



YUCOM Komitet pravnika za ljudska prava / Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights
17 Svetogorska Street, 11000 Belgrade, Republic of Serbia
Tel/Fax: +381 11 33 44 235; 33 444 25; 3238 980
e-mail yucomoffice@gmail.com www.yucom.org.rs

Hate Speech in Serbia



This issue was supported by the
National Endowment for Democracy

Newsletter No.2

Hate Speech in Serbia in Reaction to the Recognition of Kosovo's Independence by Montenegro and Macedonia

The recognition of Kosovo's independence by Montenegro and Macedonia on October 9, 2008 was followed by an eruption of politically harsh and unmeasured statements by both Serbian government and opposition, which in many cases contained outright hate speech. Discriminatory reactions by the citizens were only a logical consequence of the basic message sent by the government. In its justification of harsh reactions, particularly towards Montenegro and Macedonia (those countries' ambassadors were declared *personae non gratae*) the state top of Serbia particularly pointed out the fact that those two countries recognized Kosovo's independence only one day after "Serbia achieved a great international success" by UN General Assembly's decision to seek the opinion of the International Court of Justice about the legality of Kosovo's declaration of independence, so therefore the recognition of Kosovo by our neighboring states represented a form of betrayal, i.e. "a stab in the back", as stated by Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs **Vuk Jeremić**. Those statements were particularly addressed against Montenegro, creating the impression that Serbia still was not aware that Montenegro is an independent state.

The government's decision on taking "reciprocal measures" created an open space for the media for the further spreading of an atmosphere of tension, even violence, hate speech and insistence on all the negative stereotypes pointed against certain politicians, but also the people in the neighboring countries. Serbia's threats with punitive measures towards Montenegro and Macedonia, as well as the expelling of those countries' ambassadors from Serbia after they recognized the independence of Kosovo, led to many statements and articles in the press which openly expressed public speech ethic and hate speech against political leaders and the peoples who used to live in the same country.



YUCOM

1

In his numerous interviews and statements during those days, Serbian Foreign Minister did not hold back from low qualifications, inappropriate expression of emotions – anger, in particular – and his attitude was far from what a minister of foreign affairs should represent. **Vuk Jeremić** acted like a tabloid columnist and with such behavior he caused the admiration of former members of the *Serbian Radical Party*, who formed the *Serbian Progressive Party*, such as **Branislav Crnčević**, who dedicated an entire column in the *Kurir* daily, recommending to the politicians to follow his example. Among other things, Jeremić, in his capacity of foreign minister, stated that Montenegro, by deciding to recognize Kosovo only one day after the UN had forwarded this issue to the *International Court of Justice*, showed that it does not conduct its foreign affairs independently and that it is not a sovereign state in the full sense of the word.

In addition to this, Minister **Vuk Jeremić**, when speaking about Montenegro, only used the terms “Podgorica regime“, “Montenegrin regime“, or the “Milo Đukanović regime“ with the obvious intention to allude that Montenegro was not an independent state with democratically elected leadership, but an one-man regime and dictatorship against the will of the people of Montenegro. “The Podgorica regime did this intentionally, only one day after our great victory in the UN, and by the direct order of those whose ideas were convincingly defeated during the vote at the General Assembly...“. “The Podgorica regime obviously wants to break the ties between Serbia and Montenegro, causing immense damage to the people which had been living together for hundreds of years. We are two brother nations and we will not allow anyone to come between us. We will do everything to protect the interest of our compatriots living in Montenegro, but also the interest of all other citizens of Montenegro. They will not suffer consequences of the measures which will be taken by the Government of Serbia, in accordance with the law...“, **Jeremić** stated.

Interior Minister and new leader of Milošević’s *SPS (Socialist Party of Serbia)*, **Ivica Dačić** told that “now there probably will be a revision of ‘Gusle¹ songs’, literature, manhood and heroism, because throughout their history, Montenegrins have fought against Turks and liberated Kosovo from Turkish and Albanian occupation, together with Serbia“. **Dragan Marković Palma**, former ally of **Željko Ražnatović Arkan**, now member of the ruling pro-European coalition as the Head of the *Jedinstvena Srbija (United Serbia)* party, stated the following: “...Citizens of Serbia should not spend their holidays at the Montenegrin seaside any more! Those with Montenegrin citizenship should be prohibited from buying property in Serbia. Planes should stop flying to Montenegro. And **Milo Đukanović** and **Filip Vujanović** should be declared *personae non gratae* in Serbia...“. That way, he *a priori* dictated a list of “desirable“ measures which Serbia should take towards Montenegro. **Marković** emphasized: “...Why should Serbs take their money to Montenegro when at the border crossing you must pay a fee, your luggage gets searched, you cannot take any food there and so on. I am sending a message to the citizens of Serbia – do not go to the Montenegro seaside, go someplace else. **Velimir Ilić** (leader of the *Nova Srbija (New Serbia)* party), former Infrastructure Minister in the **Vojislav Koštunica** Government, said: “...The recognition (of Kosovo) by Macedonia and Montenegro was a stab to the heart and caused every citizen of Serbia a great deal of pain. That is why we need to fight together, to unite and argue less among each other in order to survive in these beautiful regions of ours.“ **Dušan Bajatović**, Director-General of the public enterprise “Srbijagas“ and Head of the SPS Provincial Organization for Vojvodina, among other things, stated: “...The Government of Montenegro had to recognize the independence of

¹ *Gusle* is a traditional one-string musical instrument whose monotonous tunes accompany epic songs glorifying Serbs’ heroic exploits, especially during the Turkish rule (14 till 19th century), but also the 1990s Balkan wars.



Kosovo under international pressure and Serbia must protect its interests by all legal and economic means. The independence of Kosovo was not recognized by the Montenegrin people, but by the Government of Montenegro and Don Milo Corleone“. Assistant Head of the *Nova Srbija* Deputy Club **Miroslav Markićević** said that the recognition of Kosovo’s independence was the „...most shameful act in the history of Montenegro and the Montenegrins. Our message to the Serbs in Montenegro is that Serbia will not forget its compatriots living there, but we also wish to send a message to all members of the Montenegrin Government - that they will be put on the pillory...“.

On the other hand, the *Serbian Radical Party* led by **Vojislav Šešelj** and the *Democratic Party of Serbia* led by **Vojislav Koštunica**, considered the measures taken by Serbia to be too mild and that all states which recognized the independence of Kosovo should be sued. Head of the *Serbian Progressive Party* **Tomislav Nikolić** said the following from the Parliament rostrum: „...The situation is very serious. All those who have by now recognized Kosovo could not say they are a Serb state, or that they were a Serb state and are a Serb state no more A part of the Serbian people is doomed to live in a state which recognized the right of a new state to exist within the mother country“.

Of all Serbian politicians, only **Čedomir Jovanović** (*Liberal Democratic Party*) and **Vuk Drašković** (*Serbian Renewal Movement*) have stated that this was a “hysterical and unreasonable“ reaction by the government to the decision of Montenegro to recognize the independence of Kosovo, which by their opinion, represents a completely counterproductive measure which further weakens the position of Serbia. „...The majority of the political elite still haven’t realized that Montenegro is an independent state...“, **Čedomir Jovanović** said. **Vuk Drašković** stated: „Madness is a mild word to describe the public threats saying that no member of the Montenegrin government will be safe on the ground or in the skies of Serbia, the demands that all the sick people from Montenegro should thrown out from Serbian hospitals, that Serbia should introduce an economic blockade of Montenegro...“.

After such statements by the politicians, stigmatization and hate speech quickly developed in the media, as well, especially in the form of attacks against Montenegrins, Montenegro and the Montenegrin ruling parties and Prime Minister **Milo Đukanović**. Attacks against Macedonia were of much less intensity, which, in a way, indicated that this country was being perceived as worthless and underrated as secondary and unimportant, which is best indicated by a statement of Serbian Parliament deputy **Borislav Pelević** (**Željko Ražnatović Arkan**’s former fellow combatant and) member of his *Serbian Unity Party* and current member of **Tomislav Nikolić**’s *Serbian Progressive Party*: “We are not so much concerned with Macedonia, it is a semi-Shiptar² state, anyway, but the brother state of Montenegro has stabbed us in the back”. As in the case of the attacks against **Sonja Biserko**, the media, not only with a complete lack of criticism, but through open examples of hate speech against the Montenegrin nation and its state top, have spread intolerance while pointing out the jeopardized “Serbdom“ in Montenegro. Headlines insulting and humiliating Montenegrin and macedonian nations and politicians alike illustrate the atmosphere in Serbia only to a certain degree: “*Shameful*”, “Montenegro is even blacker and Macedonia more miserable”, *Pravda* daily October 11 2008, “*Tough – Sanctions for Milo*”, *Kurir* daily, October 11 2008, *Glas javnosti* daily “*They Bit the Hand that Feeds them*” etc.

² The word *Šiptar* is used in Serbia as a perjorative denomination for Albanians.



Rough– Sanctions for Milo
Kurir, October 11 2008

Rude statements by politicians, other than those which were already mentioned, were published by almost every media, mostly without any form of disassociation or commentary, following the idea that the media are a market and this is a legitimate political standpoint. Daily papers *Kurir* and *Glas javnosti* were competing who would publish more thrash about Montenegro, the “regime” and Montenegrins, using previous statements by politicians. In that manner, the statement by *New Serbia* deputy **Miroslav Markićević** in which he openly threatens Montenegrin officials, was passed on like a mantra: “...Serbian land and Serbian skies are not safe for Montenegrin politicians. ...Montenegrin officials are enemies of our people and state” etc. **Markićević** also suggested the freezing of their assets as well as assets of their family members in Serbia and banning their entry in the Republic of Serbia. A popular figure in the media was also the Democratic Party of Serbia deputy **Dragan Šormaz** who was in favor of a *lifelong ban* for the Montenegrin officials to enter Serbia. On the other hand, there was no publicity for public figures and politicians, representatives of NGOs and other public figures that do not fit in this trend of a vulgar discourse. According to media reports, it seemed as though there is a new homogenization in Serbia, this time against Montenegro’s betrayal.

Comments by regular readers increased atmosphere of hatred and aggressiveness towards the Montenegrin people. One of them (in the *Glas javnosti* daily), who called himself a *patriot*, expressed his opinion that, for starters, “... all Montenegrins’ residence permits should be cancelled, apart from students who should receive a one-year visa in order to finish their semester and after that they should be expelled, too. Not one of those Montenegrins has a permanent residence here, so it is time for them to leave. That is how it’s done in western democracies, and since the Montenegrins aspire to that, they will understand that this is how it has to be, because their friends do the same. Of course, the canceling of flights is a quite reasonable measure and they should be also cancelled for Germans, the Dutch, French and other worldly scum... Montenegrin students cannot have the same status as Serbian students, they have to be treated as foreigners. Why should a Montenegrin student have privileged status, as opposed to students from Sudan or Algeria... Enough already with this discrimination – foreigners are foreigners...”. Another reader, **Milenko**, suggests concrete “measures“: “...To make a list of the ruling parties’ officials (all members of parties’ main committees, all the way to the level of municipalities) and prohibit them and members of their families to enter Serbia; prohibit their children to study in Serbia; block all their property and put the turnover and sales thereof under complete embargo; prohibit them to buy real-estate in Serbia; prohibit the participation of their companies and those individuals from any form of financial and commercial arrangements in Serbia; prohibit all companies with close

connections to the Montenegrin dictators to do business with Serbia; block their property indefinitely; ban the landing of their airline in Serbia and introduce a 30% customs tax for Montenegrin and Macedonian products, regardless of all previous obligations regarding liberalization, because the sovereignty of the country comes first; introduce visas for citizens of Montenegro in order to control the entry of those Little Napoleons; to provide direct help to pro-Serbian parties in Montenegro and become directly involved with Montenegrin elections. In fact, to do the same as the USA did against us“.

In an article printed by *Kurir*, titled “*Heroin Independence*“, Montenegro’s decision to recognize the independence of Kosovo is brought in connection with heroin trade with alleged active participation of the Montenegro Prime Minister **Milo Đukanović** and Kosovo Albanians. Lawyer **Marko Nicović** (police expert and former Interpol official specialized in counter-narcotics operations) said that it is highly probable that the Montenegrin Prime Minister recognized Kosovo’s independence in order to pay back some old debts to the Albanians who, as **Nicović** reminded, ardently supported the independence of Montenegro, i.e. contributed to the victory of **Đukanović’s** idea. “...Now the moment has arrived for the repayment of an old debt. You remember that Milo used to have contacts and was visited by **Čeku**, **Thaci** and even **Rugova**. So, what happened now has been expected...”, **Nicović** stated, reminding that the drug trafficking routes follow the border between Kosovo and Montenegro. _



Heroin Independence
Kurir, October 12, 2008

As a classic example of hate speech, we will mention a column published in the *Press* daily on October 27, 2008 entitled *Commentary of the Day*, in which columnist **Miloš Garić** supports **Andrija Mandić’s**³ hunger strike in protest of Kosovo’s recognition by Montenegro. **Garić** uses the *most primitive and unconcealed hate speech and disqualifications*, which he intensifies with vulgarities. The text is headlined **Čegović**⁴ and it has the following subtitle: ”...There is hope for Montenegro! There is hope. It’s true that dark clouds have gathered over the ‘Serbian Sparta’, there are many rats, nobodies and similar scum, but there are still decent people walking through those hills down there.“. In the same text, **Garić** also wrote: “Andrija Mandić showed the Montenegrins that one’s honor is more important than one’s ass and that there are things in life more important than Versace and Gabanna. The 43 year-old man from Šavnik, father of two, leader of the parliamentary opposition, Serb, spent 14 days in a hunger strike protesting against the decision of the Montenegrin Government to bequeath Kosovo to the Albanians. Mandić fought the only way he could. Andrija offered his health and his life in order to send a message that Kosovo is Serbian,

³ **Andrija Mandić**, Head of the pro-Serbian *Serbian People’s Party*

⁴ A hero from the Montenegrin history.



YUCOM

Montenegrin, too, of course, and that behind the signature of Đukanović's ministers there is nothing but blood money and naked power. His two-week long hunger feeds the Serbian people in Montenegro with will and strength, and tells the other Montenegrin brothers how important it is to know who and what they are. "But, so be it. Andrija Mandić did what was up to him. He did not let things go by so easily. If nothing else, he explained to the unfortunate Miško Vuković⁵ what it means to be a Čegović. Mandić's children, as long as they have such a father, will carry their name with pride and tell everybody whose children they are. There is no dilemma for Vuković. As much as a lizard is a snake, Miško is a man."

* * * * *

The case of Montenegro, but also of other neighboring states, i.e. former Yugoslav republics, which will be more closely dealt with in the next issue of this newsletter, shows the low level of public speech ethics in Serbia. However, this would represent only a political problem of Serbia if the standards of public communication were not dropping so low that the statements by politicians are again featured with war cries, threats, discrediting. Therefore, hate speech ranging from the highest state organs to regular citizens, represents a very dangerous trend in Serbia, and leads not only to further tensions in the region, but also to an increasingly open disrespect of standards of the European Union, to which Serbia declaratively and formally aspires to. Still, the greatest danger is that Serbia, frustrated and burdened with its war past, threatens to contaminate the public opinion which will not be capable not only to control the government, but to represent a necessary democratic factor in the further development of this country.

⁵ **Miodrag Vuković**, official of the ruling *Democratic Party of Socialists* in Montenegro



YUCOM

Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights

17 Svetogorska Street, 11000 Belgrade, Republic of Serbia Tel/Fax: +381 11 33 44 235; 33 444 25
e-mail yucomoffice@gmail.com; www.yucom.org.rs