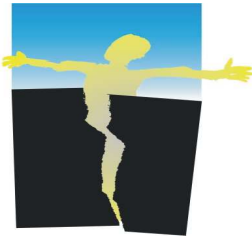


HELSINKI Bulletin



Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia

Rige od Fere str. #20, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia
tel./fax +381 11 30 32 408; e-mail office@helsinki.org.rs ;
www.helsinki.org.rs

N° 29 • May 2009

FOREIGN POLICY WITHOUT A CONCEPT

The domain of foreign policy best reflects the absence of a strategic concept for the country's development – characteristic of Serbia's "inner dynamic" ever since the assassination of Premier Zoran Djindjic. Such "concept free" foreign policy is notably evident in the past three years of Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic's international and diplomatic activism. Though formally a cadre of the Democratic Party – verbally persisting on Serbia's "European course" (which secured it victory in presidential and parliamentary elections in 2008) – Jeremic has been wasting his indisputably enormous energy on one cause only: on hindering international recognition of Kosovo's independence. The Minister thus services the influential and, unfortunately, still predominant parts of Serb academic elite and political class that – cocooned in their autism – are totally unaware of deep changes taking place at global level in the past years. Even less are they aware of true interests of Serb people and state, and its strategic position in this new context.



Boiled down to one "battle" only the country's foreign policy and diplomatic activity implies – apart from being restrictive in itself – unprincipled compromises and often a high price Serbia has to pay for such arrangements: it pays with its reputation¹ and it pays financially as in case of the Serbian Oil Industry sold to a Russian partner. Such disorientation in both domestic and foreign policy sources from unwillingness to take stock of wrong policies of Slobodan Milosevic and Vojislav Kostunica.

At the same time it testifies of a crisis of political identity. On the one hand, Serbia undergoes transition similar to the one in Russia and, on the other, it has not psychologically overcome Milosevic's defeated "social state." However, despite such discrepancy, Serbia perceives itself as a country standing for the principles of socialism and social justice (regardless of the widespread tycoonization) and against American neoliberalism and imperialism. Persisting on the state issue (rear-

¹ The Helsinki Committee's report for the year 2008 published under the title „Human Rights, Democracy and – Violence“ provides an example that indicates the compromises Serbia accepts in the search for allies in „defense“ of Kosovo. Namely, on November 21, 2008, Serbia voted against the UN Resolution on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran where the Sharia applies even to persons under age (out of 32 death penalties in the entire world in 2005, 26 took place in Iran). According to an unnamed official of the EU, the only logical reason for Serbia no-vote is that it „repaid Iran for its vote for the request for the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion on legality of Kosovo's independence.

rangement of the Balkans, including partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina) Serbia has been undermining, all the time, the international community's endeavor to stabilize the territory of ex-Yugoslavia and include it in Euro-Atlantic integrations.

In this context, Serbia obstructs implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords and most selectively cooperates with the tribunal in The Hague (that cooperation has hardly influenced Serbia's society and prompted it to establish a new moral vertical and open public dialogue that would contribute to regional normalization).

Anti-Americanism has also gained huge proportions – and as such it perfectly fits into the large international front that has taken root at the time of George Bush's presidency. In addition, Serbia perceives the US as the main "culprit" for the failure of the Greater Serbia project. Therefore, Belgrade tries at all costs to curb US effort to include Serbia in NATO. American insistence on multiethnicity and multiculturalism is seen as a new form of colonialism. Regardless of much sympathy for President Barack Obama worldwide – and in Serbia – Serbian diplomacy looks at the American administration solely from the prism of its attitude towards the Balkans, i.e. towards Serbia. So, for instance, in his argumentation before leaving for Washington the newly appointed ambassador to US, Vladimir Petrovic, claimed he would not cooperate with the Department of State because of Hillary Clinton but only with Congress or White House with allegedly Serb lobbies that could help in realization of state and national interests.²



² A source close to the Foreign Policy Committee of the Serbian Parliament.



Having adopted the Resolution on Neutrality (2007) Serbia defined its foreign policy position as something between the East and the West (with reliance on Russia) and thereby its attitude towards the EU: a "cash box" to service its budget deficit.

In its search for allies all over the globe -- for the concept shared by many countries that seem to be at loss in the new circumstances and try to maintain status quo at all costs – Serbia's diplomacy mostly tracks them down in Asia and Africa, among authoritarian regimes that hardly care for either Serbia or Kosovo but need support for their own interests in the UN or some other international organization. (E.g. Serbia supported Iran, Estonia, withdrew its participation in NATO maneuvers in Georgia, etc.)

Serbia's Foreign Minister is being preoccupied with lobbying among such potential partners while boasting about the (short term) effects of his actions and publicly speaking about them as triumphs.

The Latest Campaign

Kosovo's independence declaration (2008) set off a new wave of anti-Western sentiments that found full reflection in Serbia's foreign policy. Serbia has been spending almost its entire political energy on blocking Kosovo's international recognition. Relations with the countries in the region that had recognized Kosovo have been impaired since Serbia saw it as an act of hostility. Montenegrin and Macedonian ambassadors were even proclaimed personae non grata. After that the Foreign Ministry begun an intensive campaign the purpose of which was to radicalize the Albanian population in Kosovo and thus prove Belgrade's thesis about Albanians' incapability to govern a state. For

Belgrade, such scenario may also open the door to its strategic goal: impelling partition of Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, i.e. rearrangement of the Balkans. Beside looking for partners at other continents, Serbia's diplomacy has played on division within the EU the more so since five member-countries (Spain, Rumania, Cyprus, Slovakia and Greece) had not yet recognized Kosovo.

Allegedly, the Ministerial Conference of the Organization of Islamic Conference in Syria, in mid-May 2009 did not decide on "collective recognition of Kosovo" thanks to Minister Jeremic's endeavor. "With the helping hand from friendly countries in the OIC Serbia managed to have the appeal for urgent recognition of Kosovo removed from the Declaration of Kosovo that was adopted in Syria yesterday. The planned wave of recognition by some 20 countries was thus avoided," says a news story in *Vecernje Novosti*.³

According to the stories run by other media, Serbia's initiative, advocated by Minister Jeremic himself via telephone communication with ministries of scores of countries, was backed by "friendly countries" such as Egypt, Azerbaijan, Sudan, Algeria, etc.

"First they wanted all Islamic countries to recognized Kosovo 'in the name of Allah' but what they got in the end was a four-paragraph resolution so worded as the Serb side itself has wrote it," quotes *Politika* its anonymous source from the Foreign Ministry in a story titled "Who 'Won' in Damascus?"⁴ The story also quotes the director of the Forum for Ethnic Relations, Dusan Janjic, saying "the amended resolution by Islamic states is a great victory of the Foreign Ministry."

With its 57 member-states the Organization of Islamic Conference is the second biggest international organization. So far 9 OIC member-states have bilaterally recognized Kosovo – among them is the influential Saudi Arabia, which, allegedly, initiated "collective recognition" in Damascus. Boasting about his success in preventing such

recognition, the Foreign Minister enthusiastically announced next actions. "We are going on. We shall be present in all places in which decisions on Kosovo are made, our voice will be heard at all meridians and I hope we would be as successful as we have been up to now," said Jeremic.⁵



To prove his intention Minister Jeremic, just a couple of days later, flew to Honduras for the Ministerial Meeting of the Organization of American States. "Another victory," said *Kurir*⁶ about the outcome of his mission. Other media followed in the tabloid's footsteps. All news stories were based on the messages sent by the Foreign Minister from a faraway country and all of them claimed his person-to-person talks with numerous foreign ministers "stopped the wave of collective recognition of Kosovo." (Not a single story missed to mention that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also attended the conference. Her goal, according to domestic media, was to initiate "the wave of collective recognition.")

Using a similar cliché to that for the meeting in Damascus the media asserted US and Great Britain were exerting enormous pressure on the countries of Central and South America to "recognize Kosovo during the conference or shortly after it."⁷ Whereas physically not present in Damascus, Minister Jeremic was allowed to address ministers in San Pedro and to appeal to appeal to the countries that have not recognized Kosovo yet to refrain from such act. "That's the only way to avoid further undermining of legitimacy of the international order and universal values we share," he said among other things.⁸

³ *Vecernje Novosti*, May 25, 2009.

⁴ *Politika*, May 28, 2009.

⁵ *E-novine*, June 3, 2009.

⁶ *Kurir*, June 5, 2009.

⁷ *Danas*, June 2, 2009

⁸ *Glas Javnosti*, June 2, 2009.

His message to foreign ministers attending the conference of the Process of Cooperation in South East Europe in Kishinev, Moldova, was about the same. Last year's expectations of major international factors that Serbia – having initiated advisory opinion on legitimacy of Kosovo's independence before the International Court of Justice – would transfer the issue from political to legal arena were not fulfilled. On the contrary, Minister Jeremic has been trying to profit from this interregnum. "We all have to respect the fact that the court has the issue under consideration, and no one should prejudicate the outcome of the process or encourage new recognitions of the unilaterally proclaimed independence," he argued in Kishinev.⁹

Criticism from "One's Own" Ranks

This wandering all over the globe, without a strategy and a clear-cut concept, from Russia through China to friendly, non-aligned countries of ex-Yugoslavia – including the initiative for ceremonial marking of the 50th anniversary of the movement established by newly emerged African and Asian countries in Belgrade in 2011 – not only illustrates foreign policy amateurism but also confuses the public (the majority of which is still dedicated to European course) and even among conservatives of extremely "patriotic orientation" that make up a rather homogenous bloc in Serbia.

The warning voiced by Prof. Darko Tanaskovic on the occasion of Jeremic's diplomatic "success" at the OIC conference in Damascus is most indicative. This "expert for the Islamic world," as pictured by Vecernje Novosti, said that Serbia attained "a short-term objective" in Damascus. Moreover, he says, it could "handicap" its endeavor vis-à-vis long-term political goals. "By joining in the game with Middle East countries," says Tanaskovic "Serbia sided against EU and US" which is contrary to its long-term objective implying integration into the community of European states and NATO.¹⁰

⁹ *Glas Javnosti*, June 5, 2009.

¹⁰ *Vecernje Novosti*, May 26, 2009.



The outstanding author of the "New Serbian Political Thought," Misa Djurkovic, was among the strongest critics of patriotic partners from the "left of the center." Focused on leftist delusions about Russia (though he does not quote them not in black and white, he evidently refers to the *Pecat* weekly and its editor-in-chief Milorad Vucelic together with the magazine's staff) in the article *Politika*¹¹ run under the title "Russia, EU and Serbia" Djurkovic criticizes "Russophile circles" ignorance about contemporary Russia, its strategic orientation and its foreign policy. Instead of learning something about that and thus help Serbia chart its geogstrategic position, says Djurkovic, "they try to tutor Russia in what should be its interest."¹²



According to Djurkovic, those circles actually stand against capitalism in general and still treat Russia as a socialist country. "In the domain of geopolitics and international relations they advocate fundamental ties of dependence on Russia and giving up the European Union. They would like to see the EU – as a godless creation -- disintegrated and an anti-globalization, anti-American front led by China, Russia and Latin American regimes of Chavez, Morales and Castro created."¹³

¹¹ *Politika*, June 12, 2009.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

And yet, Serbia's moderate turn towards the West evident in the past weeks (visit by the US Vice-President Joseph Biden, President Boris Tadic's visit to France, the Foreign Minister going to Brussels, contacts at different levels to contribute to visa facilities, etc.) was mostly initiated by US and EU. Aware that regional stability cannot be attained without Serbia, the international community endeavors to uphold its pro-Western course and in doing so makes occasional concessions.

Whether Serbia's political class would more readily acknowledge international actors' benevolence is still as question without a clear answer. It should be noted, however, that – unlike the majority of “the Serb dispersed community” -- some outstanding individuals from diaspora, perceptive of new currents in international constellation, encourage this acknowledgment. In his detailed article run by *Svedok*, Marko Vojvodic interprets Joseph Biden's visit as “a possible historical chance for Serbia to finally and clearly signal its readiness to set itself on the course towards Europe and integrations.”¹⁴ Interestingly, in the same article the author discreetly but undoubtedly breaks the Kosovo “taboo” with the thesis “the time has proved that Serbia itself cannot offer a permanent and clear solution for its south province and, therefore, needs a helping hand from outside.”¹⁵

About the Foreign Minister

As he flews self-complacently from one part of the globe to another, Vuk Jeremic seems to have an eye solely at his rating at domestic scene and solely at one (nationalistic-conservative) pole of that scene. Inexperienced in diplomacy but arrogant and without sensibility for Serbia's regional position – vis-à-vis neighboring countries it “has not been at war with” – and for a larger geostrategic context, Jeremic has managed to impair many relations over the past year: he impaired both the country's standing and that of the

¹⁴ *Svedok*, May 19, 2009.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

office of the country's representation abroad.

Aggravated relations with the countries emerging from ex-Yugoslavia on the grounds of their recognition of Kosovo (a new Montenegrin ambassador to Serbia has not been appointed yet despite the fact that the former one, Anka Vojvodic, was proclaimed *persona non grata* back in autumn 2008), the suit and countersuit filed with the International Court of Justice (against Croatia) or because of permanent interference in neighbors' domestic affairs (as two members of the Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sulejman Tihic and Zeljko Komsic, refused to pay the official visit to Serbia, Serbia hosted just Nebojsa Radmanovic) are rather earned by Minister Jeremic's “merit.”



More and more foreign politicians and other officials would not meet with him. For instance, Jeremic's absence from the official delegation for the talks with Croatian Premier Ivo Sanader in Belgrade was most indicative. Moreover, at the time of Mr. Sanader's visit, Jeremic himself was in a visit to Turkey – which only justified speculation, no one denied, about Premier Sanader's denial to meet with Jeremic.¹⁶

While in visit to Washington in late April 2008, Vuk Jeremic was given a noticeably low-level counterpart to a Foreign Minister. He didn't meet with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, or with US Vice-President Joseph Biden, or even with Biden's adviser Anthony Blinken. He told the press in Washington that he had met with Blinken but had to deny the information himself later on.¹⁷ He was practically neither in the official delegation meeting US Vice-President Joseph Biden in Belgrade. He just shook hands with Biden outside

¹⁶ Annual report of the Helsinki Committee for Human Right in Serbia for the year 2008, “Human Rights, Democracy and – Violence.”

¹⁷ *Borba* May 14-15, 2009.

the building where the later was expected by President Boris Tadic¹⁸



No doubt that a blind eye turned to the proclaimed state priority – movement towards the European Union – for the sake of “defense of Kosovo” is to be considerably ascribed to the Foreign Minister’s personal affiliation. Despite the fact that the “tough position” of the Netherlands, the only country that would not consent with unfreezing of SAA with Serbia, is attributed, over here, to Dutch Foreign Minister Max Ferhagen not a single official from Belgrade has paid a visit to the Netherlands parliament, its foreign policy committee or a member of that committee.¹⁹



The Dutch Foreign Policy Committee with its 25 members crucially determines the Netherlands’ foreign policy the Foreign Minister is duty-bound to pursue. “Had someone flew to the Netherlands on weekly basis at least, talked with parliamentarians, met with all party representatives, took with himself the War Crime Prosecutor, heads of intelligence services and their associates to try to convince their counterparts that Serbia was doing its utmost to cooperate with the ICTY, tax would cost less taxpayers in Serbia than ‘defense’ of Kosovo and

produce by far better results,” says the Brussels-seated correspondent for Dnevnik.



Conclusion:

Should Serbia, under the weight of economic crisis and potential social unrest, decide to resume pro-European course without delay that would be impossible without a U-turn in the foreign policy orientation implying reshuffle of the staff.

This is particularly important at the time when EU and US try, with renewed vigor, to uphold the West Balkans’ European course. It is also important, in this context, that the West Balkan countries are accorded candidacy for EU membership – which would finally put an end to the question of state borders and territorial aspiration.

¹⁸ *Borba*, May 21, 2009.

¹⁹ *Dnevnik*, June 14, 2009.