

SECURITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN SERBIA 2007 and 2008

YUCOMs INPUT TO THE SECOND ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE OSCE REGION

Specific individual cases and/or patterns of challenges and obstacles faced by human rights defenders

Seven parliamentary election terms after the introduction of the multiparty system (1990) and three after Slobodan Milošević's fall (2000) Serbia remains to be one of the very few European countries where the position, role and treatment of nongovernmental organizations and other forms of civic associations are not regulated by law. A draft *Law on Associations* has been in parliamentary procedure for seven years pending debate and adoption. With the new election scheduled for May 11, the future of the draft law is even more endangered. Meanwhile NGOs are treated (and taxed) the same way as any other legal or business entity. Absence of a clearly defined legal framework that would correspond with European standards creates a favorable environment for negative campaigns against NGOs and civic society in general with the constant possibility for the NGOs to be the subject of arbitrary persecution of tax authorities¹.

SOME OF THE INDIVIDUAL CASES AND EXAMPLES

- On February 2007 – Daily "Politika" published a text by **Slobodan Antonic**, political analyst, who compares "the scramble for Kosovo with Rape", analyzing the role of NGOs in this process. In conclusion, **Antonic** says: "Serbia, dear, you don't have to pretend. Weep. What is most important is that you remember them all. Remember those who raped you and those who cheered around. Because one day... Yes, yes. One day!"
- On February 2007 –In daily "Kurir" there appeared an article headlined "Prison", in which lawyer **Svetozar Vujacic** and lecturer at the *Security College* **Darko Trifunovic** call on the state bodies to punish activists and member of *Women in Black*, LDP and representatives of Albanians from Southern Serbia, each with 15 years of prison on charges of their having undermined and endangered the country's safety and its territorial integrity.
- YUCOM and **Biljana Kovacevic Vuco** received a number of anonymous threatening letters during 2007. As a reaction to the report of SMS threats from November 2006², In the investigation that *took place* more than 6 months after the threats, the police informed

¹ YUCOM was subject of such a persecution at the end of 2006 and beginning of 2007.

² SMS messages were sent to Biljana Kovacevic-Vuco from a mobile phone signed by football fans of RAD² with the following text „Witch and whore, if Kosovo becomes independent we will massacre you and Veran, whole B92 and Beba² and Ceda² and other traitors, whores and gays. Therefore move out from our country, because this is the state of the Serbian people....long live Sinisa Vucinic“.



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YUCOM that the mobile phone with that number was used only to send that message and never again.

- YUCOM started the procedure of helping the registration of the Montenegro Orthodox Church in Serbia. Ministry of confessions refused the registration stating that based on autonomous canons of Serbian Orthodox Church, Montenegro Orthodox Church is considered as union of citizens (NGO). Reactions to the news that YUCOM is pleading Montenegro Orthodox Church cause before Supreme Court were harsh and discrediting qualifications, on the first place from minister of confessions Naumov and the most severe hate speech, curses and anathema by different columnists and priests of Serbian Orthodox Church against Biljana Kovacevic Vuco and YUCOM. Just as an illustration we are giving some of the headlines from daily newspapers "Antichrists", "Minister in the Government of Serbia Mr. Naumov: God save us", "Montenegrins against Vuco.." etc.
- On December 10 2007, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Centre for Advanced Legal Studies and Queeria celebrated the International Human Rights Day by organizing the performance "We Won't Go Back" for peace and equality and against "increasing clericalization of the state". The performance gathered members and activists from different human rights NGOs and cityzens. However, at the same time and place more than 50 young men, wearing shirts with symbols of the nationalistic movement "Obraz" and pins of the ICTY indictee Ratko Mladic, sang Chetnik songs and chanted: "Ratko Mladic", "Kill, slaughter so the fags don't exist", "Ustashe", "Kill the fag", "There will be flash", "We'll slaughter Croats", "Kill yourself and save Serbia, Boris" and "You will get beaten".

Negative campaign against HRD and Human Rights NGOs is more severely led in public since the forming of the Government in 2004. What is disturbing is the fact that the campaign is reinforced and joined not only by tabloids, but also by media, especially *NIN* weekly and *Politika* daily (both controlled by the government of **Vojislav Kostunica**). By means of stereotypes, previously used by **Milosevic** and after his fall in 2000 by tabloids with connections with unreformed secret services and organized crime (*Kurir*, Press, Pravda, Ogledalo, *Nacional*³ etc.), they keep insisting that:

- NGOs finances is un-transparent
- Human Rights NGOs are linked with foreign secret services
- Human Rights Defenders have an treacherous and anti-Serb character
- NGOs have anti-democratic stance and
- insisting on satanization of woman HRDs as symbols of evil

These stereotypes are associated with the organizations dealing with Human Rights and politically sensitive issues such as responsibility for the recent wars, criminalization of the state, corruption, etc. The campaign was conducted with much resemblance to and reliance on the Russian example. *NIN* and *Politika* explicitly celebrated **Mr. Putin's** model of disciplining Human

³ Tabloid Nacional was closed in 2006.



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Rights NGOs and had numerous favorable articles and comments and the same model of dealing with NGOs is advocated in 2007 and 2008.

Most influential NGOs in Serbia, mainly led by women, earned, by way of active and constant public engagement, and courage to address burning issues (such as war crimes, transitional justice, Kosovo, organized crime, corruption, discrimination) substantial public acknowledgement and support.

On the other hand, such a support made NGOs one of the most targeted parts of Serbian society in the last four years, and especially their leaders. Leaders of NGOs: **Natasa Kandic** (Humanitarian Law Center), **Stasa Zajovic** (Woman in Black), **Sonja Biserko** (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia), **Biljana Kovacevic-Vuco** (Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights - YUCOM) and **Borka Pavicevic** (Center for Cultural Decontamination) are subject of attack from various directions, starting from official government institutions, through so-called independent analysts, media, church, to less visible and equally dangerous centers of power and secret services closely linked to organized crime and war crimes.

Methodology of attacks also varies from direct physical violence and open threats, to creating more sophisticated atmosphere of animosity against woman human rights defenders and thus creating sense of insecurity. Charges pressed against them in courts at different levels also represent a method of obstruction of these HRDs work and pressure on them⁴.

Woman HRDs are subject of constant campaign, both on the basis of the activities they are carrying out and on the gender base. Direct insult against woman HRDs is also spread by both print and electronic media on a daily basis, as well as in Serbian Parliament.

Increase of hostility against HRD and HR NGOs

We are witnessing increase in threats and restrictions against human rights defenders and human rights organizations in Serbia prior to, and in reaction to, the official declaration of Kosovo's independence.

- Hate speech against human rights defenders is also becoming more frequent among ministers and deputies, without proper reaction of relevant officials. During one of the recent sessions in the Parliament the Executive Director of the Humanitarian Law Centre, Ms. Natasa Kandic was subjected to verbal abuse, while numerous insults and hate speech were directed to citizens of Croatian nationality. In the Parliament hall, MPs from Serbian Radical Party were selling and giving away a book titled "Hrtkovci Affair and Ustasa Whore Natasa Kandic." This public demonstration of vulgarity and hate was not met with an adequate reaction from the Serbian Parliament. The Speaker of the Parliament stated that the problem was "selling books without fiscal bills". Such statements in the Serbian Parliament contribute to the atmosphere of persecution. Similar abuses are directed to other human rights defenders, TV B92, and activists within liberal political parties.
- During a parliamentary session on 19 February 2008, Ivica Dacic, the leader of the SPS called for all non-governmental organizations that recognized Kosovo's independence to be banned. He

⁴ The summary of cases being currently in the procedure in front of courts is given bellow.



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spoke in the Serbian Parliament in support of a policy by the country's former president Slobodan Milošević, saying he would advocate the banning of all political parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which recognized Kosovo as independent.

- On 20 February 2008, the opposition Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) announced that it had begun collecting signatures as part of a campaign to lodge a criminal complaint against Natasa Kandic, the Executive Director of the Humanitarian Law Centre. Natasa Kandic was present in the Kosovan assembly at the time of the adoption of the declaration of Kosovo's independence on 18 February 2008. The SPS have accused her of acting against the constitutional order and threatening the "State's independence and integrity". These accusations by the SPS have been supported by much of the media in Serbia and the tabloid press has reportedly embarked on a campaign of defamation against Natasa Kandic, accusing her of being a traitor. On 19 February 2008, the daily newspaper Novosti published a piece entitled "Natasa, the woman who does not exist", declaring that Natasa Kandic is a "non-person" and inciting its readers to the view that nothing would be lost by her "elimination".
- On May 6, 2008 Gordana Pop Lazic, high official of Radical Party gave a statement to the B92 Info TV channel "We have to work, on first place, on awakening of the young generation and to cherish them in patriotic and nationalistic spirit. Unfortunately, we have to fight also with media that are supporting Euro-unity forces because it is not good and to fight against nongovernmental organizations too, because they do the same". This pre-election promiss given in the last week of the election run is a clear example of the intentions of suspending democratic principles for the national awakening sake. None of the officials reacted to this statement.

Scope of government interference in human rights defenders' work

On the rally organized in Belgrade by the government on February 21, 2008 orchestrated call to "lynch" started against all those who think differently, and against members of other ethnic, national, religious, political and other minorities, and particularly against NGOs that deal with promotion, protection, and advance of human rights. It is in media close to the dominant ideology of rigid nationalism and xenophobia that they are branded as "traitors", "inside enemies and foreign servants", "mercenaries of the West". Several most outstanding examples:

1. One of the speakers and participants on the Feb. 21 rally, film director Emir Kusturica channeled the anger of citizens toward political opponents, HRDs, and independent media, calling them in front of a 250,000 crowd "domestic mice hidden in their holes, who get paid to lie" and asking "where are those who mock the Kosovo myth ... I know where they are – they are in their holes!".
2. A number of open, both verbal and physical attacks were launched against representatives of organizations fighting for human rights and democracy immediately upon the declaration of Kosovo's independence on 17 February 2008. A grave physical attack was staged on the NGO *Lingua* in the city of Kraljevo on 20 February. The offices of this NGO, which has over the past ten years focussed on helping Kosovo Serb IDPs, 20,000 of whom have found refuge in the city of Kraljevo, have been demolished.



3. On February 22, as one of the results of such a situation, *Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights* received phone threats. The case was reported to police immediately, whereupon a police inspector visited the YUCOM office.
4. 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".
5. In a discussion forum at the SRS Web-page the topic "LDP's (Liberal Democratic Party's) headquarters demolished" was debated and contained, among other, the following comments: "Veran Matić (director of RTV B92) and those four stooges (Nataša Kandić of the *Humanitarian Law Center*, Sonja Biserko of the *Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia*, Biljana Kovačević-Vučo of YUCOM and Borka Pavićević of the *Center for Cultural Decontamination*) will be made to remember the day of Kosovo "independence"!".
6. Similar discussion appeared on the *Facebook* internet portal, where a group named "Banish Nataša Kandić from Serbia", as a reaction on appearance of Nataša Kandić in Kosovo Parliament on February 17, states the following: "The women have to definitely be proclaimed the enemy of the public, as well as the two other bitches (meaning Biljana Kovačević-Vučo and Sonja Biserko). The witches should be burned in public, the hunt on the witches should start immediately!!!!", and "And what to do with other two bastards, those Biserko and Vučo? If I was to decide, a small amount of gasoline and a match would solve the problem!!! This trio fantastico will anyhow eventually burn in hell!!!!".
7. Another discussion appeared on *Facebook* under the name "Burn B92", where this media house is defined as "The worst traitor TV in Serbia, headed by the American scum Veran Matić! The group that rallies all anti-Serbs, such as Čedomir Jovanović (LDP), Nataša Kandić, Sonja Biserko and others".
8. In a statement given to the media on February 27, Minister Velimir Ilić answered the question if persons who think differently are safe in Serbia: "We cannot defend people who argue that Kosovo is not ours, and get to be beaten by someone from Kosovo" – a statement viewed by many as an open invitation to violence.
9. Borislav Djordjević, a popular rock singer, well-known for his extremist "patriotic" views, wrote in his column in *Politika* on Feb. 27: "The remaining few traitors that have been bought by either money or promises, are hidden inside their mouse holes ... and they can kiss my ass".
10. On the occasion of the *International Women's Day* peace and equal rights organization *Women in Black* had intended to organize a women's peace march in downtown Belgrade on March 8. Although a fairly small number of participants was announced in limited space on a city square, the Interior Ministry banned the event for reasons "of public order and public health (!)".



11. The Management of the Belgrade University *Law School* refused on March 11 to give its permission to a student group called *Europe Has No Alternative* to mark the 5th anniversary of the **Djindjić** assassination with a public panel on European integrations. The explanation of the ban argued that "the complex political situation related to Kosovo" and "upcoming parliamentary and local elections" did not create good conditions for an event like that, adding that "the Faculty does not want to drag itself into politics". Over the years the *Law School* has been the venue of numerous highly politicized events staged by *Nomokanon* – an extreme rightist student group – and other neo-Nazi organizations. More than 50 LS professors are members of a Committee to support [the Bosnian Serb war criminal] **Radovan Karadžić**.
12. An NGO caravan touring Serb enclaves in Kosovo was attacked by a group of 50 to 60 Serb extremists in the town of Štrpce in south-eastern Kosovo. The group included *Helsinki Human Rights Committee* in Serbia Chairperson **Sonja Biserko**, *Center for Cultural Decontamination* Director **Borka Pavićević**, *Belgrade Circle* Chairman Prof. **Obrad Savić** and *Socialdemocratic Women Circle* Member **Vera Marković**, as well as representatives of several NGOs from different parts of Serbia. The attack in Štrpce followed a range of very successful talks the group had conducted with representatives of Serb communities confined to several towns and villages in Kosovo. Extremist groups behind these acts of hate speech and hate crime aim at "proving" that a multi-ethnic Kosovo is not possible and all those who advocate it are traitors and unwelcome in Serb-controlled areas.
13. **Mladen Obradović** of the extreme rightist and xenophobic organization *Obraz*⁵ (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 Belgrade⁶, 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. 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.

⁵ *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 indictments, 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.

⁶ The *Alo* report features the headline: "Belgrade To Host 20.000 Homosexuals May 25!".



GOOD PRACTICES CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND CREATING AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR THEIR WORK

Numerous international organizations made a swift reaction after the increase of threats and campaign against human rights defenders in Serbia in 2007 and especially in 2008. On the other hand there was no official reaction from any of the officials in Serbia nor any measures taken by the state in order to support and encourage human rights defenders to raise concerns, and to build capacity of human rights defenders. Not only that the response of the state to prevent such attacks and to adequately respond to such attacks was missing, but some of the government officials, ministers gave negative statements towards HRD and NGOs and by these acts further more developed the campaign led against HRD.

WORDS OF CONCERN FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Speaking in October 2007, following her visit to Serbia, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders Hina Jilani expressed particular concern about the "hostile attitude against the core group of human rights NGOs and prominent defenders, mostly women, who are under constant attack, mainly in the media". She went on to report that the "stigmatization of defenders, which portrays them as enemies of the country is not countered by supportive statement of the State authorities".

After her visit to Serbia in September 2007, Ms. Hina Jilani, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders, expressed special concern about the hostile attitude against a core group of human rights NGOs which work with issues of transitional justice and minority rights. The attacks on these human rights defenders, which are portrayed as "enemies of the state", are not countered by supportive statements by State authorities that would give them legitimacy and protection, according to Ms. Jilani. The Head of the OSCE mission in Serbia expressed similar concerns regarding the attacks on B92 on December 13, 2007.

On February 20 an open letter signed by *Swedish Helsinki Committee* General Secretary **Robert Haardh**, *US National Endowment for Democracy* President **Carl Gershman** and *Impunity Watch* Executive Director **Nico Rosen** was sent to Serbian President **Boris Tadić**, Prime Minister **Vojislav Koštunica** and Speaker of Parliament **Oliver Dulić**, expressing concern over repeated acts of intimidation – including demonization in the media, physical assaults and public calls for lynch – against human rights activists and organizations, independent and critically-minded journalists and public figures. The letter contains a large number of examples substantiating the assessment that the persons and organizations concerned need protection, and state organs should take measures to put an end to such actions. There has been no reaction by any of the addressees to date.

Amnesty International on February 20, 2008 called on the Serbian authorities and specifically Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica and President Boris Tadić to urgently condemn attacks on human rights activists and on ethnic minorities in the country.



"The Serbian authorities must strongly condemn any attempts to victimise members of Serbian society. They should ensure that any attacks on human rights activists and minorities are promptly and meaningfully investigated and those responsible are brought to justice."

The US Department of State 2007 *Human Rights Report* devotes considerable attention to the state of affairs in Serbia in this respect (see full text at: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100583.htm>). Despite some inaccuracy, basically benevolent attitude toward the country's authorities and assessments that reflect wishful thinking rather than a fair account, the Report offers good insight into this segment of Serbia's condition. Special attention is paid to the role and position of NGOs and human rights defenders including the dangers of the environment they act in.

POSITIVE ROLE OF THE COMMISSIONER FOR INFORMATION OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE AND HIGH EXPECTANCE FROM THE RECENTLY ESTABLISHED OMBUDSPERSON OFFICE

The establishment of independent human rights institutions like the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and the Ombudsperson are crucial for further protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and at this moment are representing the only two allies of HRD in Serbia. Commissioner and its office have very close cooperation with NGOs and is considered as the only elected institution giving constant and not restrained support to NGOs. Partly different situation is with the institution of Ombudsperson (Protector of Citizens) as recently established and its effectiveness cannot be assessed at this stage. Beside few small scale actions of the Ombudsperson, its first months of work are in the light of mild press release issued by his office. Working meetings set by Ombudsman office are encouraging and represent first steps towards establishing a permanent communication and cooperation. At this stage we must give some credit to this institution and wait for it to start the work in full capacity with full staff. The Ombudsperson needs support to be in a position to deliver the benefits expected from it.

CASES THAT YUCOM IS HANDLING IN DEFENDING OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Along with fighting its own court cases run against **Biljana Kovacevic-Vuco** or against itself, YUCOM is also representing other NGOs in an increasing number of cases, and is monitoring cases and tendencies in attacks against human rights activists, in order to assist the development of mechanisms for HRDs' protection in Serbia.

- *Women in Black*, the case of assault and attack on their activists **Violeta Djikanovic** and **Milos Urosevic**. The assault happened on January 22, 2007, when a group of skinheads attacked **Violeta Djikanovic** and **Milos Urosevic** from *Woman in Black*. One of the attackers told **Urosevic** "Look at him, what a faggot! I know him, he is from Woman in Black. Someone pressed charges against me because of you." **Djikanovic** was thrown down the stairs and ended



up with head and other injuries. The procedure started in 2007, after reporting the incident, but it is still in the process of police investigation without any court procedure yet.

- Criminal procedure against Pavel Domonji, activists of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights led against him by militant right-wing organization "Svetozar Miletić". The criminal charges are pressed against him for publishing the joint press release, although he neither signed, nor wrote the press release.
- The case of a militant right-wing organization "Svetozar Miletić" that pressed charges against 8 NGOs for defamation (*Humanitarian Law Center, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, YUCOM, Women in Black, Belgrade Circle, Civic Initiatives, Youth Initiative for Human Rights and Center for Cultural Decontamination*).
- Cases of threat to *LGBT* organizations (*Queeria*) that especially increased in the period from March 2008, as the date set for the Eurovision Song Contest is approaching. The most recent are the separate interviews to the *Alo* and *Gazeta* tabloids **Milan Obradović** of the extreme rightist organization *Obraz* reiterated his organization's intention to make it out to the streets on the occasion of the Eurovision Song Contest *Eurosong* (Belgrade, May 2008) and prevent expected *LGBT* manifestations if necessary by force: „We're talking about the most normal response of all Serbian men and women who are concerned about their people's health and sanity ... We will not allow any sort of fagot parade, they are free to do whatever they want in their homes, but that won't be possible in the streets of Serbian Belgrade", he said. **Obradović** repeatedly bragged about his organization's „success" in preventing the Belgrade *Pride parade* 2001 when gay participants were brutally beaten. A joint letter by YUCOM and *Queeria*, urging the Public Prosecutor and the Interior Ministry to act in accordance with the law, remains unanswered. Websites of extreme rightist organizations such as *Serbian Nationalists* (www.srpskinacionalisti.com) meanwhile turned into tribunes for fierce attacks on *LGBT*, announcing „20,000 fagots coming to Belgrade – get ready!", and calling them „the disease which must be exterminated".
- Case of **Zoran Petakov** before Belgrade's 4th Municipal Court sued by Vojvodina's Bishop **Irinej** who was cited as one of *Serbian Orthodox Church* (SPC) dignitaries who support extreme rightist and neo-nazi groups in Serbia. In March 2008 Petakov was fined with €1.200 for alleged insult. The fine will be substituted with jail if not paid as ruled. **Petakov** was Judge **Miroslav Bošnjak** passed the verdict and sentenced the defendant without having heard any evidence – including that of the plaintiff. In explaining the sentence, he insisted that **Petakov** –himself a victim of a brutal physical assault by neo-nazis during an anti-fascist manifestation - had "insulted the Bishop's impeccable personality" and thus "inflicted pain not only on Irinej, but all Christians including myself as a baptized Christian". The judge insisted that SPC "is not just an institution – it's much more than that" and refused to hear **Petakov** and his attorneys (YUCOM lawyers) who submitted evidence that the neo-nazi groups enjoy support and protection of the Church. This verdict shows that freedom of expression is in great jeopardy in Serbia if critical attitude towards unacceptable activities and procedures is considered subversive and their perpetrators placed above the law by judicial authorities.
- Cases of Internet threat to *Women in Black*.



- 10 cases of hate speech in media against woman HRDs, NGOs, minority groups etc.

COURT CASES AGAINST YUCOM AND BILJANA KOVACEVIC-VUCO

A campaign of filing law suits and pressing criminal charges against YUCOM and **Biljana Kovacevic-Vuco** started in 2004. These actions were aimed at disturbing regular HRDs' activities. In that sense 9 criminal charges and law suits against chairperson of YUCOM were filed by either former officials of the **Milosevic** regime (**Borislav Mikelic**), or by journalists close to **Vojislav Kostunica's** DSS (**Bogdan Tirnanic**, **Niksa Bulatovic**) or by those close to both groups but in different times (**Aleksandar Tijanic**⁷ filed 4 criminal charges against **Biljana Kovacevic-Vuco** and one lawsuit against YUCOM).

- 1 and 2** Aleksandar Tijanic, Director of Serbian public RTV against YUCOM and against Biljana Kovacevic-Vuco, for non-material damages (of 100 000 EUR in both cases) instigated by publishing fabrications in the book "The Case of Civil Servant Aleksandar Tijanic". This case has been tried during the year 2006, and has been returned for a second procedure in May 2007.
 - 3** Aleksandar Tijanic, Director of Serbian public RTV against YUCOM, for breaching author rights. This case was overruled by court in April 2006.
 - 4 and 5** Aleksandar Tijanic, Director of Serbian public RTV against Biljana Kovacevic-Vuco and against YUCOM, for publishing the book "The Case of Civil Servant Aleksandar Tijanic". The remark that must be made is that Tijanic engaged Zdenko Tomanovic⁸ law firm for filing the criminal charges and in February 2006 urging from the District Court to issue temporary measure to force out from the distribution YUCOM's book and to ban any other printing, publishing and sale of the publication.
 - 6** Borislav Mikelic, former prime-minister of the government of the so-called Republika Srpska Krajina, against Biljana Kovacevic Vuco, for defamation (criminal case), in a forged YUCOM press release that had been printed in some media.
 - 7** Borislav Mikelic, former prime-minister of the government of the so-called Republika Srpska Krajina, against Biljana Kovacevic Vuco, for defamation (criminal case) on YUCOM's press conference. In May 2008, the procedure the process ended due to the statute of limitation. The decision of the first instance court is partly confirmed by the District court in May 2008.
 - 8** Borislav Mikelic, former prime-minister of the government of the so-called Republika Srpska Krajina, against Biljana Kovacevic Vuco, for non-material damages (of 35 000 EUR) instigated by defamation on YUCOM's press conference.
- Off cases against YUCOM and Biljana Kovacevic-Vuco that are being initiated by journalists and editors of a certain number of state-controlled tabloids, the one being tried currently is:

⁷ Aleksandar Tijanic is former **Milosevic's** Information Minister and former adviser of **Vojislav Kostunica** and nowadays Director of State Television appointed by the government, recently reappointed.

⁸ Legal counselor of late Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and legal representative of Mirjana Markovic.



As a description of the atmosphere and pressure that YUCOM is suffering on these trials we give one example: Prior to entering a court room where a hearing in the case **Aleksandar Tijanić vs. Biljana Kovačević-Vučo**⁹ was to take place, a bystander who disagrees with **Mr. Tijanić's** track record in demonizing the assassinated Prime Minister **Zoran Djindjić**, was brutally attacked by him and received a fist blow in the head. Asked about the incident, **Mr. Tijanić** confirmed that it had taken place and tried to belittle his responsibility by stating that "it was only a fatherly slap" – a clear indication that domestic violence is a household item in his case. The media gave a conspicuously big publicity to the incident. Apart from very few exceptions, the media coverage was limited to conveying and advertising **Mr. Tijanić's** account of what happened and his self-appointed role of a victim in the incident.

YUCOM's HRD team
Belgrade, May 2008

⁹ The General Manager of the state-owned *Serbian Broadcasting Corporation* (RTS) pressed charges against the Chairwoman of the *Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights* (YUCOM) after the publication of the book titled *The Case of Civil Servant Aleksandar Tijanić* – a selection of quotations from his journalistic *oeuvre* intended to substantiate his inaptitude to occupy the highly sensitive and responsible post of the Head of the public broadcasting service. The charges **Tijanić** pressed include copyright infringement, slander and libel, and are dealt with in several separate lawsuits.

