



HELSINKI COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA

HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA IN 2013

Primordial Resistance to Liberal Values

ABRIDGED VERSION



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**PRIMORDIAL
RESISTANCE TO
LIBERAL VALUES**

Abridged version

BELGRADE, 2014

Human Rights in Serbia in 2013

PRIMORDIAL RESISTANCE TO LIBERAL VALUES (Abridged version)

PUBLISHER

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia

FOR THE PUBLISHER

Sonja Biserko

PDF EDITION

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Right-wing Triumphs: Only a Logical Outcome

Thirteen years after the change of the regime (2000)¹ Serbia is still transition-stuck. Reforms have been slow and half-done. Actually, only a synergy of international integrations, responsible political elites and large social movements would have made them possible. And there has been no such synergy since 2000. Economic reforms have been stagnating: Serbia's economy is still far from an acceptable level of development. Overall progress also hinges on a political system: and that system has not been changed yet in Serbia. And then, the global financial crisis that affected Serbia too set the public opinion against reforms. According to EBRD indicators, reformist moves are highly dependent on the character of political institutions and the strength of economic ones within a political system, on the ratio between human resources and economic growth, and on institutional inclusiveness.

Over the past decade Serbia has been adjusting its legislation to European norms. In this context, its legislative frame meets European criteria and standards. However, what marks the everyday life is ethno-centrism. Nationalism sinks deeper and deeper into tribalism. Pluralism, a major achievement of contemporary liberalism, has been constantly undermined. The policy of national homogenization brings forth a monolithic, insular and exclusive culture that mirrors the state's and the society's organization. This policy also fuels social tensions, manifest in intolerance to "Others." Frequent assaults at human rights defenders only crystallize these tensions. To top it all, economic stagnation has been feeding conservatism and populism, revived in waves in the past half a century.

2013 saw no progress in the domain of human rights; on the contrary, the great majority of citizens are in dire straits and, therefore, even more

¹ The changes actually began in 1990 with constitutional amendment and introduction of multi-party system.

helpless than in 2012. The situation of fundamental human rights is still alarming, especially when it comes to Roma and minority communities, LGBT population and other vulnerable groups (women, persons with mental disabilities, elderly, children, etc.). The government's declarative commitment to the respect of human rights turned into empty words. In the meantime, institutions underwent further entropy. With new cadres assigned to high offices institutional structures only went from bad to worse, considering these cadres' incompetence and unprofessionalism. Partisanship in the public service is even more evident than before. In his annual report Ombudsman Saša Janković says, "Supremacy of partisanship and populism over the rule of law, weak institutions vs. powerful political centers and politicians, weak and inefficient judiciary, the manipulation of the media, atrophied economy and unreformed administration are the biggest obstacles in the way of the exercise of human rights."²

Even democratic breakthroughs made in the past 13 years atrophied. Throughout 2013 and, especially after the early elections in 2014, the tendency of arbitrary rule and the Premier's leadership grew stronger: in almost no time the Premier managed to monopolize all the power. Such concentration of power heavily weights democratization and liberalization.

Sociopolitical and economic context

The global economic crisis intensified contradictions between national interests even in most “internationalized” parts of the Western world, including EU. This fueled nationalisms in the West on the one hand, and undermined cosmopolitan ideas on the other. The Council of Europe report on human rights in Europe, published in April 2014, warns of human rights violations, corruption, human trafficking, racism and discrimination. The Secretary General of CoE said, “Europe needs a new pan-European security agenda, which must include the protection of the rule of law and democratic principles. Together, we need to put Europe back on the path of unity and cooperation, based on common values, standards and legal obligations.”³ In Serbia, devastated by virulent nationalism, the new international trend plays in the hands of political elites that have never genuinely changed their perceptions of the values of civil society.

The weight of economic and social problems has forced all the governments since 2000 to turn towards EU option. While moving towards EU Serbia has been meeting – step-by-step – the preconditions such as cooperation with ICTY and the dialogue with Pristina that resulted in the Brussels Agreement. The later was its biggest breakthrough, according to EC report on Serbia’s progress in 2013. And on that account EU opened accession negotiations with Serbia.⁴

Serbia also made progress in meeting political criteria in the domains of the rule of law, human and minority rights and international obligations, quotes the report. It also commends Serbia’s fulfillment of the obligations deriving from the SAA. On the other hand, the report notes that economic development was small, nonuniform and, generally, inadequate. The snail-paced progress made in economic reforms indicates that Serbia is still far from meeting the Copenhagen Criteria (1993) for functional

3 <http://www.euractiv.rs/vesti/ljudska-prava/7167-savet-evrope-ozbiljna-kriza-ljudskih-prava-u-evropi->

4 http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2013/package/sr_rapport_2013.pdf.

market economy. As for its overall eligibility for membership of EU, Serbia manifested nonuniform progress in various domains (chapters).⁵

Neither has the old/new government addressed some key problems plaguing the country since 1990s – the consequences of the warring policy in the first place. This is actually the crux of all the problems. The policy of ethno-centrism – at domestic and international level alike – undermines Serbia's stability: the still unresolved status of Vojvodina's autonomy, instability in the region of Sandzak, marginalization of South Serbia, as well as disputes with Romania and Bulgaria over the situation of their minorities in Serbia. Generally speaking, the situation of minority communities is unstable and problematic. Local ethnic communities feel endangered, insulate themselves and often turn radical. The Belgrade-Pristina Agreement practically sealed Kosovo's independence. However, the Kosovo myth is still used to mobilize the public opinion.

According to the Heritage Foundation index of economic freedoms Serbia is still among "mostly unfree countries." Serbia's economic freedom score is 59.4, making its economy the 95th freest in the 2014 index – even Namibia, Vanuatu, Gambia and Uganda have better scores than Serbia. Its score is 0.8 point higher than last year, with improvements in investment freedom, monetary freedom, and freedom from corruption balanced by declines in the control of government spending, fiscal freedom, business freedom, and trade freedom. Serbia is ranked 37th out of 43 countries in the Europe region, and its overall score is below the world and regional averages, says the Foundation.

More radical institutional reforms are still of crucial significance. Serbia's score is the lowest when it comes to monetary freedoms, which implies stability of its currency and struggle against corruption – here it ranks 158th out of 178 countries – and excessive public expenditure, which ranks the country 154th. "Public spending is 45 percent of GDP. Government debt is about 64 percent of GDP," quotes the Heritage Foundation.⁶

5 Ibid.

6 <http://www.euractiv.rs/vesti/102-srbija-i-eu/6735-ekonomske-slobode-u-srbiji-ispod-svetskog-proseka.html>.

When it comes to corruption in the public sector Transparency International /TI/ ranked Serbia 72nd which means that its score improved by 3 points when compared with 2012. However, Serbia is still in the company of the countries with widespread corruption. By TI corruption index in 2014, two-thirds of the countries on the list or 69 percent have less than 50 points, which indicates that corruption is a serious global problem.⁷ The progress Serbia has made thanks to “anti-corruption institutions strengthened over the past five years,” said Vladimir Goati, president of the Transparency Serbia.⁸

Breaches of anti-corruption legislation, inadequately capacitated regulatory and control agencies and non-transparent decision-making are among major problems plaguing Serbia. Every year reports on corruption put emphasis on the same negative developments, says Nemanja Nenadić, program director of the Transparency Serbia, adding “I am not an optimist, despite the progress made.” “The very fact that most problems and priorities have been recurring year by year clearly indicates that much has to be done for any breakthrough in this area,” he says.⁹ Over the past year the regime demonstrated its “political will” to cope with some cases of corruption.

However, Serbia’s predominant value system is the biggest problem of all. Dobrica Ćosić, the uncontested interpreter of Serb national interests, sees no place for Serbia in EU and expects not EU to have more understanding for Serbia. All Serbia gets from EU are ultimatums, he says, although Serbia is the central power in the Balkans.¹⁰ Faced with economic collapse Serbia’s old/new regime had no choice but ask assistance from EU. Despite of all, the overall “mindset” remained the same, marked by xenophobia, mythic interpretation of history, conspiracy theories and inability for taking stock of the recent past. Populism – adjusted to ongoing developments – dominates the political arena.

7 <http://www.euractiv.rs/vesti/197-vladavina-prava/6578-srbija-napredovala-na-listi-percepciji-korupcije-.html>.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Dobrica Ćosić, “National Testament,” *Nedeljnik*, April 24 – May 1, 2014.

A cultural model can be changed only through social consensus and Serbia is still far from reaching it. Neither political nor intellectual elites are ready for such a change. Elites' imperialism obstructs active citizenship – citizens' participation in decision-making and responsibility for the decisions taken. Unresolved national and state issue calls for national homogeneity, which, in turn, undermines the promotion of civil values. This is evident in the position of ethnic minorities: Serbia's present-day multiculturalism has nothing to do with the values of civil society. Hence, minority communities are practically pushed into self-isolation: feeling unsafe they seal themselves off and some even get radicalized. Integration of ethnic minorities will be among the biggest challenges Serbia will have to cope with while moving towards EU.

The change of the cultural model also calls for facing the past. What still marks Serbia's attitude toward the recent past and developments in 1990s is either silence or negation of any involvement whatsoever in these developments. "The culture of silence" manifests itself in denial, manipulation, politicization and distrust. All this stands in the way of coping with the past and, hence, regional normalization. Arguments such as "Serbia has not waged the war" and Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina "waged the war of liberation" hardly contribute to regional dialogue. Serbia nurses its "victimhood" and the thesis that Serbs have been victims of all the wars in 20th century. Serbia's elite still treats Bosnia as an open question while waiting for changed circumstances that would disintegrate it. "Not a single historical act is definite, things change and so do policies," says Dobrica Ćosić.¹¹

Perception of democracy and the concept of human rights also questions the character of the change in politics. The Serbian society rests on tradition rather than on the rule of law, on rituals rather than on the Constitution. Extremely anti-capitalist and anti-market rhetoric is diametrically opposite to the realities dominated by tycoons and "back-scratching" economy. Political elites in Serbia are anti-communist and their anti-communism veils nationalism and often revanchism. Universal values of

11 Dobrica Ćosić "National Testament," *Nedeljnik*, April 24, 2014.

socialism in the case of minorities (religious and ethnic) have been replaced by tribal intolerance and fear of the “otherness.”

Sociologist Vladimir Vuletić says that Serbia has established a model of capitalism without capitalists. Politicians in control of the state have built a system that suits their interests. According to him, political and economic elites in Serbia are not only networked but also most partisan businessmen occupy high political posts. Findings of a 2007 survey show that the number of businessmen at high political offices by far exceeds businessmen’s participation in politics in, say, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Bulgaria. “When the hookup between economic and political elite crosses the line, corruption flourishes, interest in domestic investment diminishes, entrepreneurship is not being encouraged, while wealth is being concentrated in economic and political cliques sharing the same interests.”¹²

Building up Aleksandar Vučić’s image as “a strong man” generally opened up the question of Serbia’s social order: in other words, is Serbia prone to authoritarian rule or to democracy? If the overall social system continues to disintegrate, a sort of authoritarian rule is in store for Serbia, says Professor Vladimir Vuletić, adding, “I could hardly argue for the thesis about Serbia growing into a free and democratic society.” The triumph of the right-wing personified in Serb Progressive Party /SNS/ indicates, like in the case of Hungary, that Serbia might opt for the right-wing populism without confronting EU. Actually, we have been witnessing two parallel processes since SNS came to power, says anthropologist Stefan Aleksić. On the one hand the media are spinning the image of Vučić and, on the other, we are bombarded with traditionalism and the stories about a much-needed leader of the nation. Aleksić takes that Aleksandar Vučić will be pursuing the right-wing, populist policy at home and internationally.¹³

12 Vladimir Vuletić, “Two Elites,” September 26, 2013.

13 <http://www.autonomija.info/susa-i-aleksic-madarski-scenario-u-srbiji.html>.

Reconstruction of the cabinet

The reconstruction of the cabinet that took almost three months was meant to consolidate SNS rule without early elections. It took time to eliminate a coalition partner, the one holding the reins of economic and financial portfolios, the United Regions of Serbia /URS/. The reconstruction resulted in a new balance of power between the Socialists and the Progressists. However, despite all the hue and cry in the media, the reconstruction was did not derive from a plan or a program, let alone a strategy for a radical transformation of the Serbian society.

With URS ousted, it became evident that all the ruling coalition was after was to put out the Democratic Party /DS/ and marginalize the participation of other democratic parties in the process of EU integration. The way in which SNS and SPS appropriated Serbia's movement towards EU hardly guarantees the country's future in Europe, which necessitates a social consensus.

Incompetence, unprofessionalism and nepotism have already become trademarks of the human resource policy begotten on the wave of SNS electoral triumph. This policy dramatically undermined the administration and public services, and laid bare SNS's deficiency in qualified cadres. The campaign of hiring foreign experts and celebrities such as Dominique Strauss-Kahn, staged by SNS leader and the then Vice-Premier Aleksandar Vučić could have hardly compensated the years-long "institutional deinstitutionalization."

The opposition: selective criticism of the regime

Throughout 2013 and especially in early 2014 when the early elections were finally called almost all the opposition parties were criticizing just the smaller coalition partner, the Socialist Party of Serbia /SNS/. Its fiercest critic was the New Democratic Party /NDS/ – NDS leader, Boris Tadić, said Ivica Dačić had been his “biggest mistake” and SNS was the only party he would never make a coalition with considering “the fatal effects it has produced on the society and the politics.”¹⁴

Calling SPS on the carpet, opposition parties assumed it would not get a place in a new cabinet, while hoping to take its place in the coalition. They discredited SPS in hope to disheart its electorate. On the other hand, hardly anyone seriously assaulted SNS throughout the election campaign: everyone was after becoming a smaller coalition partner and no one wanted to ruin the chances. Referring to the opposition, journalist Zoran Preradović called it “a cheap husband-chaser.”

Mostly concerned with their own survival at the political arena throughout 2013 opposition parties abandoned their major role: criticism of the regime. The only purpose of a strong opposition is to prevent uniformity of opinions and create the room to political, social and economic alternatives, control and review of the government.

International representatives share the view about Serbia needing a stronger opposition. Herni Bone, director of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Belgrade, takes that in the process of EU accession and social changes to take place Serbia badly needs a strong opposition.¹⁵ Michael Davenport, head of the EU Delegation to Serbia, said, “I believe Serbian

¹⁴ Politika, February 26, 2014, <http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/Politika/Zasto-je-Ivica-Dacic-najcesca-izborna-meta.lt.html>.

¹⁵ Telegraf, January 4, 2014. <http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/politika/913572-zapanjicete-se-da-li-znate-koliko-u-srbiji-ima-politickih-partija>.

opposition plays an important role inside and outside the Parliament, the role of expressing an opinion and criticizing – much needed signs of a healthy democracy.”¹⁶

The problem facing the opposition is that SNS – largely and declaratively – appropriated the agenda that has for years differentiated parties such as the Liberal Democratic Party /LDP/ and the Democratic Party /DS/ from the Serb Radical Party /SRS/ begetting SNS founding-fathers. SNS has adjusted its policy to the mainstream, pro-European option, while its attitude towards Belgrade-Pristina normalization earned it strong support from the international community.

In other words, SNS simply took over the space once occupied by democratic opposition parties and deprived them of their specificities. And some of these parties paid dear their leniency to SNS – failed to pass the electoral threshold.

Second on the carpet – after SPS – was DS, mostly targeted by SNS. With the helping hand of the media SNS considerably achieved its main goal: to defame DS. Torn by inter-party strife that almost swept it off the political arena, DS itself contributed to its own defamation. Boris Tadić, the then party leader, had seen his defeat at the presidential elections as a personal insult. The schism he initiated on the eve of the early elections only further undermined DS. As an outcome the two parties – his newly formed NDS and DS – hardly passed the electoral threshold. Now they are both in the opposition, while their internal tensions persist.

Although strongly criticizing the ruling coalition in all segments, DS admits that the present regime “made a good deal” in the matter of Kosovo and that Serbia should be rewarded for all it has done in the movement towards EU over the past 13 years.¹⁷

16 RTVB92, May 11, 2014. http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2014&mm=05&dd=11&nav_category=12&nav_id=846489.

17 Ibid.

Early elections: the Progressists triumph

The early elections called on March 16, 2014, radically changed Serbia's political scene. The coalition formed by Aleksandar Vučić's Serb Progressive Party won almost 50 percent of the vote, along with the majority of parliamentary seats. For the first time since the change of October 5 one party can boast about such a convincing majority of vote mostly won on its leader's popularity: citizens of Serbia – or at least those who went to the polls – believe he is the only one capable of coping with accumulated economic problems, crime and corruption. The parties of the former DOS suffered a debacle. The once ruling DS hardly passed the electoral threshold, while some others failed to win 5 percent of the vote and are thus not represented in the parliament.

One to note, however, that the Radicals (the Progressists) have always been a big parliamentary party. Till 2000 they had ranked second after the Socialists, and since 2003 have had the strongest representation. Frustrated for not being in the position to form the cabinet, they renounced Vojislav Šešelj, took another name and changed their image. It was only then that they became acceptable to the West.

The victory of Serb Progressive Party /SNS/ and its leader Aleksandar Vučić in the early parliamentary elections and in local elections in Belgrade was nothing unexpected but came as a shock nevertheless. The percentage of the vote they won exceeded even a heavy vote for Slobodan Milošević in the first multi-party elections in Serbia in 1990. Commenting on this outcome, Vojislav Koštunica, leader of Democratic Party of Serbia /DSS/ said, "The structure of the new parliament associates 1990s – just once key actors, SPS and SRS, switched seats with SNS...Western powers crucially contributed to this electoral outcome, which perfectly suits them."¹⁸ In

¹⁸ Press conference by DSS, March 16, 2014.

other words, with almost an absolute (two-third) parliamentary majority, SNS can form a government at will.

A major consequence of SNS's electoral triumph – the outgoing Premier, Ivica Dačić, labeled 'a political tsunami'¹⁹ – is a quite novel configuration of Serbia's political scene. Apart from the "Progressists," parliamentary seats will be occupied by three political groupings only – Socialist Party of Serbia /SNS/, Democratic Party /DS/ and New Democratic Party /NDS/. Under the Constitution, three minority parties – Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians /SVM/, Democratic Action Party /SDA/ and Albanian Party for Democratic Action /PDD/ will also be represented in the new parliament as their seats are not preconditioned by the 5-percent election threshold.

Several factors played into the hands of the Progressists' victory (48 percent of the vote), most of all the good timing: Aleksandar Vučić's popularity reached its peak on the account of his struggle against corruption. Combining traditional nationalism and populism with alleged modernism SNS and Aleksandar Vučić won over considerable portions of the right-wing, conservative electorate (potential voters of DSS, Dveri, Serb Radical Party and others), and the liberal one, logically inclined towards DS, URS or LDP. Last but not least, they ensured their success through aggressive and occasionally brutal smear campaigns against their political opponents with the helping hand from most of the influential media outlets.

Ivica Dačić, SPS leader and the outgoing Premier, came out as the second best. His coalition won about the same number of votes and parliamentary seats as in the 2012 elections. This shows that his coalition has consolidated and entrenched itself firmly at the political scene. Their election result is the more so significant since they have been ruthlessly criticized by both the opposition and their pre-election coalition partners throughout the election campaign.

DS and NDS alike passed the election threshold with much ado, while LDP and URS failed to. And so the so-called civil option suffered defeat.²⁰

¹⁹ Press conference by SPS, March 16, 2014.

²⁰ Not a single party with the term "democracy" in its name won in any municipality; minority parties came out victorious only in their communities (Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians was successful in Vojvodina, Party for Democratic

This was the cost the opposition paid to its inconsistency, confusing orientation, splits and, generally, to being at a loss against the backdrop that was new to it. A part of the present opposition /DS/ failed to adequately respond to SNS strategy for smearing the former regime, while the rest flirted with SNS with an eye to a partnership in the government.

Vojislav Koštunica, DSS leader, and Mlađan Dinkić, leader of URS, resigned after the elections. With the exception of Boris Tadić's exhorted resignation in the aftermath of the presidential debacle in 2012, that was for the first time in Serbia's modern history that highest party officials acknowledge responsibility for election defeats by their own free will. However, Vojislav Koštunica immediately joined the Slobodan Jovanović Fund thus continuing his ideological activism he had always prioritized over political. And this is exactly where he left his footprints on Serbia's present-day mindset.

Having convincingly won the elections Vučić can now "decide on both the cabinet and the opposition."²¹ Besides he had obligated himself and the future cabinet to the fulfillment of considerable, though rather blurred promises. This especially refers to economic reforms and Serbia's overcoming its dramatic financial and economic crisis. Though the reform was a catchword of his election campaign he never explained what "hard and painful" cuts its implementation implied meant to everyman. On the eve of the election campaign he signed a contract with United Arab Emirates on a one-billion-dollar loan to partially compensate the budget deficit and pay off salaries and pensions over a couple of months.

His "omnipotence" will be tested in the period to come. For, as German expert in the Western Balkans Johanna Deimel put it, "from now on he will be responsible for the future of the state, be it good or bad."²² Some analysts hold that Vučić faces two possible options – "he might either meet his promises and thus go down in history or prove himself incapable of meeting his promises and – bearing in mind the opposition as it is and the

.....
Action in Sandzak, and Democratic Activity Party in South Serbia).

21 Editor-in-chief of the *Nedeljnik* magazine Veljko Lalić, *Nedeljnik*, March 20, 2014.

22 *Danas*, March 20, 2014.

media as they are – join the democratic oligarchy.”²³ Đorđe Vukadinović, editor-in-chief of *Serb New Political Thought* magazine, SNS victory is a bit “overwhelming” and as such “counterproductive considering all the responsibility on the shoulders of SNS and its leader Aleksandar Vučić.”²⁴ Florijan Biber, professor at the Graz University, says, “Absolute power is a threat to Serbia’s democracy, especially because of inefficient mechanisms of control over the government, scarce independent institutions, most media loyal to the regime and the fact that two out of three opposition parties would rather team up with the Progressists than criticize them.”²⁵

23 Naše Novine, March 18, 2014.

24 Politika, March 18, 2014.

25 Danas, March 25, 2014.

Serbia in the West

The first intergovernmental conference on 21 January 2014 in Brussels marked the beginning of Serbia's long journey to the European Union (EU) – after ten years of hesitation, the burden of the Milosevic era legacy and many obstacles to re-embracing the form of a civilized state. The opening of accession negotiations has a deeper meaning for Serbia, considering its historical resistance to the Western model. The very fact that the event itself was not marked by general euphoria or celebrations testifies that hesitation and anxieties about what is in store for Serbia persist. And Serbia's elites doubtful about the European option did respond, the more so since this option implies that Serbia gives up Kosovo. Dobrica Ćosić who has influenced political elites for years said in his last interview ever, “Kosovo exists no more as Serbia's south province.”²⁶

The European Commission decided to open accession negotiations with Serbia in June 2013 and to convene the first intergovernmental conference by the end of January 2014 at the latest. In the meantime Serbia was expected to continue the process of normalization with Kosovo in accordance with the Brussels Agreement (signed on 18 April 2013). Participation of Serbs from four municipalities in Kosovo North in local called for 3 November 2013 was the main precondition. The so-called Serbian parallel structures, operating in this part of Kosovo for more than ten years, were thereby abolished.

Normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina will still be of key importance throughout the EU accession process.²⁷ The European Union wants to see full normalization by the end of accession negotiations and have it verified by a binding document. The most influential EU member-states such as Germany and the Great Britain (authors of the so-called 'non-paper' presented to Belgrade and Pristina), were particularly deter-

26 Dobrica Ćosić, “National Testament,” *Nedeljnik*, April 24 – May 1, 2014.

27 This was what Prime Minister Ivica Dacic confirmed a day before the first intergovernmental conference; RTV B92, 20 January 2014

mined – they didn't want yet another unresolved territorial issue (such as Cyprus) in the EU. The Chapter 35 was opened already in the first round of negotiations – the so-called screening of the implementation of the Brussels Agreement thus far.²⁸

Kosovo is also high on the negotiating agenda, many items of which relate to Belgrade-Pristina normalization. This includes implementation of all agreements, ban on each country's interference with the other's movement towards EU, and their signatures under a binding agreement, all of which implies that Kosovo could "spill over" to other issues such as the judiciary, security, independent institutions, antidiscrimination, minority rights, etc.

The opening accession negotiation with EU is the only tangible success the incumbent government achieved in the past two years – hence, it was only logical that it played on the fact to highlight its performance. Prime Minister Dacic called it "the most important event for the country since the WWII." The *Kurir* tabloid ran a front-page banner – "Serbia's Victory!" President of Serbia Tomislav Nikolic pointed out, "Serbia deserves to be accepted as a part of Europe because of its history and victims."²⁹

The Serbian public was not exactly exhilarated by this certainly historical step forward for the country. Public opinion polls show that in 2013 citizens' attitude toward EU spiraled (64 per cent).³⁰ However, these findings should be taken with a grain of salt considering dramatic oscillations in people's attitude over the past years. The research conducted by "Eurobarometer" tells a different story: 36 percent³¹ of interviewees in favor of EU accession ranges Serbia among "Euro-skeptic" candidate countries concludes "Eurobarometer."³²

28 Chapter 35 is usually opened at the end of accession negotiations with potential member states and generally covers the issues that are not specified in other chapters.

29 Večernje Novosti, January 22, 2014

30 Opinion poll was conducted at the end of 2013 by polling agency "Faktor plus" and newspaper Politika, and the results showed that 64 percent of participants in the poll expressed their support for the continuation of Serbia's European path.

31 According to this research, only 36 percent of citizens of Serbia think that EU accession would be "a good thing," 42 per cent take that "the country will benefit from it" and 25 percent said that EU accession is "bad for the country."

32 Danas, January 14, 2014

Vojvodina and Republika Srpska on the “waiting list”

Vojvodina has been the target of Belgrade’s “centralistic” parties ever since 1990s. As of 2012 has been going against Vojvodina by “rearranging” local self-governments to “reflect” the composition of the central government. Novi Sad was the first to fell victim to their campaign. So far – and despite many disposals in other towns and municipalities, including SNS victory in several local elections – the provincial government has sustained this heavy pressure. But now, in not a single municipality did DS /or NDS for that matter/ won the majority of vote.

Ištvan Pastor, speaker of the provincial parliament and SVM leader, takes that circumstances leading to early provincial elections have not converged yet. “The Assembly cannot be toyed with in the electoral paper war,” he said.³³ However, the outcome of the early elections practically pulled the rug from under the feet of Provincial Premier Bojan Pajtić. It is hard to expect the Progressists, now triumphantly campaigning through Serbia, to leave Vojvodina to the Democrats.³⁴

Republika Srpska /RS/ is still an unsolvable problem. The statements on Bosnia Vučić gave on several occasions hardly differed from those of his predecessors. Shortly after the protests that shook the Federation he met with Milorad Dodik and Mladen Bosić in Belgrade. Belgrade’s goal is to safeguard RS, he said on the occasion.

The Ukrainian crisis (Russia’s annexation of Crimea) acted like a tonic on RS hoping to integrate into Serbia by the same “model.” “For Republika Srpska, the referendum in Crimea is a democratic expression of the popular will,” Dodik commented, adding that RS was following similar experiences worldwide and would try to implement “models of good practice”

³³ Danas, March 18, 2014.

³⁴ Goran Knežević, SNS vice-president, said that the government of Vojvodina had lost legitimacy and called upon the Provincial Premier to resign; Informer, March 20, 2014.

when the time was ripe for it.³⁵ Judging by his own words, Vučić's attitude towards Kosovo and RS is undefined. What he said was, "Serbia will try to protect its interests and be responsible to its people and territory, and, therefore, its stance on the situation in Ukraine has to be well-balanced, responsible and serious."³⁶

35 <http://www.kurir-info.rs/vucic-srbija-nece-imati-neprijateljski-stav-prema-rusiji-clanak-1288559>

36 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/Politika/1555169/Vu%C4%8Di%C4%87%3A+Balansiran+stav+prema+Ukrajini.html>.

Regional relations

Bilateral relations in the region have been stabilizing despite occasional backslides such as SNS coming to power in Serbia. Tactless statements by President Tomislav Nikolić in the first place, and at the beginning of his term, gave rise to anxieties in the region. However, as the time went by Nikolić's statements were more and more flexible and moderate, while Aleksandar Vučić's campaign against corruption also contributed to his ratings regionwide. Serbia's relations with ex-Yugoslav republics are not yet adequate enough to manifest all the countries' evident interest in mutual cooperation.

Russian interests in Serbia

The Kosovo issue created the room for Russia's new positioning in the Balkans. As a permanent member of the UNSC Russia can undermine the resolution of Kosovo status until Serbia decides to normalize relations with it. In addition, Russia plays on the Kosovo case while trying to redefine its relations with neighboring countries and dominate the region of the former URSS. Comprehensive cooperation with Serbia considerably helped its comeback. While Serbia developed close relations with Russia in the domains of politics and energy, Russia reinforced its political support to Serbia in turn.³⁷

Serbia's dioptr often blows up Russia's interest in it. And yet, one should not underestimate the significance Moscow attaches to its "Serbia-wise position" in the Balkans. Skeptical about EU's integration capacity in the long run and hoping to see EU's core /around Berlin/ crystallize differently, Russia has been cooperating with the countries of "old Europe" and in parallel focusing on the "problematic rest," Europe's periphery: the Balkans. It tries its best to be present where it should be present – in this periphery – when the expected EU enlargement begins. So it endeavors to keep its political, and even more economic, standing in Serbia, Republika Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Montenegro.

According to some observers in the West, "Serbia is the main goal of Russia's policy for the Western Balkans" considering Moscow's strategy for hindering democratic transformation in the Balkans and in East Europe.³⁸ By keeping Serbia away from EU and NATO can safeguard the pivot of its influence in the region with reliance on the unsettled Kosovo issue.

37 Russian "Gazpromneft" bought 51 percent of Serbia's monopolistic Oil Industry /NIS/; the two countries signed contracts on the construction of the South Stream Pipeline in the territory of Serbia, as well as the underground gas reservoir Banatski Dvor; other Russian investment in Serbia's economy were also discussed but nothing came out of these talks.

38 http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=39920&cash=b22a66e254427ded96233bfc56e6243a.

The Ukrainian crisis further laid bare Russia's plans for the Balkans. The "letter of warning" to Montenegrin President Milo Đukanović for having neglected the friendly relations with Russia, delivered shortly after Đukanović's visit to Washington, was actually the warning against Montenegro's announced membership of NATO in 2014. That was a warning to Belgrade as well.

Judiciary: the key to democratic reforms

For years has been Serbia's judiciary coping with serious problems such as inefficiency, tons of unsettled suits, widespread corruption, politically motivated influence, etc. At the beginning of the reform in 2008, 4,500 criminal proceedings (punishable up to 5 years of imprisonment) were statute-barred, the same as 517 prison sentences, while numbers of criminal trials have taken more than a decade. From 2008 till 2010 in the matter of corruption, 2,000 persons were put to trial, 150 indictments were raised and more than 90 sentences pronounced totaling some 30 centuries of imprisonment.

The reform of the judiciary has failed, according to international observers and domestic experts alike. The reform has been mostly criticized for the procedures of election of judges and prosecutors. Although strongly critical about the implementation of the judicial reform while in the opposition, the incumbent regime has done little to compensate negative effects since it came to power.

Neglected security system

Problems in the security system resulted in several scandals that shook Serbia from the time of the previous cabinet till the early elections: leaking information, deficient legislation, partisan abuse and blackmailed judiciary. Disastrous floods of May 2014 laid bare the catastrophic situation of civil defense, a major segment of the security system. This was what highest officials admitted themselves.³⁹ What also strikes like a sore thumb are inadequately defined duties and responsibilities of the authorized personnel and the command chain; blurred communication procedure between local self-governments and governmental agencies; the absence of systemic protection of vital infrastructure; and the widespread illegal construction that was being tolerated.

³⁹ Acting Director of Serbia Waters Public Utility Goran Puzović says, "Our funds were halved in 2012 when compared with 2011. Instead of 1.5 billion RSD we got 600 million, which is 20 percent less than we actually need for proper maintenance of water flows. Blic, November 7, 2012.

Head of the Police Department of Emergency Management Predrag Marić said, "Our dams were built more than 20 years ago and need to be regularly maintained. All we managed to do this year was to influence local self-governments to do their part of the job, clean up canals and enable water flow." Blic, November 7, 2012.

The Media: from bad to worse

The SNS-SPS coalition government further destroyed the media scene. Moreover, the media began building Premier Aleksandar Vučić's cult of personality and the myth about his struggle against corruption. It was only in late 2013 and early 2014 that this idyllic picture of him began to crumble. Self-censorship – resulting in non-existent criticism of the actions taken by SNS and its leader – became the trademark of almost all the media. On the other hand, it became more and more obvious that Vučić and his party held the reins of mass media: the reins they had just taken over from their predecessors, the Democratic Party.

Culture and education

The situation of Serbia's culture of today reflects the situation of its society. When composer Ivan Tasovac was appointed the Minister of Culture in 2013 many hoped that things would start changing for the better, looking forward to "departization" of the culture and modernization of the Ministry itself. (The DS-controlled Ministry had been seen as inadequate and marked by single-mindedness and promotion of the so-called patriotic culture.) However, all high hopes sank when it became evident that the Ministry was far from opening a serious public debate on the position of culture, its strategic policies, harmonization between the market economy and subsidies or initiatives launched by cultural stakeholders themselves.

Systemic legislation on culture has not been passed yet. Moreover, the domain itself has not even been touched by transition – and even if it has it has been a transition towards the market "ruled by partisan bigwigs and buddy-buddy economy." Deprived of genuine cultural values citizens remain prone to political manipulation and without the sense for democratic standards.

Practically all the debates on the situation of culture totally neglected its influence on the quality of education and the other way round. Culture is almost non-existent in the educational system although the educational system is where the young develop their perception of culture and its values, and grow into responsible and democracy-oriented citizens.

The Ministry of Education has not yet adopted action plans for the Strategy for Development of Education. The reform initiated at the time of Đinđić's premiership and then annulled by the Koštunica cabinet is still lagging behind – mostly because of administrative sluggishness and non-existent political consensus.

The role of non-governmental organizations

Non-governmental organizations play a major role in calling the government to account for transparency or rule and responsible management. Social media and the internet can also be useful mechanisms for the establishment of the rule of law on the one hand, and disclosure of malversation on the other. Conventional media are also crucial for the control of politicians and bureaucracy. This is why independent media and provisions against libel are crucial for an efficient system. All the governments so far have been extremely hostile towards the civil sector, aware of its potential, and have usually labeled them “enemies of the state” and “traitors.” The present government has been marginalizing the civil sector even more than its predecessor. The list of “biggest traitors” composed by the Nasi movement calling for these traitors to be put on trial is most indicative, the same as the government’s farcical response to this initiative. All the persons on the list were called in by the Public Attorney to tell whether or not they felt threatened. The point is that non-governmental organizations alerting of governmental agencies’ and politicians’ actions have always been targeted by extremist groups claiming that they defend of the state. And their claim actually indicates the hookup between the two.

Revisionism fuels extremism

The complexity of the facing the past process calls for responsible approach of each country emerging from ex-Yugoslavia, and for such an approach by all of them taken together. Over the past two decades each of these countries (like the entire region) has had various phases of facing the past. Regional elites have always perceived ICTY as a burden. ICTY has had criminal responsibility on its agenda; moral responsibility was not. A serious debate on the recent past is hard to expect in the region dominated by national perceptions of their and only their victimhood. The main problem of all Yugoslavia's successor states – and Serbia's in particular – is in their understanding of Yugoslavia, especially the Second Yugoslavia. This is why coping with the past at the regional level is such a complex process. As long as the history of the 20th century is not objectified, regional facing the past will hardly be possible. Serbia perceives the 1990s wars as a continuation of the WWII, which it sees as “unfinished.” Throughout the 1990s wars it was after compensating for the “injustice” it suffered under communism.

“The past is chaotically used in our region. And yet, there is some system in the chaos: the system imposed by ruling classes whose memory of the past depends on their positions. Memories are different: there are memories of anti-fascism that are being marked on official holidays and testify of a state's appreciation of its glorious past. And there are different, much more widespread memories, those of national pasts,” says sociologist Todor Kuljić. Serbia, he reminds, nourishes memories of anti-fascism, including the anti-fascism of partisans, on the one hand, and ethnically motivated memories of victims of communism on the other. “Therefore, the past is used at one's convenience. I wouldn't say the region has made any significant progress in this direction. I would say, however, that these processes are now less strung, although the past is still used in pragmatic and ethnocentric manner.”⁴⁰

40 <http://www.autonomija.info/todor-kuljic-pomirenje-u-regionu-nece-doci-iz-brisela.html>.

Facing the past, now labeled “transitional justice” has been somewhat moved from intellectual sphere to political arena and courts of law. However, reconciliation is something the generations to come, which have nothing to do with wars, will be to cope with. “Elites cannot reconcile us, neither can foreign capital invested in the region. This can only be accomplished through a different, soul-searching attitude towards the past, the attitude to be advocated by creative intelligentsia...We all need to remember not only our victims but also the hangmen from our ranks,” says Kuljić.⁴¹

Serbia’s attitude towards to the past is still marked by silence – or, denial of any participation in the developments of 1990s. Characteristic of this “culture of silence” are denial, manipulation, politicization and distrust, all of which standing in the way of genuine coping with the past and, hence, regional normalization. Collective memory is being shaped by anti-communism, which considerably explains the ongoing revisionism, especially of the history of WWII.

The end of the Cold War, says Eric Hobsbawm, opened the room to historical revisionism, to the history that is rather mythical as it is not being written by historians but by governments, movements, organizations and pressure groups. Given that nations are being shaped just by their past, he adds, no wonder that “ethnic groups or the so-called ethnic groups are trying to build their identities by constructing their histories.”

“Morally neutral” attitude towards war criminals further curbs a debate on Serbia’s role in the 1990s wars. The myth of Serbs’ victimhood has been built into their new identity and, as such, adds to ethnic distance.

War crime trials before national courts and ICTY alike have not spread the truth about wartime developments or triggered off soul-searching social dialogues.

Memorials of the 1990s such as those staged by the Women in Black and other groups – youth in the first place – are often used by right-wing organizations to demonize their organizers. Collective memory based on facts is almost impossible to build considering a variety of historical interpretations all of which are denying Serbia’s responsibility for war crimes.

41 <http://www.autonomija.info/todor-kuljic-pomirenje-u-regionu-nece-doci-iz-brisela.html>.

However, there are research initiatives for revealing the truth about the war launched by non-governmental organizations and independent intellectuals in the first place.

As preparations to mark the centennial of WWI are on throughout Europe, the war itself has become topical in Serbia too. Main manifestations will be organized in Sarajevo throughout June 2014 culminating on June 28, the day of the assassination of Prince Ferdinand.

New books discussing old topics such as the causes or culprits of the WWI are being published in Europe. As many as 25,000 books on the causes of the war were written between 1918 and 2013. When it comes to the latest books on the topic Serbia's public was specially captured by authors such as Christopher Clark and Margaret MacMillan. The two historians critically examined the role played by the Kingdom of Serbia and the czarist Russia. Serbia's mainstream historians labeled this research historical revisionism, speaking of it as a conspiracy theory meant to blame Serbia solely for the war. Nothing new has emerged in Serbia about Serbia's participation in the Great War. The main institution keeping the records on Serbian troops in the WWI, the Military Archive in Belgrade, has been understaffed and housed in a makeshift facility with leaking roof since NATO bombardment.⁴²

Debates at home resound with views that Europe wants to belittle just causes of small nations, of Serbs in particular. So historian Miladin Subotić claims that "Serbia's major and positive role /in WWI/ is an unwelcome fact for those fierce crusaders for some new 'truths'...They are making 'a sticky basis' for yet another gross misunderstanding of Serbia." Hard times are in store for Serbia, say historians on the same wavelength, adding that interpretations of history are being adjusted to the balance of power rather than to "the power of facts and truth." This is why Gavrilo Princip's freedom-loving and heroic act of patriotism is presented as an act of senseless and self-destructive terrorism, says Subotić. Followers of "Mlada Bosnia" are treated as misled losers, an uncivilized group that was standing in the way of Austro-Hungarian progress.⁴³

42 <http://pescanik.net/2014/01/prvi-svetski-rat-uzroci-posledice-secanje/>

43 <http://www.slobodanjovanovic.org/2014/03/12/miladin-subotic-negovanje-secanja-na-prvi-svetski-rat/>

All manifestations marking the centennial of WWI, says Subotić, are after “humiliating and smearing Serbia’s and Serbs’ contribution to the great victory...All this is an attempt at accusing Serbia of the breakup of the WWI.”⁴⁴

44 Ibid.

The WWII revisionism

Speaking of the past, most debates focus on the WWII. The advocates of reconsideration of “the crimes committed by liberators,” “historical injustice” and “rehabilitation of innocent victims of the communist terror, killed or repressed for political and ideological reasons” – all this in the name of “national reconciliation” – have been present in the media for long, though their advocacy culminated in the period 2009–2012.

The goal of the policy of “new memories” and fabrication of Serbia’s “new” history is to nationalize anti-fascism and compromise partisans’ liberation war: anti-fascism is being installed as the fundamental value of the society build on anti-communism, while the entire body of historical experience of the “Second Yugoslavia” is denied and demonized. The implementation of the Rehabilitation Act resulted in distortion of some historical developments, figures and processes: in brief, enabled violence against critical historiography.

Apart from the Tchetnik movement that is presented as yet another anti-fascist movement, most historians in Serbia, says Croat historical Tvrtko Jakovina, “perceive the WWII from a fundamentally different angle.” “Even Serbia’s official historiography claims that Yugoslavia, the outcome of the WWII, restricted Serbs’ right to what they would have were it not for Yugoslavia. This probably refers to the fact that after the WWI Serbia had brought in a far bigger territory than the one left to it after Yugoslavia’s disintegration. Whoever perceives developments in this way ignores everything that happened in the meantime: Macedonians, Vojvodina, etc.” he says.⁴⁵

Serbia’s propaganda starting in 1980s generally denied all the achievements of the Second Yugoslavia, the AVNOJ borders most of all. This fits into later denial of anti-fascism from which the Second Yugoslavia emerged after all. The thesis about illegitimate AVNOJ borders dominated the decade preceding the 1990s wars, the ICTY courtrooms and even today’s discourse.

45 “The Legacy of the Common Past,” *Vreme* No. 1173, June 27, 2013.

Serbs were mobilized for the 1990s wars on this thesis that, in fact, advocated the Greater Serbia. This is why historical revisionism overstates the number of post-war victims. The trend itself earmarks the revisionist narrative. For more than two decades the number of the “victims of the communist terror” has been subject to ideological and political manipulation. The number of killed opponents of the “new regime” (especially in Central Serbia, Belgrade and Backa) has been multiplied. In early 1990s right-wing and nationalistic media were preoccupied with the issue (Pogledi, Duga, etc.)⁴⁶ All this revisionism is after establishing the legitimacy of Yugoslavia’s anti-communists, mostly collaborationists. The fact that many of them such as Milan Nedić, Dimitrije Ljotić or Dragoljub Mihailović were either war criminals, had command responsibility for war crimes or cooperated with fascist aggressors is being ignored.

On July 9, 2009 Serbia’s government established *the State Commission for Detection and Marking of all Secret Tombs with Bodily Remnants of Persons Shot after September 12, 1944*.⁴⁷ Three historians were appointed at its helm: Slobodan Marković, chairman, Srđan Cvetković, secretary, and Momčilo Pavlović, coordinator. Momčilo Pavlović was the one who had launched the initiative for this commission. Establishment of the commission would have been impossible without a clear-cut political will (political consensus between the parties of the ruling coalition headed by the Democratic Party).

The exhibition titled “In the Name of People: Repression in Serbia in 1944–53” was opened in the Historical Museum of Serbia in mid-April 2014. That was the first exhibition ever, claimed the *Nedeljnik* weekly, revealing all ideologically motivated crimes in the aftermath of the WWII and paying homage to the victims hushed up for decades.⁴⁸ “This is a kind of collective rehabilitation, although one cannot say for sure that all of those

46 <http://www.e-novine.com/srbija/srbija-tema/102144-Kako-delati-postali-rtve.html>.

47 On the eve of the establishment of the State Commission, the state-run paper *Vecernje Novosti* published an article by Srđan Cvetković, claiming that 80,000 citizens of Serbia at least had been executed. Historian Čedomir Antić argued that the figure was even higher – 100,000 executed people.

48 *Nedeljnik*, April 10, 2014.

people were innocent,” said historian Srđan Cvetković of the commission. “We cannot say for sure whether all of them deserved death penalty, we cannot guarantee each individual’s innocence, but know, nevertheless, that all those shot without trial and for political reasons need public rehabilitation. For even the communists who had been in concentration camps before the WWII had been treated as human beings.”⁴⁹

According to historian Todor Kuljić, the “exhibition follows the track of Europe, the track of the European Parliament’s resolution against totalitarianism, which makes no difference between the red star and the swastika.” “Hence, the exhibition is generally acceptable to Europe. On the other hand, the exhibition does speak for national victims. No doubt that liberators did commit some crimes, but the exhibition as a whole argues against anti-fascism. So it dethrones anti-fascism as a rational policy and affirms not only national victims but also all others communist have allegedly killed. I think that this exhibition wants to neutralize anti-fascism – that has always been present over here – and to visually strengthen anti-anti-fascism,” he says.⁵⁰

49 Ibid.

50 <http://www.autonomija.info/todor-kuljic-pomirenje-u-regionu-nece-doci-iz-brisela.html>.

War crimes and ICTY

Tomašica: the biggest mass grave

The media are by far less interested in the 1990s wars and war crimes than several year ago. Stories are mostly reduced while the public debate on the topic almost faded away. One of the reasons why it is so is that the “battle” for interpretation of the WWII and alleged losses Serbia suffered by entering the Second Yugoslavia is still on.

Discovery of the mass grave in the Tomašica mine nearby Prijedor made a breaking news in the region, as well as worldwide. Every newly discovered mass grave clearly indicates the character of the Bosnian war. However, in Serbia no one seemed exactly interested in analyzing the causes of the mass crime committed in the mine. The media just ran news stories with factual information taken over from their Bosnian counterparts. The monstrosity of the crime itself was overlooked and forgotten in almost no time.

“We first discovered identities of two persons who had been engaged in transporting people to Tomašica. Then we spoke to the two of them trying to appeal to their conscience. One of the two Serbs told us later on the exact location of the mass grave. He simply came to the crime scene and pointed to the grave. We gave him an overcoat as it was raining at the time,” said an investigator.⁵¹ The man said he felt somewhat relieved once he told his “dark secret.” He also said he would never forget some scenes at Tomašica that obviously made him come up with the story.⁵² “During the war and after it local Serbs felt uneasy and wanted to have the mass grave relocated because of awful smell undercover waters were bringing to their houses. However, they were not talking about it openly and refused to inform the families of victims about the grave their brutally murdered dear-

51 <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/brammertz-otkriva-u-tomasici-dokazi-u-optuznicama>.

52 Ibid.

est were buried in. And many of their neighbors were buried in this mass grave," he told investigators.⁵³

Bosnia-Herzegovina still searches for 6,500 missing persons and mass graves. The Tomašica mine is probably the biggest mass grave ever located not only in Bosnia but also throughout the territory of the countries emerging from Yugoslavia.⁵⁴ Amor Mašović, the director of the Institute for Missing Persons in Bosnia-Herzegovina, says he is afraid more than 600 bodies could be excavated. One can hardly tell how many mass graves are still hidden; however, judging by 23,000 missing persons found dead in over 630 mass graves and some 7,000 tombs, the rest of missing persons are probably buried in 60-odd mass graves and several hundreds of tombs.⁵⁵ The Institute needs funds to continue the search, and such funds are less and less available. Some MPs, says Mašović, constantly threaten with cutting our budget down or even closing the Institute – all of which certainly discourages the families still looking for their missing members and the staff of the Institute.⁵⁶

Many wondered how possibly the biggest mass grave could be discovered so late. And this is what human rights defender Edin Ramulić give as an explanation: local authorities are to blame for people's silence about these locations in Prijedor; they are trying to sweep everything under the carpet. "Crimes are systematically hushed up in Prijedor and, therefore, stand for 'joint criminal enterprise' as ICTY had decided in all Prijedor trials... People simply dare not report these locations, they fear local authorities and the police, as well as a label of 'traitors of Serb interest,'" says Edin Ramulić.⁵⁷

Slobodan Stojanović, former trooper of Serbia's special police squad and ICTY protected witness, claims the existence of a mass grave of 1,000–2,000 Muslims executed by Leskovac policemen. The mass grave,

53 Ibid.

54

55 <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/plp-masovic-tomasica-je-najveca-grobnica-na-podrucju-bivse-jugoslavije/25162297.html>.

56 Ibid..

57 Danas, March 9, 2014.

somewhere in Eastern Bosnia, has not been detected yet. However, Stojanović maintains that Serbia's Public Prosecution is well aware of the exact location. "They must know given that diggers were sent there overnight and ordered to secretly dig a large pit and transport bodies by trucks. Bodies of the killed Muslims were transported at night and laid in the pit, then covered with earth just to have another layer of bodies placed on top of them. These were all helpless women, children and the elderly. The Tomašica grave nearby Prijedor will be nothing compared with this one. I would only be glad to reveal the location were there not for the obstruction by our Prosecution and I take that yours would take the same attitude," he said.⁵⁸

According to his testimony, 90 percent of criminals are living normal lives not and no one can touch them. Most of them are gendarmes, and some work as instructors in the Special Anti-terrorist Unit /SAJ/. All of them are comfortably off with monthly salaries of some 1,000 Euros. "The Gendarmerie is an elite squad for killing law-abiding citizens. A month ago they killed a goldsmith in Nis. They had racketeering him for long and then decided to murder him. They are doing the same in Belgrade, maltreating and racketeering people. All units of the Gendarmeries recruits Serbs from Bosnia-Herzegovina, who have found refuge in Serbia. They keep each other's backs to conceal their murders, plunder and theft during the war. People in Kosovo have accumulated enormous wealth on plunder. Among them are many policemen, especially those high in the command chain."⁵⁹

The international community is also concerned with the issue of missing person as a global problem. A three-day conference in The Hague concluded that the fact that in the 21st century the international community has yet developed a mechanism for solving the problems of the missing was rather disturbing. The conference was convened with the purpose to initiate establishment of a global mechanism for prompt reaction not only

58 <http://diwan-magazine.com/u-istocnoj-bosni-postoji-neotkrivena-masovna-grobnica-veca-od-tomasice/>.

59 Ibid.

in wars and riots but also natural disasters – a mechanism that would be financed globally and available to all countries.

Stanišić, Simatović and Perišić proclaimed not guilty

ICTY decisions have little significance given that they are not being used for public debates. The media in Serbia were more preoccupied with acquittals of two Croat generals (Gotovina and Markač) than with similar no guilty verdicts to Serb generals Momčilo Perišić, Jovica Stanišić and Frenki Simatović. They often use the cases of Gotovina and Haradinaj to illustrate ICTY bias against Serbs while regularly ignoring acquittals of their Serb counterparts or interpreting everything from the angle of conspiracy theories. The not guilty verdict to the three Serb generals standing trial for crimes in Croatia and Bosnia plays into the hand of the argument about “Serbia having nothing to do with the war.”

In his capacity as the president of the UN General Assembly, Serbia’s former foreign minister, Vuk Jeremić, organized a public debate in the General Assembly on April 10, 2013. The debate was titled “The Role of International Criminal Law in the Process of Reconciliation.” What prompted him to organize the event, said Vuk Jeremić himself, were “the shocking not guilty verdicts for the war crimes committed in the ‘Storm’ operation by the ICTY Appellate Chamber.”⁶⁰

Addressing the audience Serbia’s President Tomislav Nikolić seized the opportunity to say what he thought about ICTY. “Inquisition used to burn people alive in the name of heavenly justice and to save their souls from Satan through flames. The proceedings in The Hague are exactly the same,” he said, adding that the trials to Serbs were motivated by punishment and reprisal.⁶¹

By acquitting Momčilo Perišić, former head of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army, ICTY practically “ruined” any chance for proving Serbia’s responsibility for Bosnian genocide.

60 Večernje Novosti, April 7, 2013.

61 Večernje Novosti, April 10, 2013.

First Vice-Premier Aleksandar Vučić called not guilty verdicts to former high officials of the State Security most welcome for Serbia.⁶² Ivica Dačić, the premier, said, “This verdict is most important for the Republic of Serbia. The Serbian government has always been advocating fairness of trials before ICTY as the only way to assert the truth about the crimes and ensure regional reconciliation, peace and stability.”⁶³

A part of Serbia’s civil sector and some party leaders were most critical about these acquittals. Žarko Korać, the leader of the Social Democratic Union and psychology professor, was shocked at the news. “It’s hard to believe that people who were ‘the heart of the darkness’ – to paraphrase Joseph Conrad – of the Milošević regime were acquitted. Simatović and Stanišić were mastermind of everything that happened in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.”⁶⁴

Nataša Kandić, the former director of the Humanitarian Law Fund, said, “I must say I am shocked. The verdict itself and its explanation have nothing to do with common reason and obvious facts.⁶⁵ Serb para-military units in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were not ‘free lancers’ getting their arms without the assistance from Serbia and its State Security, as the ICTY decided... It’s obvious that these units had been formed to commit war crimes. While standing trial in Belgrade members of the ‘Scorpions’ unit made no bones about it being formed by the state. They were perfectly equipped because the State Security tasked them with most important actions.”⁶⁶ As it seems, she added, the court held that these units had been formed for the sole purpose of maintaining Serbs’ control over the battlefield, rather than for ethnic homogenization of the parts of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina through expulsion of non-Serbs and for

62 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/385529/Vucic-Oslobadjajuca-presuda-dobra-za-zemlju>.

63 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/385380/Dacic-pozdravio-oslobadjajucu-presudu-Stanisicu>.

64 <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/quotsimatovic-i-stanisic-bili-su-srce-tame-milosevicevog-rezimaquot/680589.aspx>.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

integration of these territories into Serbia. "In this last phase of its work the ICTY refrains from obvious facts," she says.⁶⁷

Chairwoman of the Humanitarian Law Fund Sandra Orlović takes that not guilty verdicts to Stanišić and Simatović inflict injustice to families of the victims of war crimes. Moreover, she adds, these acquittals will be only contributing to misunderstanding of war developments.⁶⁸

Sonja Biserko, the chairwoman of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, pointed out that the roles played by Stanišić and Simatović had been clearly defined over the trial to Slobodan Milošević. "The Tribunal's exit strategy is to amnesty all the states in the region and put all the blame on Serbs from Croatia and Bosnia. What remains, however, is the undeniable fact that there are over 400,000 war veterans in Serbia. This is not a small group of people all of whom might have reacted 'spontaneously,'" she said.⁶⁹

Commenting on the acquittals Geoffrey Nice, the ICTY ex-prosecutor, said that they showed that the Tribunal was ready for going down into history as an institution more concerned with the interests of big powers than of victims.⁷⁰ With the exception of condemning Tuđman en passant in the Prlić case, says Nice, the responsibility for everything that happened in Bosnia "remains in Bosnia." "But since Tuđman has never been put to trial, everyone will soon forget his guilt. Not guilty verdicts to Perišić, Stanišić and Simatović have actually acquitted Belgrade and all Serb defendants from Serbia," he said.⁷¹ On the other hand, he added, Bosnia-Herzegovina had bothered so little to write the history of the conflict on its own and even "the mothers of Srebrenica had not managed to urge the Bosnian government to do something about it." "Instead, the Bosnian government left the interpretation of history to Serbia, which skillfully blurred all major facts. Now they /the government/ have these

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 <http://www.vesti-online.com/Vesti/Srbija/319734/Kakvi-interesi-zrtava-Haskom-sudu-su-bitniji-interesi-sila>.

71 Ibid.

verdicts that will probably not be contested, despite all the serious criticism of outstanding international lawyers," he said.⁷²

Florence Artman commented on the verdicts saying that the ICTY only confirmed it was after abolishing command responsibility from the international law, as well as the complicity of military and civilian authorities in systemic violence. "The masterminds of the system, who had planingly organized mass violence while careful not to put any direct order in black and white were thus rewarded," she said.⁷³

The Minister of Justice visits the ICTY

Minister of Justice Nikola Selaković and his entourage paid the first official visit to ICTY defendants. After eight-hour talks with 13 detainees of Serb origin out of 24, Selaković told the press that all the meetings had been extremely friendly and that the detainees had been obviously happy to have an official of the Serbian government visiting them.

He also told the press that Ratko Mladić had served them some chocolate, while Zdravko Tolimir offered juice. Because of the Minister's visit Mladić excused himself from the trial, and Radovan Karadžić met with the Minister upon his return from the courtroom. Selaković announced new measures to assist and support the ICTY detainees. "We informed them all about the steps the government would take, including legal amendments related to assistance to our citizens to be voted soon," he said.⁷⁴

He also said he was dissatisfied with not guilty verdicts in the cases of Gotovina, Markač and Haradinaj, and announced a possible demand to have Serb convicts transferred to Serbia to serve their sentences.⁷⁵

72 Ibid.

73 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/385670/Artman-Presudom-Stanisicu-i-Simatovicu-Hag-usao-u-proces-ukidanja-Zenevske-konvencije>.

74 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/363380/Mladic-posluzio-Selakovica-cokoladom-Pavkovic-spremio-pitu-s-mesom>.

75 Ibid.

The Šešelj case

The Šešelj case is still on trial in the ICTY. Proceedings against him have protracted endlessly not only because of his foul language in the courtroom and, consequently, repeated punishment for disrespect of the court but also because his defense had demanded exclusion of Justice Harhoff.

The Hague Tribunal had postponed the decision in the case against leader of the Serb Radical Party Vojislav Šešelj till October 31, 2013. However, yet another postponement ensued as Presiding Judge Jean-Claude Antonetti gave green light to the defense lawyers' request for the exclusion of Justice Harhoff on the account of possible bias. Since the Prosecution and other judges asked that the decision on the exclusion should be reconsidered, another judge was not appointed in due time and the Presiding Judge said a verdict could not be passed until the issue was settled.

Namely, having discussed the request for exclusion a special chamber has decided that in a letter to friends publicized in the Danish media Justice Harhoff had "demonstrated bias against not guilty verdicts" when criticizing the Tribunal's decisions.⁷⁶

Šešelj had taken stand in the case of Radovan Karadžić, claiming in his testimony that "only Serbs have been living in Bosnia-Herzegovina from bygones." People in Bosnia, he detailed, are either "Catholic Serbs, Muslim Serbs or Eastern Orthodox Serbs." He claimed that Karadžić "could not have been hostile to Muslims and Croats." He denied the charge of "joint criminal enterprise" against him and Karadžić, calling it "a fabrication."⁷⁷

The present regime has not preoccupied itself with the case; in fact it fears Šešelj's release. While testifying in the Karadžić case, Šešelj said, "If I am involved in war crimes then Tomislav Nikolić is my closest accomplice." He and Nikolić had "worked side by side" in Croatia and Bosnia throughout the war, he said. Then he expounded on the main goal of the Serb Radical Party: establishment of the Greater Serbia that would incorporate territories of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. "National unity"

76 <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/presuda-seselju-odgodjena-na-neodredjeno-vrijeme/701034.aspx>.

77 <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/seselj-u-bih-oduvijek-zive-samo-srbi/682116.aspx>.

and “Serbs living in harmony” is what would have marked this creation of his /the Greater Serbia/. He also mentioned Serbia’s First Vice-Premier Aleksandar Vučić as the party volunteer in Sarajevo, stationed at the Jewish Cemetery.”⁷⁸

78 <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/vojislav-seselj-sve-sto-sam-radio-u-ratu-radio-sam-zajedno-s-danasnjim-predsjednikom-srbije-nikolicem-/682596.aspx>.

Primordial resistance to liberal values

Over the past decade Serbia has been constantly adjusting its legislation to the European: from this angle, therefore, the values proclaimed correspond to European criteria and standards. However what prevails in everyday life is ethno-centrism. Nationalism growingly sinks into tribalism. Pluralism, a major attainment of modern liberalism, is permanently called on the carpet. The policy of homogenization breathes life into a monolithic, insular and exclusive culture that reflects governmental and social systems. This policy keeps the society in constant tension, intolerance and hostility for others.

Two value concepts clash with one another: the predominant, conservative and patriarchal on the one hand, and liberal on the other. Serbia parries liberal values. This explains permanent campaigns against the West, free market, capitalism and, especially, human rights culture perceived as the West's imperial implant. Frequent assaults at human rights defenders crystallize this attitude towards human rights. Besides, economic stagnation additionally spoon-feeds the conservative option and populism that has been coming and going in waves in the past twenty years.

What earmarks the "new" fascism are acts and statements targeting "others" and "otherness," camouflaged with slogans about the threats to national interests. One cannot but be concerned with the fact that almost all relevant political parties in the region are supporting – overtly or silently – fascist initiatives on the one hand, and denying anti-fascist legacies as basic social values on the other. The cult of tradition – a primary characteristic of fascism – rejects modernism under the veil of nonacceptance of capitalistic lifestyles. What catches the eye is distrust in the "world of intellect," the distrust usually worded by mainstream intellectuals, blaming the modern culture and liberally minded intelligentsia of having betrayed traditional values. Each and every criticism is seen as treason.

Extreme right-wing organizations have been active in Serbia ever since 1990s. With open support from Vojislav Koštunica, elected the President after the change of the regime in 2000, and the Serb Orthodox Church these organizations have been promoting traditional values “making up” Serb identity. These obsolete values negate all forms of modernity and cooperation with the Western world. Their promoters strongly oppose Serbia’s membership of EU and NATO. Close to the Serb Progressive Party once, they are now deeply disappointed with its pro-European course. They are after annulling Vojvodina’s autonomy; and in this have been rather successful over the past two years.

By its very nature fascism is obsessed with conspiracy theories – preferably with global conspiracies. Not only right-wing organizations but also the great majority of Serbia’s intellectuals argue for this thesis. Playing on Serbia’s victimhood they try to obstruct a dialogue on the 1990s wars, which they ascribe to the West’s conspiracy against the Serb nation.

So Slobodan Erić says, “This pathological obsession with Serbs, this hardly understandable hatred, and this systematic and persistent struggle against Serbs are all a struggle that goes on at a much higher, spiritual level: the struggle against Eastern Orthodoxy, against the only true faith, against the truth and God, which most politicians and Serbs could not and would not see as such...As long as this spiritual situation of the world persists, the West would not let us be. The West and our enemies will be doing what they always have, and we, Serbs, as we still have a grain of wisdom of our ancestors, should live in harmony with God and St. Sava tradition alike.”⁷⁹

Right-wing intellectuals such as sociologist Mirjana Vasović, professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences, point out that “further throwing national and state interests aside only speeds up disintegration of not only national identity but also of the state-building consciousness.” “If we are unable to establish sovereignty over entire territory, protect our legitimate national interest and just call everything taken from us ‘lost,’ then all we

79 Slobodan Erić, *Geopolitika* No. 66, September 2013.

can expect at domestic level is anomie, and disrespect, anonymity and marginalization in international relations," she says.⁸⁰

The Serb Orthodox Church shares this view. According to Archimandrite Danilo, the New Age is a bigger threat to Serbia than communism was. Serbia's membership of EU is a suicide, he says, as 600 million of EU citizens will literally swallow us up. "They take us for the people that easily changes its mind, prone to assimilation and changes of cloths, language and alphabet. They hope to see us changing our faith eventually... This is why we must take utter care of our religion, tradition, our saints' days, and safeguard our identity closely tied to Eastern Orthodoxy."⁸¹

The Third Serbia (assembling former members of the right-wing movement Dveri) stepped on the political scene after the 2012 elections and SNS parliamentary and presidential victory. Up to then, as a new grouping going "after reconciliation between the first and the second Serbia," it had acted from the margins little known to general public. However, the "recomposition" of local government in Novi Sad – when SNS dethroned DS – opened a window of opportunity to the Third Serbia to delegate its members to governmental institutions. With two MPs in the provincial parliament it formed a parliamentary caucus.⁸² The Third Serbia is actually an informal coalition partner to the present regime, which deploys it whenever it either cannot or would not expose itself. Hence, it is strongly present in the media, in Vojvodina in particular.

Their primary goal, they say, is to reconcile the "first" (nationalistic) and the "second" (civilian) Serbia. According to Andrej Fajgelj, one of founding-fathers, "Serbian public and politics are totally blocked by the partition between two mutually exclusive and confronting sides." This is why many important questions, such as the one about the war, remain unanswered; the "first" Serbia sees Serbs solely as victims, while the "second" as criminals, he explains. On the top of the organization's priority

80 <http://www.pecat.co.rs/2013/01/mirjana-vasovic-socijalni-psiholog-pitanje-drzavnog-i-nacionalnog-identiteta-vaznije-od-pitanja-nataliteta/>.

81 Geopolitika No.72, Mart 2014.

82 The party did not pass the electoral threshold in the early parliamentary elections in 2014.

list is national identity-building, which has to be “inclusive given that ethnic origin is not that important as education, manners and lifestyle.” On October 6, 2012 the party adopted its manifesto under the slogan “Serbia has the future. It is worthwhile.” Founding-fathers Aleksandar Protić, Miroslav Parović and Aleksandar Đurđev pointed out that the time has time for new generations at the political scene and the young people who will take over the responsibility.⁸³

In their public discourse party leaders are mostly focused on the so-called problem of “Serbia’s self-denial” and “Vojvodina as a paradigm of that self-denial.”⁸⁴ Andrej Fajgelj, the leader most present in the media, says that “the culture of self-denial has been built for more than a hundred years and this cultural war /of theirs/ broke out only once a new generation begun standing for Serbhood, a generation that stands chance to really defend it.”⁸⁵

To all appearances, Andrej Fajgelj considers himself a part of that generation. After the “recomposition” of the local government in 2012 he was appointed director of the Novi Sad Cultural Center instead of Laslo Blašković. His first move in the new post was to replace the Latin script in the Center’s name and logo with Cyrillic. This announced the course of his policy. Then he banned a painting by a young artist (Danijela Tasić) from an exhibition because, he explained, the painting insulted citizens’ religious feelings (the painting represented Jesus dressed in banknotes). His action raised a hue and cry about censorship.

For his part, Fajgelj called his critics to account for not protesting against “censorship” when the launch of a book relativizing the Srebrenica genocide (“The Srebrenica Fraud”) was suspended. The launch scheduled in the Center of Serbian Army had been suspended at the request of the Humanitarian Law Fund.

What earmarks the Third Serbia’s program are “traditional Serb values,” the family in the first place. For the time being it mostly acts in Vojvodina. It considers itself an engine of development but its stances are

83 Beta, November 14, 2012.

84 Danas, May 16, 2014.

85 Politika, May 4, 2014.

close to those of the most conservative intellectual circles. True, the party does not advocate annulment of Vojvodina's autonomy. On the other hand, it insists that the question about "whether we really need an autonomous province" should be raised.⁸⁶ "We should also raise a question of whether all this implies elements of a quasi-state, and whether citizens of the province really need banners, emblems, statutes, academies of science and the police of their own, or they need a flexible and modern governance integrated into the whole of Serbia's system," says Fajgelj.⁸⁷

The Third Serbia promotes right-wing ideas that often border on national socialist propaganda. In an article published by the *Novi Standard* magazine on July 28, 2013, Aleksandar Đurđev, the party secretary, describes his organization as a group of people tasked with "teaching new generations to work diligently, produce qualitatively, sell adequately, earn realistically and spend moderately." Addressing the electoral assembly, Nada Tabš, the vice-president, said, "The Third Serbia stands for work ethics and respect of hard work, as this is what ensures progress in all spheres, including the birthrate policy."⁸⁸

According to the party policy, the seat of Serbia's government should be in Belgrade, the seat of the Presidency in Novi Sad, of General Staff in Nis, while the main police headquarters should be in Kragujevac. Such rearrangement of the seats of governance, they say, would enable each region to develop in accordance to its specificities on the one hand, and ensure genuine decentralization on the other. Novi Sad as a new capital would lessen the threat of instability in the regions north of rivers Sava and Danube. Having the General Staff stationed in Nis would be only logical, they claim, since "the biggest security threats are coming from the South." Not long ago, President of the Progressive Club Čedomir Antić also suggested moving of Serbia's capital from Belgrade to Novi Sad.⁸⁹

More and more residents of Novi Sad join political parties. Membership of SNS and the Third Serbia has spiraled, while the parties that failed

⁸⁶ Danas, May 16, 2014.

⁸⁷ Isto.

⁸⁸ E-Novine, January 23, 2014.

⁸⁹ Tanjug, Beta, December 30, 2013.

to pass the electoral threshold for the city council are on the downward curve. Citizens having joined DS while it was in power at all levels of the provincial governance are not walking out of it. Membership of the Third Serbia grows by geometrical progression, claim party officials. The Third Serbia is the youngest party in Novi Sad; it has six representatives in the city hall. Bojan Panaotović, one of the two well-known journalists from Novi Sad who have joined the party, says, "The Third Serbia is among those rare political organization not lead by oligarchy and the principle of negative selection," while his colleague, Milorad Vukašinić adds, "No party has been so sincere, unambiguous and fair is its appeal to citizens as the Third Serbia."⁹⁰

The Third Serbia submitted for parliamentary consideration the initiative for the "Dignity" fund to provide urgent assistance to the poorest strata of population. It wanted to present MPs from all political parties a model of "assistance in action" prior to the vote on the budget for 2014.⁹¹

Prompted by escalation of violence in Novi Sad, the Third Serbia addressed an open letter to Police Minister Ivica Dačić and Police Director Milorad Veljović, saying, "Thanks to your years-long delay to appoint a head of the Novi Sad Police Department, our town is now among the unsafest places in the country. The number of violent crimes is growing the same as the number of juvenile offenders and juvenile victims, and gangs coming to Novi Sad to plunder. Some so-called fan groups have become distribution centers of narcotics, while schools their recruit bases. Discouraged parents do not report assaults any longer." Blaming Dačić's hesitation to appoint a police chief, the letter claims that the situation makes it possible for Nenad Čanak and Bojan Pajić to continue "dancing towards independence."⁹²

The Vojvodina Party asked SNS to call early local elections in Novi Sad so as to put an end to the "plunder" of the capital of the province by "a phantom organization" called the Third Serbia. Novi Sad has never before

90 Kanal 9, December 30, 2013.

91 Novine Novosadske, November 20, 2014.

92 Nova srpska politička misao, August 22, 2013.

been in such dire straits, while the majority in the provincial assembly has not been legitimized in regular elections, released the party.

The Vojvodina Party also asked the provincial authorities to dig deeper into the media stories about taxpayers having paid for the Third Serbia's posters and billboard in the election campaign. It claims that the "Lisje" public company under the control of the Third Serbia has been hiring "unqualified but loyal followers of right-wing organizations" though the company itself is overstaffed.⁹³

The conflict between the Novi Sad regime and opposition culminated when the opposition accused the regime of having paid the Third Serbia's officials, members and even their families with moneys meant to subsidize culture. This raised the question of the "blackmail potential" of small parties such as the Third Serbia, which tipped the scales in favor of the appropriation of local self-government.⁹⁴

Via its Russophile web-portal called "Serb FB Reporter" the pro-fascist organization "Serb Assembly of Pledgers" (Srpski sabor Zavetnici) invited all like-minded people to a protest against "the media lynch, persecution and sack of journalist and spokesman for the Anti-terrorist Squad Radosmir Počuča, as well as shameful NGO activities, insulting to all victims of NATO bombardment, the families of the killed but also the feelings of the majority of citizens of Serbia." "We call you to a protest in front of the premises housing the Women in Black (detailed address follows) meant to urge the authorities to adopt an amendment by the model of Russia, providing that non-governmental organizations financed by factors from abroad and Western embassies shall be treated as foreign agents," says the release. The spokeswoman for the organization, Milica Đurđević, said that the state should not protect organizations such as "Women in Black" that "undermine the Constitution, the Serb society, tradition and culture."⁹⁵

93 Autonomija, info, 28. mart 2013.

94 Politika, 8. jul 2013.

95 <http://www.021.rs/Info/Srbija/Zavetnici-podrzali-Pocucu-LSV-trazi-sankcionisanje-nadleznih-u-MUP-u.html>.

The Russian House in which the organization⁹⁶ marked its second anniversary was a full house.⁹⁷

Andrej Fagelj, assistant professor at the Kragujevac University and high official of the Third Serbia, said, "In the 21st century the Serbs are the only Europeans threatened with ethnically motivated murders, and whose culture and identity have been constantly defamed. Never put on trial or punished but, on the contrary, quite successful in its goals, anti-Serb fascism has become acceptable. And not only acceptable to descendants of criminals but also to the public worldwide, and, monstrously, among descendants of victims. The Second Serbia has given birth to a monstrous hybrid of anti-Serb fascism and Serb anti-fascism."⁹⁸

The organization's website quotes, among other things, that one of German anti-Serb strategists' most monstrous plan is to have "Belgrade influence the mindset of Serbs in Kosovo North" so that they would consider KFOR and EULEX friendly organizations. Belgrade has accepted this ultimatum, claims the author of the website story. "Moreover, it not only tries to change the mindset of Kosmet Serbs but also to brainwash the entire Serbia and all the Serbs worldwide. It lies when saying that citizens of Serbia will die of hunger unless they pursue the course of 'Euro-integration;' it scares people with new sanctions, reversion to 1990s, Shiptars' 'Storm' operation and another wave of expelled Serbs; on the other hand it makes childish promises that Serbs would live 'like all other decent

96 It participated in the early elections in coalition with the Party of Serb Unity led by Borislav Pelević.

97 "The main hall of the Russian House turned to be too small last night to accommodate all the guests of the ceremony marking the second anniversary of the Serb Assembly of Pledgers. In appreciation of its host the ceremony opened with the Russian anthem and a prayer for Serbia and Russia.../Addressing the audience/ the vice-president of the organization, Damjan Knežević, reminded of its beginnings at the barricades erected in Kosovo and Metohija. "If God helps us we shall be the generation that will liberate and renew Serbia," he concluded. In his letter of support read aloud, writer Antonije Đurić said, "All and sundry have persecuted us, all and sundry have butchered us, and they all would do it again, still hungry of Serb blood. But they will not, as we shall not allow them, we at the stronghold of our fatherland."

98 <http://www.srbel.net/2013/04/12/andrej-fajgelj-zasto-u-evropi-postoji-antisrpski-fasizam/>.

peoples' by just joining EU or at least obtain the date for the beginning of accession negotiations.”⁹⁹

They strongly criticized President Nikolić for his apology to the crimes in Srebrenica. “Who has authorized this person, the incumbent President of Serbia, to apologize on behalf of Serbia?...The common knowledge is that Serbia has been involved in no way in what happened in Srebrenica. Even the International Court of Justice, hostile to Serbs, failed to connect Serbia with “the genocide” in Srebrenica. All it could manage is to issue an absurd statement about Serbia having acted inadequately to prevent a crime such,” released the organization.¹⁰⁰

A group of right-wing organizations staged a campaign against “advocacy of homosexuality among juveniles” by the Russian model. Milan Obradović of the “Obraz” organization said that the campaign titled “The People against LGBT Propaganda” aimed at adoption of the legislation similar to the Russian prohibiting such propaganda.¹⁰¹

It were the cases of the spokesman for the Anti-terrorist Squad, Radomir Počuča, and Ivan Ivanović of the “Naši” organization that drew public attention to these organizations. The two had been arrested as suspects of the crimes against law and order, and of racial and other discrimination committed via Internet. After police interrogation they were the High Tech Crime Prosecutor called for their detention. Počuča was arrested for having published a list of “30 biggest Serb-haters and traitors among public figures,” released the Prosecutor.

Besides, on March 25 at his Facebook account Počuča appealed to fans of “Red Star,” “Partizan,” “Rad” and “Vojvodina” football clubs “not to waste their energy in mutual fights but to join hands instead and beat up” the Women in Black marking the 15th anniversary of the crimes against

99 <http://www.srbel.net/2013/04/30/izvinjenje-za-tu%C4%91e-zlo%C4%8Dine-i-vilibrantizacija-srbije/>.

100 Ibid.

101 http://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/10775/srbija_desnichari_pokrenuli_zabranu_zakonsku_zabranu_propagiranja_homoseksualizma.html.

civilians in Kosovo. The “Nasi” movement spread the list of “Serb-haters” via social networks.¹⁰²

The “Dveri” organization, most present among young academics, holds that the Serbian language, maths and history have been placed at the back seat. Most teachers, they claim, are more interested in the matters immaterial than in those tangible and in quality lecturing. This is yet another proof that we are not compatible with Euro-Atlantic trends almost deprived of any spirituality, argues the organization.¹⁰³

102 The list of outstanding public figures includes Mirjana Karanović, Goran Marković, Svetislav Basara, Veran Matić, Nataša Kandić, Biljana Srbljanović, Gorčin Stojanović, Latinka Perović, Borka Pavićević, Branko Radun, Vladimir Arsenijević, Ivan Vejevoda, Srđa Popović, Sonja Biserko, Teofil Pančić, Miljenko Dereta, Jelena Milić, Mirko Đorđević, Srbijanka Turajlić, Milovan Drecun, Nenad Lj. Stefanović, Svetlana Lukić, Nebojša Krstić, Miša Brkić, Jelena Karleuša, Jovan Bajford, Žarko Korać, Dragomir Andjelković, Petar Luković, Nikola Đuričko.

103 Večernje Novosti, March 12, 2014.

The media: champions of anti-Western sentiments

Having reported developments in Ukraine during pro-European demonstrations at the Maidan Square rather objectively, the media in Serbia – tabloids and the so-called serious papers almost without any exception – changed their tune after Russia’s intervention and annexation of Crimea. The media used US President Barack Obama’s statement about Kosovo’s referendum on independence having been in line with the international law, while the Crimean had not, to spread anti-American feelings.¹⁰⁴ They begun reinterpreting the Maidan developments and accusing US (and their secret services) and Ukrainian right-wing organizations of having organized the protests. They also started criticizing the West’s sanctions against Russia claiming the purpose was not to help solving the crisis Ukraine but to punish Russia.¹⁰⁵

Right-wing organizations, for their part, started calling human rights defenders and some media outlets on the carpet. In this context, an editorial penned by Ratko Dmitrović, editor of *Večernje Novosti*, stood up as a drastic example. Under the headline “Kristijan and Some Others,”¹⁰⁶ Dmitrović called for a ban on Jelena Milić’s (director of the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies) and Sonja Biserko’s (chairwoman of the Helsinki Committee) public appearances, calling them notorious “anti-Serbs” and “traitors.” What motivated his editorial was a hue and cry raised about frequent appearances as a guest in talk shows of Kristijan Golubović, a convicted criminal and drug dealer. Why shouldn’t then the authorities ban

104 It was the Kosovo Parliament that declared independence without calling a referendum on the issue.

105 “It is Russia rather than Ukraine that concerns the West. And if Ukraine has to be sacrificed in the showdown with Russia, its /Ukraine’s/ friends in the West would only be glad to oblige,” quotes the editorial headlined “Russia Haunts Europe;” *Politika*, May 6, 2014.

106 *Večernje Novosti*, April 26, 2014.

the two civil society activists' from appearing in talk shows considering their "anti-Serb" stances, wanders Dmitrović.

Michael Davenport, head of the EU Delegation to Serbia, reacted at the editorial.¹⁰⁷ He called the overall state of the Serbian media unsatisfactory and some phenomena "very unpleasant and unacceptable."¹⁰⁸ Here he referred to comparisons made between civil society representatives and criminals, saying that was "a clear breach of human rights, as well as rights of these individuals and organizations."¹⁰⁹

In the name of freedom of speech and expression, *Politika* promptly retorted to Michael Davenport's statement: it compared it with Central Committee releases in the socialist era, which "were hurriedly parroted and quoted by everybody."¹¹⁰

Director and editor of *Pecat* Milorad Vučelić was the first to suggest that the media should simply ignore outstanding human rights defenders such as Sonja Biserko. His weekly overtly advocates against Serbia's membership of EU taking that its /Serbia's/ place is "in the East." Compared with other weeklies this one has enviable circulation and influence on general public.

The word has it that Russia directly subsidizes *Pecat* for its overt support to it and its foreign policy, and especially its favoring Vladimir Putin, and that it supports some right-wing organizations for the same reasons. Should that be the case the financial support would be rather non-transparent (unlike Western donors that finance non-governmental organizations and insist on transparency of the grants and expenditures). Be it as it may, Milorad Vučelić vehemently denies everything, claiming that his weekly get "nothing special from Russia" and that in his opinion "business

107 On the account of Serbia's cooperativeness in the matter of Kosovo EU officials have been lenient about domestic situation, including breaches of fundamental standards of ethics and professionalism in the media.

108 *Politika*, May 12, 2014.

109 *Ibid.*

110 *Politika*, May 14, 2014.

circles in Moscow and their companies in Serbia have never demonstrated that they are aware of him at all.”¹¹¹

It is common knowledge, however, that Russia provides logistic and financial support to scores of right-wing organizations in West Europe, including pro-fascist parties, although it has been articulating – and especially since the outburst of the Ukrainian crisis – its concern over the rise of fascism in Europe. (“We shall not allow fascism to resurrect in Europe,” says Sergey Lavrov adding, “Europe has been turning a blind eye to the re-awaken fascist ideology for long.”) According to *Politika*, Moscow wants to instigate a political Internationale that would lead towards a “Euro-Asian confederation of free nations” by the means of “nationalistic impulses” that had found an echo among extreme rightist circles.¹¹²

The paper also says that “Russia’s right-wing favorites” are the National Front in France, Flanders Interest in Belgium, Italy’s Northern League, Austria’s Freedom Party, Hungary’s Jobik and Bulgaria’s Ataka.¹¹³

111 Danas, May 12, 2014.

112 Politika, May 9, 2014.

113 Politika, May 9, 2014.

Democracy-oriented civil sector

Serbia's civil sector – human rights organizations in the first place – advocating democratic and liberal ideas at usually on the regime's carpet list, but also at the carpet list of right-wing and so-called patriotic organizations for which liberal values equal Western imperialism. Campaigns against these organizations – more or less intensive – label them “traitors,” “foreign mercenaries,” “Serb-haters,” and the like. Tabloids are in the forefront, although papers such as *Večernje Novosti* or *Pecat* follow in their footsteps pretty much. About the same propaganda is being spread through social networks. And yet, to make denunciation most effective they all mostly focus on foreign donors, usually Western government and foundations. On the other hand, no one seems to be interested in the fact that Russia has been financing many right-wing organizations. Unlike grants Western donors allocate to non-governmental organizations, Russian subsidies are not transparent.

Aleksandar Popov, director of the Center for Regionalism, says, “Non-governmental organizations have never been the regime's favorites, especially in the era of Slobodan Milošević but also at the time of DOS and its successors although we had rather contributed to the October 5 ouster...They all have perceived the civil society as an unwelcome witness, a pest, reminding them of what they had promised,” he says. Unlike various religious and “patriotic” organizations, the democracy-oriented non-governmental sector has been regularly paying its taxes and dues, and stating the sources of their finances.¹¹⁴

It is some media (*Pečat* and *Večernje Novosti*) that are now trying to delegitimize the House of Human Rights allocated to five Belgrade-seated non-governmental organizations. So, *Pečat*, backed by some governmental circles and right-wing organizations, asks, “Is the House of Human

114 <http://www.dw.de/nevlatinim-organizacijama-u-srbiji-danas-je-lak%C5%A1e/a-17205293>.

Rights and Democracy – and all it symbolizes – a monument to democratization or to undeclared occupation of Serbia?”¹¹⁵

Non-governmental organizations – notably those advocating Serbia’s movement towards EU – have played a major role over the past 15 years: they have been pointing their finger at actual problems and practically stood for the only critic of the government. Thanks to their monitoring reports many problems have been revealed.

Nevertheless, the role of the civil sector has been recognized in part of the public and by some party officials, the later for the sake of a “modern image” they want to present to their interlocutors from abroad.

So addressing the Congress of European Movements and Civil Societies of the Southeast Europe Branko Ružić, former minister without portfolio in charge of EU integration, said, “The civil sector is one of the pillars of EU integration.” He stressed that the civil sector has been a corrective in the movement towards EU, adding, “The civil sector will be playing an important role in Serbia’s course towards EU.”¹¹⁶

Director of the Office for Cooperation with Civil Sector Ivana Ćirković reminded that under Serbia-EU agreement on the beginning of accession negotiations Serbia’s civil sector organizations participating in EU programs were entitled to 55,000-Euro subsidies. “The government has to co-finance the projects under EU grants, and these funds have been set aside in budgetary revision,” she said.¹¹⁷

115 Pečat,

116 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Drustvo/421899/Ruzic-Civilni-sektor-kao-korektivni-faktor-na-putu-ka-EU>.

117 <http://glassrbije.org/%C4%8Dlanak/zakonska-ograni%C4%8Denja-i-manjak-sredstava-sputavaju-civilni-sektor>.

Campaign against Sonja Biserko: A paradigm of the attitude towards human rights defenders

Online threats and hostile commentaries by “concerned” citizens followed in the footsteps of the months-long media campaign against Sonja Biserko, chairwoman of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia. This campaign fueling physical violence is a paradigm of overt or covert assaults at human rights defenders in “half-way democracies” and societies in transition that have not overcome yet their past marked by authoritarianism and conflicts, or developed mechanisms for the protection of human rights defenders.

The international community reacted against these campaigns. So Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia Michael Davenport told the Fonet News Agency in early May 2014 that media assaults at organizations and individuals were dangerous and thus unacceptable.¹¹⁸

Regardless of all the changes of the regime, Sonja Biserko has been among the most assaulted human rights defender in Serbia ever since 1990s. Campaigns labeling her “a traitor,” “a collaborator,” and the like have usually coincided with major shifts and developments at the sociopolitical arena – such as Kosovo’s independence declaration – as a rule marked by personal threats via email and physical assaults by “indignant” citizens in public places.

All these campaigns have been largely influenced by the public discourse of the nationalistic, conservative right-wing circles. Their main targets are human rights defenders including also Jelena Milić, director of the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies, or activists of the “Woman in Black” organization. Though acting differently both organizations tackle the most sensitive issues of Serbia’s transition. So Jelena Milić has been

118 http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2014&mm=05&dd=11&nav_category=12&nav_id=846489

advocating Serbia's membership of NATO and radical reform of the security sector (strongly opposed among the structures in power), while the Women in Black have been regularly organizing memorials to the victims of the Srebrenica genocide throughout Serbia and calling those responsible to account.¹¹⁹ Characteristically, whenever human rights defenders are being campaigned against governmental officials have nothing to say while relevant institutions fail to react. Most they do is to send policemen to street performances or protests to cordon off activists from "angry" citizens threatening those peaceful demonstrators.

Ever since 2000 politicians have been lenient to the conservative bloc to counterweight the decisions standing for a breakup with the undemocratic past and launch of new policies on the one hand, and concede international demands on the other. This is probably best illustrated by the case of Kosovo: the "cooperative" government signs the Belgrade-Prishtina Agreement but simultaneously and by more sophisticated means fuels animosity towards the strongest critics of the earlier Kosovo policy.

Aggressive campaigns against human rights defenders create the climate propitious to physical violence and distorted perceptions of victims and assaulters. This is why the general public usually supports assaulters rather than victims as the later are seen as "traitors deserving to be assaulted."

119 The non-governmental organization "Women in Black" was anew threatened with death at Facebook once Radomir Počuča, the spokesman for the Anti-terrorist Unit, had called hooligans to lynch its activists. Consequently, Počuča was denied his post after his contract expired on April 1, 2014. The organization "Serb congregation Zavetnici" staged a protest in downtown Belgrade in support of the fired Počuča. Počuča had started threatening the Women in Black after their memorial to mark the 15th anniversary of ethnic cleansing of Albanian civilians of March 26, 2014. Women in Black have been physically assaulted on several occasions: three years ago their premises in downtown Belgrade were demolished and the police had never identified perpetrators. Several non-governmental organizations protested in a release saying that instead of reforming the security sector parties had put it under their control, while using at the same time the so-called football fan groups against the regime's opponents. Residents of the building housing the premises of the Women in Black complain of being threatened due to the organization's presence. They fear they may be collateral damage. They even petitioned against the organization to have it moved out. Nase Novine, April 11, 2014.

Extreme right-wing organizations are just mouthpieces and most visible assaulters: a by far larger circle including the media, public figures, intellectuals, governmental officials who are turning a blind eye and the Serb Orthodox Church are ones that actually create the lynch atmosphere. As of recently, the first to throw stones at Sonja Biserko and other human rights defenders was the newly appointed Minister of Justice Nikola Selaković in 2012. As a guest of a most popular talk-show, “The Impression of the Week,” he said there was no difference between Sonja Biserko and the leader of the extreme right-wing organization “Naši”, Ivan Ivanović. Selaković was reappointed the Minister of Justice in March 2014. Extremist organizations known also for their lists of “Serb haters” have been growingly active ever since SNS formed the government.

The intensity of campaigns against Sonja Biserko varied but were usually launched by the media and further transferred to internet forums, portals, websites, etc. All this contributed to the atmosphere in which any action against was allowed.

The breaking news that Sonja Biserko would take the stand for Croatia in Serbia-Croatia charges and countercharges for genocide before the ICJ triggered of the latest campaign against her. The media campaign was after discrediting her as a valid witness, but also after intimidation of any other possible witnesses against the state of Serbia. Everything indicated that the information about her testimony leaked from governmental institutions. Here one has to take into account that the state of Serbia is a co-owner of two high-circulation dailies that fiercely campaigned against her: *Politika* (50 percent of governmental shares) and *Vecernje Novosti* (37 percent).¹²⁰

Although parties in the dispute, Serbia and Croatia, had agreed on not having identities of witnesses publicized, several newspapers revealed Biserko’s identity: this includes the *Blic* daily and its a story headlined “Sonja Biserko Takes Stand for Croatia in the Trial for Genocide” (November 12,

120 *Politika*’s editor-in-chief is Ljiljana Smajlović who also presides the Journalists’ Association of Serbia, while her counterpart in *Vecernje Novosti* is Ratko Dmitrović, one of most infamous warmongers of Serbian journalism. The two were appointed editors-in-chief once SNS entered the coalition government. .

2013), *Politika* (“Good Friends Go to Law, November 13) and *Vecernje Novosti* (“Biserko Stands up for Croatia). Editors and reporters of these papers must have been informed about the Serbia-Croatia agreement and aware that publicizing the name of a witness could jeopardize her safety. The head of Serbia’s team of lawyers, Saša Obradović, himself confirmed that identities of witnesses were secret. However, it was only a day later when the campaign was already in full swing in other media that *Politika*, having already published Biserko’s name, run his statement.

On November 16, *Vecernje Novosti* carried an interview with Saša Obradović in his capacity as the head of Serbia’s team of lawyers. “We are not allowed to reveal the names of witnesses three months prior to the trial considering the threat to their safety,” he said.

The analysis of the story ran by *Blic* that broke the news indicates that the information must have leaked from the team of lawyers, and that the leak itself must have been given a go-ahead at a higher level of governance. The fact that no paper revealed the name of its source indicates that the source himself must have been fully aware of the illegality of the act and its potential consequences.

The Helsinki Committee filed a complaint with the Press Council (a regulatory agency investigating the cases of the breach of Journalistic Code of Ethics).¹²¹ Complaining against the above-mentioned newspaper stories the Committee invoked the Article 5 of the Code and argued that the leak and follow-up stories were meant to discredit and intimidate Ms. Biserko.

The Article 5 provides that a journalist shall double-check the information obtained from a source, and take into account that sources are often either interested parties or stand for interests of social groups to which they belong. The Article also provides that readers shall always be informed about a possible benefit a source can draw from giving a piece of information, especially if the source was after a showdown with someone else.

In its complaint, the Committee also referred to stories headlined “Expel this Woman from Serbia” (a front-page story run by the *Informer* tabloid on November 13) and the one carried by *Vecernje Novosti* under the

121 The Code is available at <http://www.savetzastampu.rs/latinica/kodeks-novinara-srbije>.

title “In War against the State of Her Own” (November 23, 2013). 2013.¹²² The paper had announced the latter story a day before.

“We take that the above-mentioned stories violated the Article 5 of the Journalistic Code providing that a journalist shall act with responsibility to his readers and shall not ignore this responsibility for the sake of other stakeholders, including publishers, the government and governmental agencies...A journalist shall stand up against anyone who violates human rights or advocates discrimination, hate speech and violence,” quoted the Committee’s complaint, reminding that “a journalist shall also take into account the threat of discrimination spread by other mass media and shall do everything in his power to curb discrimination based on different political views.” In this regard, argued the Committee, the two stories had called upon the state to take repressive measures against Sonja Biserko and violated not only witness protection but also the freedom of expression as a fundamental human right.

The above-mentioned stories in *Informer* and *Vecernje Novosti* brim with hate speech against the witness meant to intimidate her. Judging by readers’ comments at these papers’ websites the stories also incited violence; for instance *Vecernje Novosti* published what a certain Zoran wrote on November 23, 2014, “The best the state could do is to call off her security guards. The rest will be a piece of cake.”¹²³

To additionally intimidate, discredit and justify possible violence against Sonja Biserko in her capacity as a witness, papers quoted public figures such as the head of SNS parliamentary caucus, Zoran Babić, the president of the Association of Refugees from Croatia, Miloško Budimir, the DSS MP, Sanda Rašković Ivić, academician Smilja Avramov, Miroslav Svirčević of the Balkans Institute of the Serb Academy of Arts and Sciences, Milan Škulić, law professor, and many others.

122 Headline – “Will Serbia React at the News that Sonja Biserko Will Take the Stand for Croatia?” Subtitles – “What Possibly Could Biserko Testify of Given that She Has not Been Directly Involved” and “Her Credibility is Disputable Considering the Decoration Bestowed Upon Her by Stjepan Mesić.”

123 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuelno.289.html:465057-Sonja-Biserko-svedoci-protiv-sopstvene-zemlje>

The propaganda matrix in *Vecernje Novosti* differs not from that used in the 1990s wars: to illustrate its point, the paper published crime scenes against Serbs in the WWII as it did in 1990s to justify the war against Croatia.

Academician Smilja Adamov reiterated untruths every journalist should recognize as such as the Committee had repeatedly denied them. Be it as it may, these false information, including the one about Sonja Biserko's alleged file, were run as they had to serve the purpose of the campaign.¹²⁴

In its complaint to the Press Council the Committee also pointed to the overall context of this negative propaganda, quoting, among other things that threats with violence emailed to Sonja Biserko and the Committee as an organization had been reported to the police, and that neo-Nazi and right-wing organizations advocating "blood and soil" ideology were most active in Serbia. The information about these organizations have been regularly published in the Committee's annual reports and press releases by the House of Human Rights, YUCOM, Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina, Amnesty International, etc.

Considering the Committee's complaint the Press Council decided out of all stories referred to only one broke the Journalistic Code.

The Appeal Commission of the Council said that not even the *Blic* daily in the story titled "Sonja Biserko Takes Stand for Croatia against Serbia in the Genocide Trial" published on November 12, 2013, had violated the Code. Without taking into consideration the overall context in which all the stories were run, the Appeal Commission explained, as in the case of the *Blic* daily, that editors "had done nothing contrary to professional rules of ethics" given that "publishing of a witness' identity had not been banned by a court of law but just informally agreed on between the teams of Serbia's and Croatia's lawyers, an agreement to which the media are not duty-bound." It also decided that the story "Good Friends Go to Law" in *Politika's* online edition had not breached the Code, a decision all six

124 Smilja Avramov said, "She has been fired from the Foreign Ministry but her file is still there for all to see. Besides she is a chairwoman of the organization that is being financed from abroad." *Večernje Novosti*, November 23, 2013.

members of the Commission but one voted in. The same decision was made in the case of the *Vecernje Novosti* daily.

The only story that broke the Code, according to the Commission, was the one titled “Expel this Woman from Serbia” carried in the *Informer* daily. The Commission explained that the paper had violated the Article IV of the Code providing that “a journalist shall be obliged to stand up against anyone violating human rights or advocating any form of discrimination, hate speech and violence.” It also referred to the breach of the provision on a journalist’s duty to be aware of the threat to discrimination spread by the media. The Commission accepted the plaintiff’s (Committee’s) argument that such reporting calls for punishment for taking stand in the International Court of Justice, whereby violating Ms. Biserko’s human rights and discriminating her on the ground of her opinions. The Commission also took that statements by interviewees intended to insult Sonja Biserko were unacceptable, while the tone of the story was after inciting hatred and contempt among readership. It voted as one that *Informer* had breached the Code.

The Commission failed to reach a decision on the story “In War Against the State of Her Own:” four members voted for a breach, two voted against and the other two were “undecided.” The four members argued that the appeal for depriving Sonja Biserko of Serbia’s citizenship and practically labeling her “a traitor” fueled discrimination and hatred. Since the story presented no proofs to justify its contents, they said, one could only presume that *Vecernje Novosti* had invented everything. The Commission members who voted against argued that the media had the right to choose editorial policies to follow and were free to interview people of their choice.

Vecernje Novosti continued campaigning even after November 2013. According to a press release by the House of Human Rights and Democracy (the Committee being among five organizations founding the House), the government had ordered several dailies to “dig up information” against the House. On April 12, 2014, under the headline “Non-governmental Militants Rewarded” the paper run the story penned by R. Dragović.¹²⁵

125 The same story was published at the paper’s website under a different headline

The tone of the entire story associates the 1990s and the warmongering propaganda, openly labeling human rights organizations as hostile and treacherous. It was published at the point when renovation of the premises to house the five organizations was almost over. These premises had been legally allocated to the House of Human Rights and Democracy for the House by the Belgrade City Hall, and the agreement signed with the then mayor, Dragan Đilas, of the Democratic Party. The renovation itself is being financed by the government of the Kingdom of Norway.

“Organizations known for their strong criticism of Serbia’s policy have not only been subsidized (from Serbia’s budget) but also largely privileged unlike many other associations...For instance, in 2011 the City Hall lent them over 500 square meters of exclusive business space in downtown Belgrade...The testimony of Sonja Biserko before the International Court of Justice in the Serbia-Croatia trial for genocide opened the question of public recourses and funds allocated to the non-governmental sector,” quotes the story.

Accusing the former mayor of Belgrade, Dragan Đilas, of lending the premises to non-governmental organizations, the story continues, “Although these organizations have not moved in yet, they stick to the agreement signed by the then mayor, Dragan Đilas. He had practically lent them the premises that would have been rented for at least 100,000 Euro per year at free market. The city authorities released at the time that they had thus contributed to ‘the struggle for human rights and made it possible for those who have dedicated their lives to this struggle to work in better conditions.’”

In late 2012 the House of Human Rights itself paid for renovation of an area to be used for joint activities by many non-governmental organizations, conferences, round tables, public debates, exhibitions, etc. In January 2014 began restoration of the entire, pretty ruined area allocated to the House. The claims about exclusiveness of these offices were evidently false since no one had moved in at the point the story was published.

Following upon the campaign, Miloš Jovanović, assistant professor at the Faculty of Law, called for a ban on NGO financing from abroad. “Grants

saying “Non-governmental Organizations: Fierce Critics of Serbia Get Privileged.”

given to the non-governmental sector by other states and foreign organizations are more dangerous than governmental subsidies, as they turn domestic non-governmental organizations into advocates of foreign interests rather than into organizations working for the benefit of their own society. We have surrendered to the trendiness of having non-governmental organizations included into governmental agencies and supervisors of democracy. Although they might help the state in some areas, this is not a normal situation. One can never be sure whose interests they are standing for," he said.

The Faculty of Law, Belgrade University, is known as a high school promoting ideologies close to nationalism and assembling Serbia's conservative and nationalistic circles.

The story titled "Red Sonja" by Milan Jovanović – published by the online edition of *Frankfurter Zeitung* on March 15, 2014 – exemplifies hate speech most drastically. The author says, among other things, "Should Vučić be a Putin, which is something he could never be, and should Serbia be a Russia, which is would never be, Sonja Biserko would have been behind bars long ago or at least spreading her ideas about genocidal Serbs from exile."¹²⁶

At the news that the Republican Broadcasting Agency¹²⁷ had reprimanded several tv stations for shows either guesting or glorifying the infamous criminal, Kristijan Golubović, the editor-in-chief of *Vecernje Novosti*, Ratko Dmitrović, wrote his column that he saw no reason why the said criminal's stands should be more dangerous than those in favor of Serbia's membership of NATO, advocated by Jelena Milić of the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies, or why his cv should be more dangerous than Sonja Biserko's.¹²⁸ Head of EU Delegation to Serbia Michael Davenport reacted

126 <http://www.vesti-online.com/Vesti/Kolumne/388884/Crvena-Sonja>.

127 On April 25, 2014 the Council of the Broadcasting Agency convened a meeting under summary procedure to discuss the shows broadcast by TV Pink, TV B92, TV Prva and TV Happy, in which Kristijan Golubović appeared as a guest. The meeting decided to take punitive measures against these broadcasters and released that it "shares public concern with the metastasis of pathology in the media which began in 1990s and advocates a social consensus on the values broadcast media should promote."

128 Commentary titled "Kristijan and Some Others as Well," *Večernje Novosti*, April 26,

promptly saying that any comparison made between human rights activists and criminals “clearly violates standards of professional journalism, and the rights of these individuals and organizations.” “We expect the institutions responsible for media standards to react at such breaches,” he said and pointed out to the need for strengthening the role of independent regulatory agencies such as the Press Council and the Broadcasting Agency.¹²⁹

Before and after the Serbia-Croatia trial before the International Court of Justice the media kept running the stories meant to discredit Sonja Biserko as a witness. A headline after a headline suggested that she was “a witness with a task,” “an economist by vocation without professional skills for expert testimony,” that she had accused just Serbs as a nation of Yugoslavia’s disintegration, that “even the Croatian Party of Law /an extremely nationalistic party/ would not have taken the stand in her place,” that she had “blackened Serbia more than Croats had ever,” “has been lobbying for Croatia for years,” etc. For instance, fashion designer Verica Rakočević said in an interview that Serbia’s democracy “allowed publicity to fascist stands and that people as such /referring to Sonja Biserko/ still walk freely the streets.” “And offices that were once solving such problems efficiently

“Why should Kristijan Golubović’s story be more dangerous to this society than the one spread by Jelena Milić of the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies, who promotes NATO? She is on TV screen more often than Golubović, she writes columns, blogs, whatever, for influential media, she addresses public debates, she lectures and she holds that Serbia was rightfully bombarded in 1999. That was, she claims, the only way to stop Milošević’s crimes in Kosovo in 1998–99. Of course, she touches not on Albanians’ armed rebellion. She explains not the situation in 1995 when Croatia expelled 250,000 Serbs or NATO that had not bombarded Zagreb but, on the contrary, assisted Tuđman’s army in the ethnic cleansing task. How do such stands affect the mind of a under-age boy? ...And there is another woman, Sonja Biserko, who appears as a guest at talk shows throughout Serbia, more frequently than Seka Aleksić /a folk singer/, although she has testified in The Hague about Serbia’s genocidal policies, composed lists of unwelcome Serb intellectuals and professors. And it never occurred to any of those so much concerned now to call for a ban on her public appearance.”

129 http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2014&mm=05&dd=11&nav_category=12&nav_id=846489

are now paving the road to drugs and corruption,” she added.¹³⁰ For his part, Editor-in-chief of the *Informer* tabloid Dragan J. Vučićević launched the initiative for media boycott of Sonja Biserko; editors to influential nationalistically hued papers *Večernje Novosti and Pečat*, Ratko Dmitrović and Milorad Vučelić, promptly sided with their colleague.

However, most worrisome are comments and threats with violence readers of these papers have sent in to be published at websites. Following in the footsteps of a series of stories brimming with lies about Sonja Biserko and her work published over the past two decades, these latest negative propaganda was evidently after fueling additional hostility for this outstanding human rights defender.

In their comments the readers, say, openly suggested the measures to be taken against Sonja Biserko, including radical ones staged by security services (such as arranging a traffic accident to kill her or infecting her with a deadly virus), prosecution for high treason, expulsion from Serbia or a ban on her work by Putin’s scenario.¹³¹

130 *Naše Novine*, April 3, 2014.

131 Here are some comments whereby the readership responded to the article “Sonja Biserko Blackened Serbia More than Croats Had Ever” run in *Vecernje Novosti* on April 1, 2014: “Officials should copy the West’s procedure, read everything she had wrote and then initiate proceedings against her;” “I would go after more radical measure, I would expel this creature from Serbia;” “I cannot understand why it is that Serbia hesitates to proclaim her a persona non grata:” “Why is she still in Serbia? She should go to her Croatia;” “Such organizations should be banned for acting against their own state. That’s what Russia did and no one can touch her;” “Sonja Biserko and Nataša Kandić should be put to trial;” “I would give her 24 hours to leave country or arrest her otherwise;” “Israeli Mosad took reprisals against the terrorists who had killed their athletes in Munich. This is a state with dignity. In Israel people like Biserko wouldn’t even dare to speak up, and if they do that is their death sentence:” “She is an American mercenary getting tons of moneys to spit on Serbia;” “She should be properly beaten up and then pissed on;” “Serious democratic countries would promptly blacklist people like her, confiscate her property, annul her checkbook...And even, when national interest is at stake, they would arrange a deadly car accident for her;” A John Doe commented the story the *Kurir* tabloid run online under the title “This is How Sonja Biserko Testified in The Hague: Serbs Have Worked against SFRY since Tito’s Death” by saying, “Sonja, darling, you must have heard of deadly viruses. Well, they may well be in store for you.” Similar comments were posted at the website of the allegedly liberal and democratically-oriented TV B92.

The Committee duly reported all the threats to the police. All relevant institutions, including the police and the Public Prosecutor sat on their hands from January 2013 till May 2014. Only police officers from the Stari Grad station promised to regularly tour the Committee's premises. At the request of "well-meaning but concerned neighbors" the Committee took its plate off its door and the entrance to the building. Some neighbors claimed they felt insecure for living door to door with the Committee. Similar is the experience of other NGOs.

Not a single governmental official condemned the assaults at Sonja Biserko. On the contrary, some of them refused to participate in the debates to which she had been invited. Instead of standing up for a human rights defender Serbia's officials have silently sided with the media campaign against her and thus additionally inspired hostile commentaries and lynch calls.