



YUCOM

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## Human Rights and Democracy Violation Early Warning *Weekly Newsletter* No. 5

1. Political parties and coalitions have completed their election lists and filed them with the *Republic Election Commission* (RIK). The week starting on Apr. 6 marks the beginning of the fully fledged election campaign: a new *People's Assembly* (Parliament) of the Republic of Serbia, *Provincial Assembly* of Vojvodina) and municipal assemblies<sup>1</sup> will be elected on May 11. Regardless of the fact that Kosovo still represents a UN protectorate, as well as that it declared independence on Feb. 17, Belgrade claims sovereignty over the Province and insists on organizing elections in Kosovo as well, whereby only ethnic Serbs living there would vote.

The upcoming elections feature two more indications that democratic principles are likely to be victimized by political calculations:

- As on other occasions since his departure to The Hague, where he currently stands trial before the *International War Crimes Tribunal* (ICTY) for war crimes and crimes against humanity, Chairman of the *Serbian Radical Party* (SRS) **Vojislav Šešelj** heads his Party's ticket;
- President of the Republic **Boris Tadić** not only leads his<sup>2</sup> Party's (*Democratic Party* – DS) and its coalition allies' ticket: he actively campaigns for that coalition, tours the country and speaks at DS rallies.

2. In an interview for *Blic* daily Defense Minister **Dragan Šutanovac** (DS) said that the Mar. 17 riots in Kosovska Mitrovica following the Kosovo Declaration of Independence had been organized and coordinated from Belgrade by Prime Minister **Vojislav Koštunica** and Minister in charge of Kosovo **Slobodan Samardžić** without informing the (caretaker) Government. Minister **Šutanovac** went on to say that the top secret *Action Plan* of measures to be taken against foreign governments that recognize Kosovo's independence

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<sup>1</sup> The total of 189 municipalities in Serbia includes 29 in Kosovo, administered by the *UN Mission to Kosovo* (UNMIK). Belgrade authorities have effective control over several settlements inhabited by a Serb majority, mostly enclaves surrounded by ethnic Albanian cities, towns and village. Only the Northern part of the divided city of Kosovska Mitrovica is territorially congruent with Serbia proper.

<sup>2</sup> Art. 115 of the *Constitution* stipulates: "President of the Republic shall not hold other public offices or perform other professional activity".





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is accessible to other Government members on an eyes only basis in the Government Secretariat office.

3. **Oliver Ivanović**, a Kosovo Serb politician known for his criticism of the dominating Belgrade's confrontational approach to the Kosovo issue and opposition to the manipulation with ethnic Serbs living in what Serbia considers its Southern province, said that the results of the official investigation into the Mar. 17 riots in Kosovska Mitrovica "may not be pleasant for Serbs".

4. The series of false bomb alarms in the Slovene-owned *Merkator* shopping mall continued last week, as well as in Belgrade *Justice Palace*.

5. An editorial of the Priština *Gazeta* daily expressing disagreement with Kosovo establishment's intolerance towards anything of Serb denomination, and suggesting that a street in a Kosovo town should be named after, say, [Belgrade *Humanitarian Law Center* - FHP Director] **Nataša Kandić** out of "gratitude for all in Kosovo, but for Serbs and others in the Balkans as well", met fierce reactions in numerous media in Belgrade. Belgrade *Kurir* daily titled its Apr. 5 story "A Street to be named after Serbian Traitor Soon" and opened its website to readers' comments such as "mercenary whore", "bitch" who, "together with [YUCOM President **Biljana Kovačević**] **Vučo** should be dealt with the way Russian president **Putin** solved the NGO problem by banning them".

6. **Mladen Obradović** of the extreme rightist and xenophobic organization *Obraz*<sup>3</sup> (Cheek) said Apr. 7 in a statement to the Belgrade *Alo* daily that his organization "will not allow a demonstration of perverted and monstrous values in the streets of Belgrade" on the occasion of the forthcoming *Eurovision Song Contest* in Belgrade on May 25 in Belgrade<sup>4</sup>, which is to be attended by gay and lesbian audience as well. **Obradović** stressed that "together with Moscow, Belgrade is the only metropolis where no gay parade has taken place" and admitted that it was his organization that prevented the *Pride Parade* in Belgrade 2001, where dozens of peaceful participants and sympathetic viewers suffered heavy injuries due to *Obraz* thugs' violent assaults in broad daylight.

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<sup>3</sup> *Obraz* – officially cited as a clero-fascist organization in a report by Vojvodina Parliament - is renowned for its support for the 1990s war policies and ICTY indictees, anti-European and anti-Semitic propaganda and close links with the most regressive circles in and around the clergy. PM **Koštunica** has contributed to its magazine bearing the organization's name.

<sup>4</sup> The *Alo* report features the headline: "Belgrade To Host 20.000 Homosexuals May 25!".





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Together with *Queeria* – a LGTB rights organization based in Belgrade - YUCOM addressed a letter to the Interior Ministry and Public Prosecutor's Office demanding appropriate action to be taken, since *Obraz* announcement represents a threat of serious felony with elements of violence and discrimination.

7. In a lengthy interview to Belgrade *Večernje Novosti* daily (advertised as "the largest selling newspaper in the country") General Manager of the state-owned *Serbian Broadcasting Corporation* (RTS) **Aleksandar Tijanić** embarks on a politically biased "analysis" of the pre-election situation in Serbia, takes sides with specific political parties and – inconsistently with his position of a public servant in an institution that is supposed to serve public interest – attacks political opponents and all those who critically approach his political favorites. He accuses them of attempting "to substitute public opinion, decide who is to rule Serbia and create a concentration camp to confine all those who think otherwise". **Tijanić** goes on to attack a range of public personalities – quoting full names - known for their critical attitude toward the dominating "patriotic" homogenization around the Kosovo issue, and advocating Serbia's opening to the world of democratic values, human rights and rule of law. His attacks are especially fierce against *the Liberal Democratic Party* – the only parliamentary party unreservedly standing for these values.

8. A bus driving *Liberal Democratic Party* (LDP) politicians on the campaign trail through Serbia was attacked Apr. 4 by "political opponents" in the Sanjak town of Raška. One of the LDP candidates was thrown eggs on. Police intervened.

9. Official data published by the Government on the occasion of the *World Roma Day* (Apr. indicates that 49% of the Roma population in Serbia lives in poverty, whereas 60% never finish primary education (grammar school), 7.8% graduate from high school and only 0.3% from university. 60% of Serbia's jobless belong to that community. According to the 2002 population census 108,000 Roma live in Serbia, whereas UNICEF estimates that their number lies between 400,000a and 700,000. Roma organizations' activists maintain that there is no consistent development strategy for the Roma community and whatever progress is achieved is a result of sporadic efforts based on personal engagement with foreign assistance rather than clearly defined government programs.





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## **Outlook:**

The election campaign is accelerating and assuming characteristics of a fully-fledged propaganda war waged primarily against political ideas advocating Serbia's modernization and joining the free world. The recent acquittal of former Prime Minister of Kosovo **Ramush Haradinaj** by the ICTY adds to the „patriotic“ mobilization and threatens with an escalation of hostilities that can easily provoke violence both in Kosovo and Serbia proper.

