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Human Rights and Democracy Violation Early Warning *Weekly Newsletter* No. 12

1. *Amnesty International* issued its *2008 Report – State of the World's Human Rights* which offers a comprehensive insight into the state of affairs in this sensitive field in almost all states and territories in the world. This issue, too, devotes a separate section to Serbia, which contains critical remarks on human rights policies and practices in this country, pertaining especially to:

- The Serbian Government's failure to find a negotiated solution to the Kosovo issue and human and minority problems associated with it;
- Impunity for war criminals;
- Failure to fully cooperate with the war crimes *Tribunal* at The Hague (ICTY);
- Failure to investigate and take appropriate steps in the case of the bodies of 900 ethnic Albanians killed in Kosovo during the 1990s and transported to Serbia in refrigerator trucks to be buried near Belgrade;
- Discrimination of minorities in Serbia.

The AI 2008 Report part on Serbia can be viewed at:

<http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/europe-and-central-asia/serbia>

2. *Politika*¹, a Belgrade daily with a long tradition (founded 1904) and reputed not only for a considerably high level of professionalism, but also for its editors' unmistakable sense of

¹ *Politika* represents one of the media houses that – in spite of legal obligations and contrary to European standards – are still in the state's majority ownership: while the publishing house *Politika* is owned by the state or state-owned banks, pension funds and utilities, the daily itself belongs to the *Politika Newspapers and Magazines* (PNM) a 50-50 venture between *Politika* and the German media conglomerate *WAZ* (Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung), whereby *Politika* retains full autonomy in shaping and pursuing editorial policies.





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not diverging from ruling government's political line, keeps its pages opened to contributions by several authors who ardently support the dominant "patriotic" hegemonization and thereby do not conceal their radical anti-European stance and a high level of intolerance towards any individual, group, organization or institution of a differing opinion on the most topical issues in Serbian politics.

In his May 28 commentary headlined "Monkey Business" – ostensibly intended to sketch a roundup of the *European Song Contest* held in Belgrade earlier that week – **S. Stojićević**, a *Politika* author, launched an all-out attack on the LGBT presence at the Eurosong, opposed the alleged intention "to turn into normal something which is unnatural", and used this segment of the scene surrounding the show to condemn whatever influences coming from Europe and the developed world.

A range of LGBT and human rights organizations condemned this outburst of hate speech, but *Politika* did not bother to register the protest, let alone react to it.

3. Women account for 51.4% of the population of Serbia, whereas 29.7% of real estate entered in cadastre registers are owned by women. Of all those who give up their employment, 80% are women, who also account for 98% of persons whose only employment is house-keeping. Women occupy 30.5% of managerial and leading posts in companies and institutions: 20.8% of corporate managers and 14.3% of chairpersons of managing boards are women. Women are cited as "heads" in only 27% of all households. While there are numerous testimonies to the effect that female employees are paid less than men for the same amount of work at equal workplaces, there is neither adequate statistical evidence nor a viable mechanism of changing that. The Government-elaborated *Gender Equality Strategy* remains to be a list of desiderata rather than a set of effective measures to be taken towards solving this problem that represents a serious obstacle in the way of Serbia's modernization.

4. In an interview to the *Danas* daily published on May 30, **Ms. Doris Pack**, European Parliament member and Head of the EP Delegation for South-Eastern Europe, was asked about the situation in Serbia in the wake of May 11 parliamentary election, and the prospect that the *Socialist Party of Serbia* (SPS – founded 1990 by **Slobodan Milošević**) enters a coalition with the *Democratic Party* (DS) whose Chairman and Serbia's Prime Minister **Zoran Djindjić** was assassinated 2003. Her answer: "As far as I am informed, the Socialists have had no anti-European statements during the election campaign and thereafter, nor will they oppose the Stabilization and Association Agreement [between





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Serbia and EU]. **One should not look back**². If the Socialists have changed – as it seems – and, if that is the best option for the formation of a pro-European government in Serbia, than Mr. Boris Tadić and the Democratic Party should form a government with them”.

5. „Army represents a key factor for the stability of a modern state”, **Boris Tadić**, President of Serbia, said May 30 in a speech addressed to *Military Academy* graduates following their *Graduate 2008* military exercise. The President did not mention democratic institutions, rule of law, education or other “factors” of key importance for the stability of any state, Serbia included.

6. The May 11 local election brought a new balance of powers in the City of Belgrade as a result of which a new coalition was formed by the *Socialist Party of Serbia*, *Serbian Radical Party* (SRS) and the *Democratic Party of Serbia* (DSS). However, the election process has not been completed: despite an express legal provision (§ 56 of the *Local Elections Act*) that a newly elected City Assembly shall be convened within 15 days after the publication of final election results, Speaker of the Assembly convened it for July 14. Although the DS and City of Belgrade dignitaries are making efforts to find “legalistic” arguments to defend their decision to convene the inaugural session of the new assembly so late, it is clear that this step has to do with political interpretations of the law, aimed at bringing about a desired majority in the City Assembly. Such arbitrary moves – irrespective of agreement or disagreement with specific political party’s views – can not be beneficial for the short and long term development of democracy in Serbia.

7. Serbian Foreign Minister **Vuk Jeremić’s** recent statement at a regional cooperation conference in Zagreb, which represents an irresponsible attempt to politicize sensitive issues related to the atrocities committed during the Balkan wars of the 1990s and instrumentalize them for day-to-day politicking purposes – followed by Deputy PM **Božidar Djelić’s** demand for the dismissal of EP’s Rapporteur on the Balkans, **Jelko Kacin** - represent a new contribution to the further deterioration of the relations in the region. It is questionable whether these two synchronized statements have been made on

² Notwithstanding the need to form a pro-European government and the aparent necessity to opt for a lesser evil and admit the Socialists into a coalition to that end, the essence of this exercise is in whether the Socialists are willing to undergo true change and renounce **Slobodan Milošević’s** policies, and not to pursue a policy of oblivion, advocated not only by **Doris Pack**, but also by a range of parties from the [DS-led] *Coalition for a European Serbia*.





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purpose at the very moment when Serbia finds herself at a crossroad – whether to head towards Europe or not – whereby it is both Slovenia and Croatia who have assumed the role of staunchest advocates of Serbia's EU-membership.

Outlook:

Should Serbia's long-term stability – possible only if the country seriously and sincerely embarks on a modernization process within a European context – be sacrificed to short-sighted political calculations, not only internal economic, political and security problems will continue to accumulate: regional stability will also be in jeopardy.

