusion that Serbian ethnic territories will smoothly unite with the motherland, Serbia, once the change in international circumstances takes place.

Though expressed in hushed tones today, nationalism is still the dominant ideology in the army of Serbia and Montenegro. The collective consciousness of the officers corps can be depicted as a state of unreadiness and dismay. This is the outcome of some changes that were made lately in the process of the army transformation.

This primarily refers to the decision of the Supreme Defense Council, which had the General Staff integrated into the Defense Ministry; to the decision to have the military defense services also put under the command of the Defense Minister and to have them uphold procedures of democratic control. Furthermore, the Minister of Defense disbanded a "phantom commission" that has been formed under the General Staff apparently to cooperate with The Hague Tribunal. As it seems, the commission was gathering and dispatching documents and other material for the defense of Slobodan Milosevic. Finally, the third member of the infamous "Vukovar troika" was arrested – colonel and the 'hero' of the patriotic forces, Veselin Slivancanin. The Minister of Defense took some more decisions, which put an end to a practice used by both the army and other governmental agencies - the practice of pretense cooperation with the Tribunal.

These changes in the Army's organizational scheme still have to be put into practice – a task that will be far from an easy one. Either camouflaged or overt, nationalism will be building a number of barriers to hinder the Supreme Command and Defense Ministry's moves that precondition the Army's integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions.

The anyway bulky and poorly organized army, burdened with heavy "war mortgage" and other problems, now finds itself at historical crossroads. It has to opt between two roads: one leading to the Partnership for Peace, i.e. to radical transformation and collective security, and the other to traditionalism, whereby it will preserve its present, individual model of defense and security, based on the well-known principle of relying on its own means.

Considering that the incumbent Defense Minister and the Chief of General Staff advocate the former, modern option and draw good choices on those lines, officers corps - by the inertia of military obedience and devotion - has silenced down. One has the impression, therefore, that the majority of officers back Minister Tadic and General Krga. Still, there are a lot of signs that testify on the contrary. In the best case, the Partnership for Peace and collective security programs are accepted as a diktat due to need.

The "patriotic bloc" overtly opposes Minister Tadic's course of action calling it fatal for both the army and the country. Extremist circles message along the following lines, "We will join the Partnership for Peace only under the terms we set. First, NATO should pay war reparations. Second, our army should return to Kosovo. Third, the country and its army should be given a privileged position and status, given that the union of Serbia and Montenegro is the strongest military force in the Balkans and thus entitled to military

leadership, and given that the army of Serbia and Montenegro took the cake in combating 'Albanian terrorism.' The latter grants it the privileged status in the anti-terrorist alliance."

This argumentation is presented through broadcast media as well. The hard-lineist advocate of this theory, and also its creator, is the retired, but nonetheless hyperactive General Radovan Radovanovic – the mastermind of almost all battles Serbia has lost.

Furthermore, the "Second Battle of Kosovo" (this is how Radinovic titled one of his books from the "Kosovo series") is a paradigm or, so to speak, a myth, that has been often artificially and vulgarly added onto the Kosovo myth from more than 600 years ago.

Thus, for example, the former head of department for morale, now a retired general, Milen Simic, claims that the current request to have the Army radically transformed undervalues its "human factor," especially its commanders. So he says, "It's a paradox to bring the quality of human potential in question, when the army has successfully resisted the most powerful military force in the world... Such potential can hardly be found in any country in the world."¹⁴

In addition, the former professor at army academies, retired Col. Vidmir Veljkovic, wrote for the issue of February 20 of the *Vojska (Army)* magazine the following paragraph: "Many of our local critics fail to see our ethno-psychological milieu – Serbs are special people that have behaved extremely defiantly, self-confidently, often provocatively, defending their home (which has been built 'on the crossroads'), against great powers. Serbs, even though a small nation population-wise, and great when it comes to bravery and military skill, were forced to defend themselves at the end of the second millennium, once again, alone, with no help from others, against a far mightier NATO. Actually, Serbs are the only people that haven't, as it was evident at the time of the aggression, killed with hate but laughter; the only people that took Pasic's slogan 'Don't worry, it wont be good anyway' as a historic inevitability. After all, in that war, figuratively speaking, a 'Lilliputian' Serbia was attacked by '19 Gullivers.' The army, with its high morals, knowledge and skill defended its dignity, honor and the pride of its people."

Referring to national identity, Professor Nenad Dimitrijevic notes it is based on tradition and there are two poles to it.¹⁵ One pole comprises glory, uniqueness and invincibility of the "chosen people," while the other includes the myth about equally "glorious" defeats, historical continuity of suffering and "other's" hatred for "us" – here the former apparently results in a variety of anti-Serbian conspiracies, and, ultimately, in "our" endless victims.

Inspired by this second pole, *Vojska* weekly, in its issue of June 26, 2003, carried an article under the title of "Verticals of Serbian History." The feature, dedicated to St. Vitus Day, quotes, "...Many people believe that far too many Serbs perished in vain in senseless wars against by far superior enemies. Those people always give an upper hand to megalomania over diplomatic efforts. Still, there's just as many of those who believe that national honor, dignity, sovereignty of the state, and, above all, freedom, are

¹⁴ *Vojska* (the Army magazine), March 13, 2003.

¹⁵ *Republika* monthly, June 2003

priceless and that any sacrifice to attain these ideals is small and inappropriate to their value.”

With the arrival of Vojislav Kostunica to the position of the supreme commander, the Army, in the search for its own identity, found a safe haven in the warring tradition of Serbian Eastern Orthodoxy. This perfectly suited the flourish of various forms of nationalistic ideas.

Slobodan Milosevic was acceptable to the officer corps as a “supreme commander” at both rational and emotional levels. Firstly, because he was truly capable of playing a commander even though he never put on an army uniform. Secondly, officers were thankful to him because in the “Second Battle of Kosovo” he gave them a chance to prove themselves professionally and at least somewhat remove the heavy losers’ burden they have carried throughout all those wars “Serbia never took part in.”

Kostunica applied the same model of commanding the Army - the model of its deep politicization and, in a way, misuse. This was partially evident in the infamous army scandals, notably in the “Pavkovic affair.” And yet the biggest difference between the two ‘supreme commanders’ is that Kostunica, unlike Milosevic, opened the “army gates” to the Serbian Orthodox Church and thus opened the floodgates to nationalism’s overt and undercover growth.

Just after the October change, the Department of Morale urgently organized a round table under the title “Solving the Army Question in the Yugoslav Army.” The main idea was formulated this way: “As after the October 5 change even fiercer attack at the spiritual being of the Serbian people could be expected with certainty...it is necessary to build strong dams against spiritual colonization resulting from activities by various religious sects, cults and occultisms of all sorts and thus save our spiritual and national identity...” Actually, this was what the then head of the Department of Morale, General Simic, said at the round table – as if just Serbian Eastern Orthodox believers lived in Serbia and as if they were the only ones in the army service. So, General Simic’s opening speech was discriminatory in terms of people of other religions and atheists, as well as detrimental to their fundamental human rights.

The cooperation between the Army and the Church is probably best illustrated in the former’s publishing activity. It was only natural the Premier Djindjic assassination drew the attention of the army press. However, all the Army’s mouthpiece, *Vojska*, carried about it fit into one page, one-third of which dealt with Metropolitan Amfilohije Radovic and his obscure speech at the memorial service in the St. Sava Temple.

The publishing house “Vojska” (Army) issued in 2002 the book titled “Eastern Orthodoxy and War” by Colonel Borislav Grozdic, which the weekly *Vojska* also carried it in a series of articles. One of the book’s reviewers Dr. Miodrag Petrovic of the History Department of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences advised the readership on how the book should be read. So, he said, “Eastern Orthodoxy is deeply rooted into the national consciousness of Serbian people and their identity cannot exist without it. The book ought to be read in the spirit of devotion to Serbian patriotism that is inspired by the love for God and Man. According to Eastern Orthodoxy, one should love his enemies

too, but only if they are not evil to our brethren ..."¹⁶ "Humanism" as such implies a concern for "our brethren" only, while the others should be of no concern to us.

Then, in 2003, the Army publishing house issued another book by the same author, titled "Battling for Faith and Motherland." From the title, one can sense the basic content and tone of the work. In 2002, the Army Publishing Center, in tandem with the Novi Sad "Pravoslavna Rec" (The Word of Eastern Orthodoxy) publishing house, issued a major edition under the title "Monasteries of Serbia." Despite the fact that this work is considered most significant not only to the culture of the Serbian national corps, but also as a valuable addition to overall culture, one cannot but wonder why the Army figured as a co-publisher at the time when its budget could have hardly cover the expenses of food for privates.

In the last three years, army officers participated in almost all important manifestations that were organized by the Serbian Orthodox Church (transfer of the remains of Duke Lazar, from Ravanica to Lazarica; top army members also went on a 'pilgrimage' to Hilandar; the celebration of Savindan is also 72nd Special Brigade's day, etc.).¹⁷

Constitutional Issue as a Source of Nationalism

The ever more burning issue of a new constitution discloses immaturity of the Serbian elite. Once declared, the new constitution will certainly radicalize mutually opposed political stands and may bring about further tension, even a conflict. Bearing in mind Serbia's complexity (e.g. Vojvodina), a conflict as such might be internationalized. In spite of that, Serbia's attitude to the constitutional issue is about the same as it was at the time of Yugoslavia's dissolution and then in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Serbian political elite keeps insisting on re-centralization and dramatically lags behind the real life and history. In the summer of 2000, Milosevic attempted to re-centralize the federation of Serbia and Montenegro, which only resulted in further disintegration. The then opposition – nowadays in power – welcomed Milosevic's constitution regardless of its illegitimacy.

The same model of behavior is visible in Serbia proper. Projects of regionalization that are being drawn turn a blind eye to reality, try to change by the means of a constitution, and attempt to once again re-centralize Serbia – to abolish Vojvodina's autonomy, in particular. Such attempts are veiled by allegedly contemporary regionalistic solutions. Liberal nationalism that associates the once formula "one man, one vote" is once again on the table. The same as a "modern federation" was on the agenda at the time of ex-Yugoslavia's dissolution, a "modern" regionalization is put forth today. Most paradoxical of all are the projects that, while dealing with regionalization, envisage an utterly unnatural and inexplicable division of Serbia into autonomous regions the status of which would be equal to Vojvodina's and even with Kosovo's. A belief that regionalization of Serbia may amortize separatist trends in Kosovo or hard-line autonomist trends in Vojvodina sounds incredible. Solutions such as special statuses or turning Serbia into a federation are being bypassed through a false symmetry.

¹⁶ Vojska, February 14, 2002.

¹⁷ This section is based on Stipe Sikavica's contribution to the round table discussion of July 15, 2003.

One should note here that Serbia's delusion about the possibility to annul historical reality through constitutions is being nourished, and systematically so, by the international community. The international community stands in the way of having the process of ex-Yugoslavia's dissolution put to bed, which is nothing but violence against a fact of life. The manner in which the international community deals with the state issue in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia just prolongs the region's agony and wastes the energy of all factors included – this probably mostly refers to Serbia that is anyway incapable of coming face to face with itself. And, moreover, this manner fuels Serbia's delusion about ethnic borders – a delusion that is not characteristic of Serbia only.

Nationalists – the Svetozar Miletic Serbian Populist Movement in particular – argue that the actual composition of the provincial parliament “is illegitimate” as it “overtly acts against the interest of the Serbian state.” This non-governmental organization fears that the new constitution would turn Serbia into a state governed by national minorities, and that introduction of a bicameral legislature, i.e. the Chamber of National Minorities, would face Serbian parliamentarians with a blind alley, given that their counterparts coming from minority communities would be in the position to vote them down at will. Dragan Nedeljkovic of the Svetozar Miletic movement takes that a solution as such would impose the same situation that resulted from the 1974 Constitution. In other words, as Nedeljkovic puts it, Serbia would be controlled by all, while unable to keep itself under control, let alone the others. Autonomy, argues the movement, made sense at the time of Austro-Hungarian Empire, but not today. Therefore, autonomy for Vojvodina is a communist delusion, while its advocates are communists in disguise pursuing a policy that is lethal for the Serbian people. Further, members of minority communities are entitled to all democratic rights, given that Serbs are not intent to threaten anyone, particularly not in Vojvodina. According to the movement, Serbs are tolerant and often to their own detriment. However, Serbia's claim on Vojvodina is best illustrated by the argument saying that Vojvodina's remembrance naturally flows into the Serbian one, as the Serbian collective consciousness has always been the strongest in Vojvodina.

The circle of Serbian nationalists assembled in the *Prizma* magazine (e.g. Slobodan Samardzic) denies the Vojvodina legislature the right to discuss a future status for Vojvodina. Their criticism particularly focuses the possibility of Vojvodina having a tax policy of its own. They deny any historical justification whatsoever for any kind of a loose autonomy, for, as they put it, Vojvodina has no specific cultural heritage that is independent from Serbia.

However, Vojvodina is far from being a homogeneous community as nationalists perceive it. In spite of all ethnic engineering, Vojvodina remained a multiethnic community – for, the last census showed that Serbs amount to only 65 percent of the province's population. This fact only calls for serious consideration of Vojvodina's autonomy. Vojvodina's political parties are polarized in terms of its autonomy, while Vojvodina's electorate has entered the so-called expectation stage. The number of undecided votes grows. Hard-line advocates of Vojvodina's autonomy pinpoint the province's specificity and try to prevent further degradation of its towns to some “petty regions.” While opposing assimilation of minority communities, they call for the principle of “positive discrimination,” which implies minorities' mandatory participation in local self-government. Professor Stanko Pihler takes that local self-government and territorial autonomy are based on the same principle – the principle of citizenship, rather

than on collectivistic perception of the state that, as a rule, implies “unity,” togetherness and centralism, as well as undemocratic political climate overwhelmed with totalitarian tension. On the other hand, nationalists fear that a full autonomy of Vojvodina will be nothing but its separation from Serbia. According to Prof. Cetkovic, Vojvodina’s political elite and a part of its intelligentsia pursue a shortsighted policy that, under the pretext of regionalism, attempts to impose “narcissistic,” political separatism and provincialism.

Manipulation of Social Discontent, Populism and Nationalism

What unifies today’s Balkans is grinding poverty, particularly in its South (Bosnia, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo in the first place). Along with non-existent democratic tradition and democratic accountability, this poverty is the stumbling block in the way of true democratization. It boils down democracy to a meaningless form. Growingly unified Europe is permanently running ahead of the Balkans – the Balkans can simply not attain its standards that are growing higher and higher. Apparently, the Balkans lacks the enlightenment that would make it possible for it to accept European standards. The requests such as free market and the rule of law the Balkan societies are faced with nothing but further radicalize them, as they are incompetent for genuine modernization. Therefore, fundamental transformation of these societies asks for, as Bzezinsky puts it, “historical patience.”

However, even in such poverty-stricken Balkans the process of transition cannot be generalized. The wars waged over the past decade of the 20th century made Serbia the epicenter of crisis – for, as it resists changes, Serbia holds hostage the entire region. Serbia’s warring policy and its refusal to face the past unavoidably resulted in its radicalization. Radicalization then results in going back to the past. Attainments such as secularism are questioned, while the church and the army are getting the upper hand.

It was the international community that helped nourish the illusion about Serbia’s equal place in the region and in its relations with Europe. Serbia will hardly be able to set a reasonable course for itself, unless it comes to grips with the experience of the first and second Yugoslavia, as well as with the developments over the past decade. For, unless radical reforms take place – which is hardly probable – Serbs will once again try to compensate themselves by going for the territories they have allegedly lost. In an interview publicized these days, Academician Veselin Djuretic said, “Is it really possible that Albanians and Croats believe that Serbs would ever, just like that, give up what belongs to them?”

Serbia has always been in latent conflict with Europe. As it seems, this conflict is now stronger than ever before. In addition, in an attempt to further work its way up, Serbian elite relies on a possible conflict between Europe and the United States, and on Serbia’s indisputable geostrategic significance. Serbia’s inability to come face to face with itself results in both apathy and rationalization. So, some circles, particularly those within the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, are nowadays claiming that Yugoslavia should not have been destroyed at all. Academician Djuretic, referred to in the paragraph above, takes that “the Yugoslav option is the only way out for all ex-Yugoslav nations.”

What Europe has to do to really help Serbia at this point is to determine the real state of affairs and give up the wishful thinking image of Serbia on the grounds of which it builds its strategy. True, the European Union and the United States have brought peace to the Balkans. But that is not enough to really bring the Balkans closer to Europe.

Politicization of Trade Unions

Trade unions have always been politicized. This is why today the trade unions, particularly those connected with the former regime, demand ever more frequently the government's resignation. The fact the trade unions are so much engaged in politics manifests that other political factors are either incapacitated or too weak to come to grips with social problems.

Serbia's politics is "syndicated." Various political parties attempt to "profit" from social discontent. The G17 Plus that used to be a liberal-democratic organization has been riding the waves of fierce populism ever since it turned into a political party. And this dangerously opens the door to demagoguery of all sorts.¹⁸

Against the backdrop of general social discontent, socio-economic problems boil down to distribution of poverty. What matters in a situation as such is which of all trade unions is better organized than the rest. According to economist Miroslav Prokopijevic, everyone is fully aware of what it is that should be done, but "as voters are apathetic, no political party able to carry out such needed reform has emerged so far." "This is not about the lack of know-how," says Prokopijevic, "but about the lack of necessary will that marks the electorate and political parties alike. As both the former and the latter are aware of it, manipulation is mutual and endless."¹⁹

The problem of poverty – perceived as a political resource – is that it is there though the most painful stage of transition is still ahead. Serbia's transition has still not showed its bleakest effects. Aware of it, political parties are now swarming in the left of center domain, hoping to make some profit from this segment of ideological specter.

The DOS coalition was incapable of breaking with Milosevic's era, let alone those of Tito or Pasic. Egalitarianism plus mother-state is the problem facing all primitive societies. It is turned out, even the once Serbian opposition was incapacitated for a radical reform, which is evident in all domains.

As time goes by, trade union leaderships engaged in politics will turn losers, while those fighting for workers' rights will be winning the game. However, commanding trade unions to keep away from politics will not pacify them. For, trade unions' popularity is

¹⁸ Sociologist Stjepan Gredelj, the Helsinki Committee's public debate titled "Manipulation of Social Discontent, Populism and Nationalism," Kragujevac, October 30, 2003.

¹⁹ Ibid.

on the upward curve when they oppose the government, given that the state is still the main employer.²⁰

The poorest strata gradually turn most vulnerable to the influence from political parties and religious organizations. They are easily manipulated, as they have no strong value system to rely on, and are apt to having their daily interests met only. The sense of ethnicity is noticeably growing. For instance, Serbs that have fled from Kosovo getting together to “glorify Serbia” everywhere – they take they are better and more loyal citizens of any town they inhabit than the rest, and see themselves as the best “representatives of Serbian nation.” The Roma also separate themselves from others in line with their ethnic origin. For the masses, national identity becomes a way to satisfy their daily needs, as no other, better or more appropriate way is available to them. They are easily manipulated for any purpose with a national trait in it. For instance, they used to massively enroll themselves as volunteer fighters in 1999. And most of them volunteered under the pressure from some political parties. Many of them died or came out of the war as invalids. Their families nowadays live on welfare or the assistance provided by humanitarian or non-governmental organizations. On the other hand, political parties and religious organizations take poor care of their handicapped members.

Many people capable of work are now jobless and can hardly find themselves new jobs in near future. Some join political parties hoping to thus improve their employment vistas, while others go on strikes hoping to thus draw public attention to their problems. Ever more frequent hunger strikes, suicide threats or leaving babies behind in social care centers also reflect this manifold manipulation. All those people were manipulated – and now they manipulate others by presenting themselves as victims of the system, social crisis and transition. They call themselves “a collateral damage” of their own fate – which they probably are.²¹

Kosovo: Permanent Generator of Serbian Nationalism

For the Serbian national and state policy Kosovo, i.e. the Kosovo myth, has always been more of the means than the end. In the service of much stronger territorial aspirations, Kosovo is actually a constant of the modern Serbian state’s national policy. What figures as the core of this policy, from the beginnings, is unification of all territories considered Serbian, either by virtue of historical or ethnic right. Throughout history this policy has been labeled as “the revenge for Kosovo” or, like today, “the return of Kosovo.” As a rule, the policy of “the revenge for Kosovo” implied wars over territories, and not exclusively over the territory of Kosovo. In 20th century, when the Greater Serbia project was launched after the Karadjordjevic family was enthroned in 1903, Kosovo became not only the symbol, but also the driving force of the territorial expansion, the historical area wherein the Serbian state started with, but not concluded its expansionist aspirations.

²⁰ Journalist Dimitrije Boarov, the Helsinki Committee’s public debate titled “Manipulation of Social Discontent, Populism and Nationalism,” Kragujevac, October 30, 2003.

²¹ Pedagogue Borika Petkovic, the Helsinki Committee’s public debate titled “Manipulation of Social Discontent, Populism and Nationalism,” Kragujevac, October 30, 2003.

Father Milan Djuric, outstanding Radical of the time, roared in the Serbian parliament on the eve of the WW I, *“For centuries has the Serbian people slaved and fought...just to revenge Kosovo and set free its disintegrated ethnicity...It was this Kosovo pledge that pulled our ancestors up in the beginning of the past century...We should not sit on our hands while the heart of the Serbian nation is being torn off...Bosnia, the ancient Serbian kingdom, and Herzegovina, the dukedom of St. Sava.”*

After several wars and inspired by the myth of Kosovo and the slogan “revenge for Kosovo,” Serbia attained the Yugoslav state in 1918. In the newly created state the slogan lost its primary function, but was not forgotten. It was shelved in collective consciousness just to be revived every time Yugoslavia faced a crisis. At the end of the 20th century, when Serbia once again placed on the agenda the necessity of redefining national interests, “revenge for Kosovo” was resumed as a national-political formula supposed to legalize the project of territorial expansion. Like on previous occasions, this formula was utilized regardless of whether territorial aspirations were grounded on some historical or ethnic rights, and regardless of whether it was the Balkan’s south or west they were aimed at.

It was the infamous 8th Session of the League of Communists of Serbia and its clamor for Kosovo’s reintegration into Serbia’s constitutional competence that triggered the latest, large-scale recomposition of the ex-Yugoslav territory. As it turned out, the issue of Kosovo’s constitutional arrangement was an excuse, rather than the major objective of placing the Yugoslav constitution on the table. The state of emergency, following the amendment to the Serbian constitution in 1989, was imposed by federal administration of the then Yugoslavia and resulted in physical violence against Kosovo Albanians. Apparently, Serbia was not only eager to centralize anew its own territory, but the whole of ex-Yugoslavia as well. And obviously, the Eight Session was hardly just an insignificant event in the Yugoslav history or a mere inter-party showdown. Actually, that was a U-turn in the official Serbia’s Yugoslav policy. The policy of agreement was renounced and replaced by the policy aimed at Serbia’s domination over Yugoslavia at all costs, genocide included. So the slogan “revenge for Kosovo” once again became a war cry.

Ideologists of a centralized Yugoslavia – publicly omnipresent at the time – kept on expounding that a confederal Yugoslavia by itself implied a war for territorial reshuffle from Hungary to the Adriatic Sea, a war that could cost the region over one million human lives. This dreadful threat of Serbian intellectuals soon turned into Yugoslav reality. The “revenge for Kosovo” ended up as a revenge on Yugoslavia.

Kosovo’s role of the means, rather than the end of the Serbian national program is revived today regardless of suffering and hardship it initiated in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia.

Namely, in early 2003 – two years after the overthrow of the Milosevic regime – Serbia reopened the question of state borders in the Balkans. And, as throughout the past two centuries, Serbia used Kosovo: should Kosovo continue to insist on independence, threatened Serbian officials, Serbia would demand a “new Dayton,” i.e. rearrangement of regional borders. A year ago, Vice-premier Covic was quite explicit about the official stand by saying, “If they (Albanians) stand for independence, we (Serbs) will stand for

the division of Kosovo.” He thus, for the umpteenth time, reiterated the idea about division of Kosovo, the Serbian nationalists from Dobrica Cosic’s circles have been promoting ever since mid-1960s. So, to the request for an independent Kosovo Serbia responded by a list of its own territorial aspirations, topped as usual by Bosnia-Herzegovina. Actually, Serbia attempts to trade in territories: to exchange a part of Kosovo for Republika Srpska. However, apart from dividing Kosovo and Bosnia, such policy of territorial compensations questions state borders throughout the region. Serbian nationalists and makers of the national program can nowadays hardly veil that they have never given up the historical tendency to treat Macedonia – or, a part of it at least - as a Serbian territory. With Montenegro – “another Serbian state” or “the Serbian Sparta – as an add-on, it is more than obvious that Serbia has not put the issue of Balkan borders to bed and has been counting on another cycle of border drawing along ethnic lines. Apparently, today’s strategy, the same as the one before October 5, derives from general denial of the so-called AVNOJ borders, i.e. intra-republic borders laid down in the 1974 Constitution. This is the only viable explanation of the contrivance whereby Republika Srpska is equated with Kosovo.²²

In Serbia's recent past, manipulation of Kosovo begun in 1970s when the amendments to bring about the 1974 Constitution were under discussion. Dobrica Cosic was the first to come public with the statement about Serbia losing Kosovo forever. However, opening of the Kosovo problem in 1980s and its instrumentalization primarily served the purpose of opening the Serbian issue within Yugoslavia. The Kosovo problem is probably the most difficult of all because, on the one hand, it implies irrationality and emotions, and, on the other, there is a collective consciousness that Kosovo is lost. As the issue has been on the table for over a century, and solutions to it have always been utterly wrong - based on intolerance and some imaginary, collective rights that were, logically, exercised exclusively through brute force - Serbia was incapable of tracking down an exit strategy.²³

Speaking about the manipulation of Kosovo some 110 years ago, a Serb from Prizren wrote, "We want to lock horns with the entire world, though it's only natural that in conflicts as such the entire world would by far more easily beat us than we could beat them all. And then we behave like children - we kick against the pricks and cry at the top of our lungs calling the entire world 'hostile' to us, claiming this world would not let us live, let alone develop and grow stronger. No one is such a fool to take our fist for an orange or lemon...So, behaving like a mad bull, we've turned an issue of a nation's humane existence into an European problem, and did it all to our own detriment...That was the first bitter pill of our modern and infamous 'statesmanly wisdom' and provincial patriotism...One who genuinely wishes to help the Serbian people should give up all those flamy phrases, for threatening and challenging the entire world is nothing but act of suicide...We must finally realize that we cannot convert Europe and that Europe's decisions are the decisions made by some village assembly that would easily be annulled with hue and cry...And, we must realize that we should give up our claims based on force, but claim our rights, while respecting the rights of others at the same time...We've become used to swelling with fury and being at odds. And this could have produced nothing but turmoil actually originating from the smoky pubs throughout Belgrade and

²² Historian Olga Popovic-Obradovic, the Helsinki Committee’s public debate titled “Kosovo: Standards and Status,” Belgrade, November 12, 2003.

²³ Sociologist Olivera Milosavljevic, Ibid.

other towns. With everyone politically drunk, it was that poor people who had to pay the cost and up to this very day pray, 'Dear God, please save me from my alleged friend so that I can save myself from my enemies!' That people over there cannot be taken responsible for the political mess created by the bigmouths from Belgrade pubs and taverns. The bigmouths' doings are their own responsibility."²⁴

Serbian Nationalism in the Context of Regional Security

Balkan nationalisms still hinder the establishment of stable security arrangements in the region, but in Europe as well. This refers to the Kosovo issue, too. Obviously, it will take years of patient endeavor to pacify radicalism in the region, primarily through the process of joining the European Union. Membership of the European Union is the strongest motive for most Balkan states to plunge into reforms. In Serbia, there is still a large-scale resistance to such tendency. Were it not for the pressure from the international community, Serbia would have been in a chaos that – either through organized crime or terrorism – would easily spread to the territories of the EU member-states. Bearing such scenarios in mind, at its Salonika meeting of June 2003 the European Union decided to treat all Balkan countries as candidates for its membership. This is probably one of few good vistas for Serbia and its future.

Weak and paralyzed, Serbia is unable to pass a new constitution and define its borders, let alone come to grips with the problem of the final status for Kosovo. There are two scenarios in today's Serbia: one backed by the international community, which is still in draft, though its basic frame will not be given up; and the other that is advocated by the Serbian side – promoters of this scenario still refuse to acknowledge new realities, in spite of the fact that these realities will decisively influence the final status for Kosovo.

Today's final stage in the process of framing the Western Balkans is focused on the Albanian question. This is the context in which the recent visit Holbrooke and Coughnair paid to the region should be viewed. What they put on the table in Serbia was the international community's clear-cut stand. Belgrade is now challenged to choose "between Kosovo and Europe." Holbrooke was quite explicit about this choice. Serbs are at historical crossroads for, as he put it, if they "opt for Kosovo, they will lose both." Holbrooke's message pinpointed the major problem of the Balkans' security - the status for Kosovo. During his visit to Belgrade, Mark Grossman, one of top people in the American diplomacy, even hinted the deadline for solving the Kosovo problem - by 2005. Apparently, the official Belgrade is unready for such close deadline, as it wasted too much time on veiling its incapability to solve internal problems with the Kosovo issue.

Reestablishment of the Contact Groups indicates that the solution to the problem is impending. In spite of mutual differences - as, for the time being the European Union insists on standards before the status, the U.S. continue to blueprint an independent Kosovo, while Russia's stand is determined by the situation in Chechnya - all the three members have reached a consensus on basic problems of the region: weak economies,

²⁴ M. Djordjevic Prizrenac, "How To Help Our People in the Old Serbia?" Belgrade, 1891.

poor cooperation with The Hague Tribunal and political problems related to Kosovo. The European Union's sensitivity to unsolved territorial problems should also be taken into account when it comes to Kosovo. Actually, one of basic prerequisites to association to and the membership of the European Union is reflected in the stand about unacceptability of territorial problems.

The Serbian side's criticism boils down to the state of affairs in Kosovo after the intervention and the present day situation of Kosovo Serbs and other non-Albanians. Though such concern is fully legitimate, it cannot cloud the reality that placed both Serbs and non-Albanians in such situation. Over the past four years, the Serbian policy was focused on demonizing Albanians, compromising the international community's efforts and building of parallel institutions - actually it was aimed at proving to the world that Kosovo was *de facto* divided. Such strategy implies looking for a partner on the Albanian side, the one that advocates the idea of Greater Albania, i.e. division of Kosovo. But, for the time being, no advocates as such are found either in Kosovo or in Albania. Of course, this means not that such aspirations are not there.

On the other hand, Kosovo Albanians are unanimous about independence. They are fully aware that, as President Rugova puts it, "Serbia cannot hold hostage Kosovo, since Kosovo's potential also hold hostage Serbia."²⁵

Nationalism and Perception of the Past

Facing the recent past and genuine cooperation with The Hague Tribunal are of strategic significance to Serbia. This primarily implies substantiation of responsibility of those who have committed war crime and of their commanders; accountability for war crimes that will enable ethic reconstruction of the society; attainment of all declared foreign policy goals (joining European integration processes, membership of NATO, etc.); and, enabling economic development that depends on the attainment of foreign policy goals. However, the Serbian elite has opted for "commercialization," i.e. bargaining with The Hague Tribunal on the one hand, and denial or marginalization of war crimes on the other. This attitude was resumed even after October 5 in spite of the fact that the democratic regime extradited a number of indictees to the Tribunal. Among President Kostunica's first public statements was the one wherein he referred to the cooperation with the Tribunal as "the least of worries."

While extraditing the accused, the regime publicly justifies its doing with "the pressure from the world" and "the conditioned financial assistance." And, all the time it counts the minutes waiting for the end of the Tribunal's mandate. Obviously, the Serbian government prefers to be perceived as the one that extradits its innocent citizens to "the illegitimate tribunal in The Haque" and does it for "a handfull of dust" than as the government that cooperates with The Hague Tribunal in good faith, genuinely convinced that crimes have been committed and should be punished."²⁶

²⁵ Chair of the Helsinki Committee Sonja Biserko, the public debate "Kosovo: Standards and Status," Belgrade, November 12, 2003.

²⁶ Over an interview with the Danas daily, the former Ambassador to FRY, Charles Crawford, said that when he remarked that the Serbian government was deliberately leaving the public under impression

The media in Serbia play a significant role in promoting such stands taken by the political and cultural elite. This is particularly evident in the Milosevic case. Superficial reports from the Tribunal usually boil down to truncated and off-handed excerpts from witnesses' testimonies, noting, as a rule, that Milosevic "refuted" them all. Not a single analytical piece attempting to summarize the proceedings and pinpoint the counts that had been proved (and many had been) has been written so far. No reporter has ever questioned numerous lies Milosevic has been telling in the course of his "defense," not even when it comes to notorious facts.

By carrying opinions of alleged legal experts, the media regularly criticize the Tribunal primarily as a political institution manifesting an extreme anti-Serb bias. Almost as a rule, the media do not report numerous testimonies that incriminate people under their full names, who peacefully live in Serbia, let alone raise the issue of their responsibility before domestic courts. This is best illustrated by Gen. Krstic's testimony. Though he precisely named major culprits for the Srebrenica massacre, none of them has been questioned in Serbia, let alone prosecuted.

The new regime loses reputation by giving false statements about Mladic's whereabouts. It firstly claimed he was "not in the territory of Serbia" and then that he was "no longer in the territory of Serbia." The claim that he is not under the aegis of the Army was followed by the statement that he "was no longer under the aegis of the Army." The promise about "arresting Mladic immediately, if anyone told us his whereabouts" was followed by the statement according to which Mladic's "arrest could provoke a civil war." Everyone was involved in the game - from Djindjic and Kostunica to Dusan Mihajlovic, minister of the interior. (It was only Nenad Canak who openly said that the government was horsing around.)

So this is what the elite puts across at home: the crimes against non-Serbs are "not exactly the crimes;" they may be treated as crimes in keeping with the standards of another world to which we do not belong, though sometimes we do have to pretend to belong to it for financial reasons.

The Serbian administration's cynicism when it comes to the charges for genocide Bosnia-Herzegovina pressed against Serbia before the International Court of Justice is about the same story. Not long ago, the state's legal representatives requested the Court to revise the decision about its competence in the matter - for, allegedly, it was just recently that Yugoslavia "learned" it was not a UN member-state, i.e. this is what it learned when it was admitted to the UN. The bottom line here is to deny genocide Slobodan Milosevic is also charged with among other things. Not only the people from the former and the incumbent regime, but also those from the once anti-war movement are now engaged in this endeavor.

The latest indictments against four generals (Pavkovic, Lazarevic, Djordjevic and Lukic) for the crimes committed in the course of the 1999 armed conflict in Kosovo further sharpened the attitude towards The Hague Tribunal. The cooperation with the Tribunal

that it cooperated with The Hague under the pressure only, Premier Zoran Zivkovic told him the public would not accept this cooperation otherwise. The premier, upon his return from the visit to the USA in July 2003, boasted that he had demanded his counterparts to put an end to "the policy of conditioning and pressure." It is obvious that the Premier is unwilling to cooperate with The Hague Tribunal.

stalled after the Premier Djindjic assassination. The fact that Slobodan Milosevic and Vojislav Seselj figure on the top of candidates' lists for the early election in late December 2003, as well as that two indicted generals, Pavkovic and Lukic, are candidates for parliamentary seats clearly show that nothing has changed when it comes to The Hague.

National Minorities, Xenophobia, Racism and Anti-semitism

Endeavoring to present the post-October Serbia as a respectable and cooperative member of the international community, and thus emphasize the break with the old regime, the authorities also demonstrated their readiness to pursue a novel policy with regards to ***national minorities***. The task of addressing the minority question presented them with the opportunity to put across two messages: one addressed to the international community and the other to minorities themselves. The international community was thus told that it would be cooperating with a new elite, ready to abide by international standards. The minorities were messaged that they would no longer be treated as a public enemy but, on the contrary, as a partner and valuable associate in the process of building a different and more tolerant society.²⁷

The fact is that in the post-October Serbia minorities have less and less reason to fear. Massive repression against minorities is a thing of the past. However, this means not ethnically motivated violence is gone or that another cycle of its growth should be ruled out. For, nationalism that has so long and so strongly influenced developments in Serbia and the position of its minorities is neither disappeared nor defeated once and for all.

In early 2002, the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) met a major precondition set down by the Council of Europe to which it was admitted in the aftermath of the Djindjic assassination. The Federal Assembly adopted a *Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities*. The adoption of the Law drew a favourable response particularly from the international community. In its letter to Minister Ljajic, the OSCE Mission called the Law "one of the most liberal and comprehensive minority laws in Europe".²⁸

True, the Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities was a necessary but not sufficient step in the process of building a new minority policy. According to Federal Minister Rasim Ljajic, a new policy should imply new institutions, a reformed educational system freed of the views that encourage discrimination, and a transformed social climate.²⁹

What marks the Serbian society is a pronounced ethnic distance. According to the findings of the public opinion survey commissioned by the Federal Ministry of National Minorities, 3.3 percent of respondents displayed an extreme distance to people from

²⁷ "This law is our clear message to the minorities that we shall treat them as an integral part of the state and society," Rasim Ljajic, Federal Minister of National Minorities and Ethnic Communities, *Vecernje Novosti*, January 2002.

²⁸ *Danas*, March 2-3, 2002.

²⁹ *Danas*, April 12, 2002.

minority communities, 28 percent strong distance, 54.8 moderate distance, and only 10.3 percent of respondents manifested no distance at all. Over 70 percent of respondents in Central Serbia, Belgrade and Vojvodina believed that one should be on one's guard with Albanians, 50 percent said the same about Croats and Bosniaks, and 30 percent about Roma. In South of Serbia, for instance, 73 percent of Albanians and 61 percent of Serbs exhibited ethnic distance: 56 percent and 43 percent respectively said they could not be on friendly terms with one another, and as many as 96 percent and 95 percent respectively would forbid their children to intermarry.³⁰ It particularly disturbing that people between the ages of 20 and 29 exhibit greater ethnic distance than those between the ages of 50 and 57.

It comes as no surprise that, in a society weighed down with ethnic mistrust and xenophobia, some politicians such as Velimir Ilic, leader of the New Serbia party, should seek to make political capital of such trends. Instead of striving to bridge the ethnic distance and build confidence, they appeal to the prejudices of the most conservative segment of society, insisting that the key posts in the state be made the ethnic monopoly of the majority nation.

What the "union" of ethnic elites offers to minorities is assimilation in the case of small minority communities, and ethnic enclosures in the event of big ones. Small minorities have to cope with the problem of interethnic solidarity, while the big one face the issue of their own poor national identity. Some minority communities' endeavor to complete their education system from pre-school up to university level will certainly help them preserve their national identities.

The union of nationalists is turning Serbia into a kind of ethno-federation, as it dissolve is into rows of worlds that exist parallel to each other. Such union unequally distributes benefits and expenses – benefits go to big minorities, but not to small ones. When members of small minority communities criticize the Minority Law, they are in the right. For, the rights that are provided, for example, to Hungarians are denied to Germans. Considering that under the current legislation Germans are practically deprived of the possibility to form a national council, but they need a body to represent them, the only dilemma is which of their present ethnic factions will monopolize that role and so spark a process of mutual rivalry.

However, the union of nationalistic elites does not free Serbia of ethnically motivated conflicts. Such violence exists, and in some places, such as neighborhoods Adice and Veliki Rit it is going on for a long time; witness to which is the letter sent recently by the Ashkalia Union to Interior Minister Dusan Mihajlovic with a request that the police do all in its might to prevent future conflicts and protect Romanies and Ashkalia from violence.

Tolerance for *the hate speech* is still considered a natural consequence of insufficiently developed democracy and a relic of the Communist era, rather than a danger that might grow to unforeseeable proportions and the more so the phenomenon the state should put an end to. The failure of the state authorities to act appropriately was criticized by, among others, the Society for Truth About the Anti-fascist Struggle, in connection with an incident during which copies of the dailies *Danas* and *Politika* were publicly torn up at

³⁰ *Gradjanski List*, March 16-17, 2002.

the Cacak town square by members of the Ravna Gora Movement 'Sloboda' [Freedom] commemorating an anniversary of the death of General Draza Mihajlovic.³¹

"We're not against media freedom," members of the Movement said and justified their action by claiming, "These newspapers are telling the vilest things about the Serbian traditions, religion and nation. They are anti-Serb and imbued with hate speech. Their hatred is directed in the first place against Bishop Nikolaj and the Ravna Gora Movement of General Mihajlovic.' Another reason why the newspaper copies were destroyed, according to Vladimir Stegnjajic, the president of the movement's District Committee, was that *Danas* and *Politika* wrote critically about Mayor of Cacak Velimir Ilic. 'We regard any malicious article about him as an assault against Cacak," he said. In his appeal to Cacak residents to boycott *Danas* and *Politika*, Stegnjajic said, "This is just a beginning."³²

It was in Cacak too that a panel discussion on anti-Semitism was disrupted by visitors who not only opposed such a topic being discussed in the town but also called Jews "the most corrupt and filthiest race on earth." Another incident followed shortly when a member of the local extreme Right, who objected to the staging of an exhibition of works by the American photographer Ron Haviv under the title 'Blood and Honey', beat the exhibition organizer and activist of the Civil Parliament of Serbia, Ivan Zlatić.³³

Similar incidents took place in other towns staging Haviv's exhibition, notably in Uzice and Kragujevac, where supporters of Radovan Karadzic chanted nationalistic slogans, insulted visitors, and blocked the opening ceremony. There were also incidents in Novi Sad where, according to *Dnevnik*, some twenty young members of the Fatherland Movement 'Obraz' and the Serbian National Movement "Svetozar Miletic" were prevented by a strong police force from disrupting the opening ceremony. Before and during the opening of the exhibition, protesters distributed leaflets bearing slogans "This exhibition is in the service of filthy anti-Serb propaganda" and scrawling various messages on the exhibition boards such as "Ustashi!", 'Kill Muslims!', "Down with [Nenad] Canak!" "We are children of Serbia!", "The more of them are killed, the less work there is for us," "What about Serbian churches and icons?," or "Death to the traitors!". When someone reacted by scribbling, "Shall we ever see the end of wars?" his question got the following answer "Until minorities realize that the Serbian people are in the majority in Serbia and do not want to be in the minority." The Novi Sad exhibition was opened by Nenad Canak, the president of the Vojvodina Assembly, and Slavisa Grujic, editor of the TV channel Apollo. After the exhibition was declared opened, a group of protesters booed Grujic, crying he was not "a true Serb" and was married to a Hungarian.³⁴

Indeed, incidents accompanying the Haviv exhibition as it toured Serbia – in Prokuplje, for instance, the difficulties of the organizers to find appropriate premises amounted to an unofficial ban – bore evidence that every effort to publicly discuss and raise the question

³¹ This time newspapers were on the cause list...tomorrow books will be burning at the stake, and after that attacks on people with different views will become increasingly frequent and brutal," *Danas*, July 19, 2002.

³² *Danas*, July 18, 2002.

³³ The Cacak police released that the brawlers were neither skinheads nor members of any extremist group but hooligans and people prone to making trouble, *Danas*, July 20-21, 2002. The attackers were fined 5,000 dinars each except for their ringleader, Igor Ivanovic, who was sentenced to 10-day imprisonment.

³⁴ *Dnevnik*, September 11, 2002.

of responsibility for recent crimes was not only resisted but came up against a campaign in support of people accused of war crimes. In all bigger towns, for instance, the Serb Fatherland Movement "Obraz" posted Radovan Karadzic's portraits bearing the caption "Every Serb is Radovan."

Standing out against revival of radical nationalism, a group of intellectuals wrote at the end of October 2002 a "Letter of Warning to the Serbian Public." The authors warned against the unjustifiable delay in confronting the evil and condemned in particular the promotion of the school of historical and historiographic revisionism, the publicity given to conservative, organicistic thought, the rehabilitation of collaborationists in the WWII and the societal shift to "a new uniformity...marked by the totalitarian and undemocratic ideology of Milan Nedic and Dimitrije Ljotic and by the triumph of the provincial philosophy of Nikolaj Velimirovic."³⁵

The bad economic situation also fuels nationalism as it makes people in the street turn to manipulated identity references as a way out of their present difficulties. This trend became obvious following the entry into force in Hungary of the Status Law of January 1, 2002, designed to protect Hungarians living in neighboring countries. Actually, the law seeks to preserve the national identity of Hungarians living in Slovenia, Croatia, the FRY (Serbia and Montenegro now), Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine, to slow down or halt their emigration, and to encourage their spiritual and political integration without a rectification of frontiers.

Unlike the sharp reactions of the Slovak and Romanian governments, the response of the Yugoslav authorities was one of utmost reserve. In mid-2002, at a conference in Belgrade Federal Foreign Minister Goran Svilanovic had set out certain objections to the Status Law, but did not elaborate on them. When asked explicitly by a number of non-governmental organizations to declare its position on it, the federal government failed to respond. Participants in a round table in Novi Sad, organized by the local branch of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, found it inexcusable that the citizens were better informed about how Bratislava and Bucharest view the law than about the position of their own government on the same issue. They complained that the government's policy of ignoring non-governmental organizations in this respect was incompatible with its oft-repeated assurances of transparency, and warned that such attitude could hardly offset the homogenization based on anti-Hungarian feelings. That such feelings were on the rise was testified to by, among other things, inquiries made at the Helsinki Committee's Novi Sad office, when people were calling in to ask what the law was about and then providing commentaries such as "How long will Serbs be discriminated in this country?" or "What kind of democracy is this, given that Hungarians can work in both Hungary and Serbia, while there is no work for Serbs even in Serbia itself?" Out of six offices set up to deal with applications for Hungarian documents, those in Becej and Sombor received anonymous threats, their employees being warned that bombs would be thrown into the premises unless they stopped receiving applications. The opening of the KMH office in Temerin was resisted by local member of the Serbian Radical Party, who saw the move as a ploy to "wrest land from Serbs."

³⁵ *Danas*, October 29, 2002. The letter was signed by Mirko Djordjevic, Milan Djordjevic, Filip David, Dragan Velikic, Predrag Cudic, Vladimir Arsenijevic, Bogdan Bogdanovic, Radmila Lazic and Laslo Vogel.

That *xenophobia and racism* are deeply rooted is illustrated by a similar "concern" for the country's future some anonymous authors expressed in a leaflet circulated in densely populated blocks in New Belgrade. The leaflet warned the residents against "the yellow pest" and called for "the boycott immigrants." In mid-2002, an organization calling itself the Patriotic Wing of Young Serb Skinheads circulated a proclamation saying that skinheads were "neither beer-guzzlers nor haters, but young people who champion the interests of the healthy Serbian community." The objectives of this "healthy" segment of Serbian youth, enumerated under the slogan "Serbia for Serbs," include revival of the traditional Serbian family, survival of the white race and restoration of its racial pride, and a crusade against the new world order, drug addicts, homosexuals, miscegenation and the deluge of colored people. The nature of such "struggle" came to light at the end of 2002 when two Chinese shops were burned down in Kragujevac.

At the round table organized by the Croatian Academic Society, sociologist Srećko Mihajlovic drew attention to the fact that "hatred of foreigners is more common among Serbs than fear of them." The view that everything coming from abroad is dangerous and suspicious, and, therefore, one should keep away from foreigners, is in evidence in nearly all research into the matter. For instance, the stand that foreign influence is dangerous for our culture is shared by as many as half the citizens of Serbia...To make things more absurd, one-quarter of the citizens deem foreign investment as a danger to our country," said Mihajlovic.³⁶

As for *anti-Semitism* in the post-October 5 Serbia, it comes in the "nationalistic package," carefully wrapped along with racism, xenophobia, and intolerance. In parallel with a part of the Serbian elite's attempt to rehabilitate nazi collaborators in the World War II and their ideology, and discredit anyone siding the anti-Hitler coalition, new organizations such as "Obraz" or "St. Justin" popped up at the social scene. Assembling mostly young people and some students of the Faculty of Theology, these organizations have "mastered" anti-Semitism. Moreover, they have been propagating racism, Hitlerism as "a vision of the future," as well as other notorious domestic adherents of the Third Reich.

According to Aleksandar Lebl, president of the Commission for anti-Semitism of the Federation of Jewish Communities (in Serbia and Montenegro), judging anti-Semitism on a scale 1 to 10 (wherein 1 stands for non-existent anti-Semitism, while 10 for Holocaust) would get Serbia a mark of 4. Likewise, Serbia would be ranked 4-5 on the same scale applied to authorities' responses to anti-Semitism in general (for instance, today's Germany takes the top place, judged by 7-8).³⁷ In other words, Serbian authorities do react, but not appropriately and not to the point – everything boils down to verbal protests over drastic incidents, issued by officials, political parties, and non-governmental organizations. As a rule, says Lebl, the police never manage to detect authors of anti-Semitic graffiti or those who demolish Jewish tombstones and monuments. Regardless of Article 134 of the Criminal Code that penalizes publishing of anti-Semitic literature and spreading hatred, no one has been called to account so far: prosecutors have not been instituting suits against such authors or publishers. Recently demanded to ban the umpteenth edition of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," the Belgrade Public

³⁶ *Danas*, October 14, 2002.

³⁷ Aleksandar Lebl, Round Table "Extremism in Serbia," European Movement in Serbia, February 2003.

Prosecution Office replied it took not this fabrication as an anti-Semitic narrative and, therefore, saw no reason whatsoever to ban it. "This would have been unacceptable in a law-abiding state," says Lebl.³⁸

Here one should bear in mind that major advocates of retrograde ideas are not be tracked down just among marginal conservative groups or minor, extremist political forces, but in key opinion makers and presumed pillars of the society such as the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Army, the Serbian Academy of Arts and Science, University circles, etc.

To illustrate the above it suffices to say that the Church advocates the newly sanctified N. Velimirovic's stands about "the return to traditional roots." Such conservativeness that, among other things, propagates gender discrimination and "sticking to our culture and tradition as values that would never abandon us" is being rooted in the minds of ordinary people anyway having been isolated from the outside world for long. To make a bad situation worse, this particularly affects younger generation – future decision-makers and the expected vanguard of liberal ideas.

Multinational communities such as Serbia are all the more complex because they are often religiously heterogeneous. *Small religious communities* are often branded as sects that resort to all kinds of insidious practices. When early in April 2002 Olga Ivanis of Indjija committed suicide by throwing herself from a three-story building, the media quoted people as saying she had been under the pressure from a sect but nobody could say which.³⁹ A particularly serious incident took place in Belgrade in late 2002 when a group of some thirty youths prevented an Anglican priest and about twenty believers, including the British ambassador, Charles Crawford, from entering the Serbian Orthodox Church Patriarchate for a traditional Christmas Eve service. The incident was given wide media coverage and was condemned by the SPC, non-governmental organizations and political parties. Interestingly, the Serbian Minister for Religious Affairs, Vojislav Milovanovic, called the affair a "a remnant of the Communist past" though the youths gathered outside the building did not chant Communist slogans but church canons and hymns.

When the Broadcasting Law was drafted, the Serbian Orthodox Church insisted on being allotted air-time by the state RTS channel; it also wanted the drafters to throw in a provision making it obligatory for republican and provincial broadcasting services to allocate four hours of prime-time a week to religious programs anytime between 4 p.m. and 10 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. The request, signed by Patriarch Pavle, also insisted that live broadcasts of religious ceremonies should not be interrupted by commercials.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Dnevnik*, April 7, 2002.

⁴⁰ *Danas*, January 18, 2002.

Normalizing the Balkans

The uncertainty of the Balkans' future casts doubt on the process of normalization and, eventually, reconciliation. Most Balkan countries are still dominated by nationalistic policies, which are, *ipso facto*, xenophobic and intolerant. Such ethnic entities or states have not yet manifested their ability to elevate themselves to the level of modern nation states that guarantee equality and rights to their minorities. This is why the present activities of the international community and its institutions such as the United Nations, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and NATO are of crucial importance. These institutions lay down the framework and the system of values for the newly-established countries, which truly capacitates them to join the European family of nations.

The foundations that would guarantee reconciliation between former warring sides and, consequently, ensure stability in the Balkans have not yet been laid. The international community has over the past ten years invested strong efforts to find a solution to what was at first a Yugoslav crisis but could now be termed a Balkan one. The Hague Conference and the Stability Pact were separated by a time-span of ten years. All the solutions offered in the interim - from the Dayton Accords 1995, the UN Resolution 1244 (1999) to the Framework Agreement for Macedonia – were, nevertheless, half-measures allowing continual manipulation by local warlords. Besides, peace agreements are not enough in themselves to bring about reconciliation. What is necessary is political will to implement them and the will of the peoples inhabiting the region to restore their life together.

In the last ten years, Serbia has made no radical attempt to achieve reconciliation with its once »foes.« For one thing, there can be no reconciliation with Croatia while a number of questions remain unsolved; these involve, among others, the silence about the fate of 1,500 missing Croats, the dragging of feet over the Prevlaka Peninsula, and the reluctant delivery of last member of the »Vukovar troika« to The Hague. As regards relations between Belgrade and Bosnia, the state of affairs is even more uncertain and complex. To begin with, the Dayton Accords essentially cement the defeat of the victim, i.e. the Muslims. Dayton was framed according to the situation on the ground, not according to the principles of justice. In other words, the Accords themselves have not created any preconditions for a process of reconciliation. Republika Srpska is a creation founded on crime and, therefore, intrinsically condemned to ruin. Seven years after Dayton only a small number of refugees have returned to Republika Srpska, and Mladic and Karadzic, the symbols of ethnic cleansing and mass murder, are still at large. Furthermore, while paying lip service to an integral Bosnian state, the Bosnian Serbs are busy hacking away at its very foundations with a view to a union with Serbia. This project is now being promoted as the »rounding off of Serb cultural and spiritual space.« Republika Srpska has already been incorporated in the economic, educational, military and media structure of the Serbia and Montenegro. While pretending to be willing to be part of multiethnic Bosnia that has paid off in terms of Western donations, no one has any intention of facing the past.

Thus, as far as Bosnia is concerned, an initial error was made. The first Commission for Truth and Reconciliation has failed in its task because, as it turned out, each of the three parties had its own version of the truth and consistently propagated it. And that was totally contrary to the spirit of the Dayton Accords. Actually, it was contrary to the spirit

of a just peace. A new Commission under UN auspices was set up only recently. But unless the truth is established and the character of the war qualified, the new Commission is not likely to make any progress.

A similar situation is evident in Serbia following Milosevic's fall from power, especially since his transfer to The Hague. After ten-years of frustration with Milosevic, the West has settled for a »normalization of Serb nationalism« – blaming all crimes committed by Belgrade on Milosevic the Communist. No attempt has been made to fathom deeper roots of Serbian nationalism, which, throughout the twentieth century, threatened the survival of the former Yugoslavia and ultimately directly caused its break-up. Indeed such efforts have been discouraged even by Western diplomats, who are eager to have normal relations with Belgrade and willing to give new leaders benefit of the doubt. Instead of making a break with the policy of its predecessor, the new leaders perpetuated it by other means only. They were awaiting different international circumstances and even a redrawing of the Balkan map. As Dobrica Cosic, the most popular Serbian writer, said, »That would be a war for ethnic states. We have nothing to lament, for we have created an ethnic state.« Admittedly, he has not defined its boundaries yet.

The 11th of September, it seems, served Belgrade as a new excuse to reinterpret the recent past in its favour, obstruct real analysis, and try to mask the crux of the problem. The bigger the mistake and the bloodier its consequences, the harder for people to own up, says the historian Sforza. The assassination of Premier Djindjic, who symbolized Serbia's reformist endeavor, best illustrated how far conservative and nationalistic forces were ready to go to obstruct Serbia's opening to the world.

Serbia has not come to terms with recent changes in the world and the end of the communist illusion, which opened up the space for disillusionment and new manipulations. Serbian resistance to new challenges resulted in lengthy and thorough preparation for new egalitarian ideology, through party dogma urging unity, through the Church preaching about the superiority of the Eastern Orthodoxy and of East over the West, a military doctrine extolling Serbs the warriors, through literature, historiography... Without a viable alternative and with no possibility of retreat, indoctrination could not but result in the use of force. The prevalent cultural pattern wreaked unprecedented destruction: the razing of towns, the obliteration of centuries-old monuments, mass murders of civilians, etc. As one prominent Serbian architect remarked, »Through this lunacy permeates also the avenger's hatred for urban life and for urban civilization.«

Evolution of a new cultural pattern will require both time and the engagement not only of the small marginalized segment of the Serbian elite who consistently opposed nationalism, but also of the international community. Up to now, the preference has been for simple solutions ensuring peace rather than investing in efforts to fundamentally change the cultural pattern that is essential for reconciliation.

The Hague Tribunal established in 1993, representing a key mechanism for the individualization of crimes and the satisfaction of justice, is not sufficient in itself to bring about reconciliation. The Hague Tribunal is in the interest of nations in that it individualizes crimes. It proves the crime, as well as prevents a nation from deluding itself and building a new myth in which it figures as the victim. Another important

feature of The Hague Tribunal is that it compels states to accept limited sovereignty with regard to humanitarian law and human rights violations.

On the other hand, The Hague tribunal has its limitations. For example, it has no built-in moral dimension, which contributes to glossing over the issue of responsibility. Thus Milosevic's transfer under outside pressure was presented to the Serbian public as a concession that opened the door to the financial support of the West. Such an approach devalues the moral component. In other words, The Hague Tribunal is potentially problematic in that it may leave a state under the impression that it has fulfilled its moral obligation. Furthermore, the Tribunal deals with individual culpability without condemning, as the Nuremberg trials did, the policy which caused the crime.

A truth commission, therefore, can correct these shortcomings. However, a truth commission cannot by definition be a valid state truth commission if the state in question does not acknowledge its responsibility for the crimes. The commission the then president Kostunica set up was composed for the most part of people whose writings furnished the arguments in favour of territorial expansion. It was ready to establish what happened, but not to assume responsibility. It did not take the indictments against Milosevic, Mladic, Karadzic and others into account as a relevant starting point for determining the responsibility of the state.

The task of a truth commission is, among other things, to diagnose the political context in which a criminal policy was accepted and implemented. Unless this is done, a society as a whole cannot reexamine its responsibility for such policy. We are dealing here not with collective guilt but rather with the historical responsibility of a society that assented to such policy, elected the leaders who set it in motion, or merely kept the low profile. This is about the policy that brought about the siege of Sarajevo, the Serbrenica mass murder, and ethnic cleansing. Coming to grips with it is the hardest task for the society attempting to come face to face with itself.

Even if a truth commission makes the necessary diagnosis, the process of facing the past squarely cannot proceed unless backed by the state administration, governmental institutions and the media, above all the broadcast media. The state must adopt a set of values as a guidance to the commission and must build these values into the overall system including education, the media, etc.

Apparently, Serbia has not made a single step in the desired direction. The reality of today's Serbia is fragmented, as are the activities of the international community. Everything is taking place at several different levels at the same time. There is no succession of events that could set into motion a reconciliation process. At one level, Serbia is being saved from implosion, while, on the other, the union of Serbia and Montenegro is artificially maintained; on the third level, decentralization of Serbia is blocked by Belgrade's politicians; and, on the fourth level, an idea to partition Bosnia and Kosovo circulates in the hope that the international community would ultimately consent to such a »sensible and realistic« solution.

Mass graves of Kosovo Albanians are being discovered in Serbia, but are never publicly connected with the events in Kosovo - as if all those corpses came out of the blue. Although many were shocked by such discoveries, the question of what actually

happened to all those people was never publicly opened. Public reaction has basically been one of indifference to this evidence of appalling war crimes. A segment of the population still cannot accept the fact that Serbia was bombed because of what its troops and paramilitary did to Kosovo Albanians, and that the West had to protect them from a genocide. Such perception would never fit into the prevalent perception of Kosovo Albanians as third-rate citizens. The NATO intervention is never associated with the plight of the Albanians but always invoked to remind the West it should feel guilty. Thus, too, the West is supposed to pay for Serbia's democratization without Serbia having to lift a finger.

Turning a blind eye to crimes, glorifying criminals like Mladic and Karadzic, and extolling an army that was responsible for crimes is the landmark of Serbia's conservativeness and retrograde trends. Unless exposed, this link could again set the stage for a new war. However, The Hague Tribunal has become the mirror of Serbia through reconstructing the past reality, which, in return, has the impact on today's reality.

It is of paramount importance that Serbia faces its recent past and draws a moral lesson from. Only then Serbia will be genuinely prepared for reconciliation. The well-known German historian, Holm Zundhausen, said, »No society can avoid confrontation with the dark pages of its past. Every democratic community must sort itself out. Silence is destructive.«

This presupposes a break with the Greater Serbia project. Unless this project is delegitimized, the crime cannot be condemned. With the defeat of the Greater Serbia project the region can restore its balance and start its painful process of reconciliation.

Conclusion

1. Not even after the change of October 5 a socio-political alternative able to articulate a radical break with conservativeness, traditionalism and nationalism did not emerge in Serbia;
2. Though a certain economic progress has been made in terms of transition (e.g. in the domains of privatization and financial transaction), Serbia has not changed its prevalent political pattern that is also manifest in people's state of mind.
3. Three years after the change of the regime, Serbia shows that its democratic potential and energy are inadequate for facing the recent past and thus creating conditions for the establishment of a clear-cut moral vertical.
4. The Serbian elite clings on the delusion about a possible revision of peace agreements, i.e. unification of all "Serbian territories," which is more than obvious in the attitude towards The Hague Tribunal, Republika Srpska and Kosovo.
5. In the post-October period, the Serbian Orthodox Church is the main promoter of anti-modern and anti-European trends, which is evident in its overall activity. The Church is quite overt about its political ambition and, in tandem with some circles

in the Army and the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, actively supports reinstatement of monarchy. Against the backdrop of an overall identity crisis, the Church revokes a bygone value system by promoting figures that symbolize patriarchal, anti-market and anti-European train of thought. Its notable anti-Hague stance and uncritical attitude towards war crimes are aimed at marginalizing its own responsibility and that of the Serbian elite.

6. The Army that used to be the pillar of the Milosevic regime's Greater Serbia project still actively encourages the illusion that Serbia will expand to "its ethnic territories." Here the Army is close to the Serbian Orthodox Church in terms of ideology and action.
 7. Focused on ousting Milosevic's regime, the international community neglected to properly analyze the Serbian society and its trends and, therefore, it failed to adequately evaluate the transitional progress Serbia has made.
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