



YUCOM

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Human Rights and Democracy Violation Early Warning *Weekly Newsletter* No. 17

1. Less than eight years after ousting the war-mongering regime led by **Slobodan Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS)**, the Republic of Serbia has the sixth Government based on President **Tadić's** initiative to launch „national reconciliation”: a coalition Government comprising of **Tadić's Democratic Party (DS)**, [**Milošević's** heir **Ivica Dačić's**] SPS and nine other parties was sworn in on July 7, 2008 as a result of numerous compromises and mutual concessions – an effective abolition of the *Socialist Party's* responsibility for plunging Serbia into the Balkan wars of the 1990s being but one of them.

The composition of the new cabinet, the Prime Minister's programmatic address prior to the vote and prominent cabinet ministers' statements reflect the domination of economic issues and development concerns on the Government's priority list¹. References to the development of democratic institutions, protection and promotion of human rights - those of the much manipulated Serb community in Kosovo² included - and creation of conditions for a new democratic climate in a society troubled by fresh memories of war and (self)isolation, found no place either in the Prime Minister-elect's address or in the debate surrounding the new Government's inauguration.

The new cabinet features a *Ministry for Human and Minority Rights* – a segment of the executive which has yet to profile itself as an institution whose performance in the past has not lived up to the mission of defining and promoting standards in the fields of human and minority rights. The Ministry will also have to draw a clear line of distinction from the newly introduced *Office of the Ombudsman*.

2. The parliamentary debate on the new Government was (mis)used by a range of MPs as a platform for hate speech tirades and ungrounded attacks on political opponents.

¹ A more detailed analysis of the new Government and its program will be the only topic of the next EWS *Newsletter* to be issued shortly.

² Human rights were not mentioned even in the context of “non-acceptance of the independence of Kosovo” – one of the guiding principles which resembles lip service rather than serious commitment.





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There were also those like **Dušan Bajatović**³, one of top SPS officials in the province of Vojvodina, who was in favor of a tougher stance on Kosovo: he said that the new Serbian Government should defend Kosovo with diplomatic means, but „according to a military plan“ as well. There were no reactions to this provocation – an indication that there are forces even within the government coalition that do not renounce use of force as means of resolving outstanding issues.

3. **Saša Janković**, *Ombudsman* of the Republic of Serbia, issued a statement to the effect that 2,600 petitions concerning violation of citizens' rights and other irregularities in authorities' attitude towards them have been filed since the beginning of this year. As this institution represents an important instrument in upholding human rights and harmonizing local standards and practices with those adopted in the countries of developed and functioning democratic institutions, a detailed survey of *Ombudsman's Office* activities will be published in one of the coming issues.
4. A Total of **72** (out of a total of **164**) municipalities in Serbia and their **1,584.304** inhabitants with voting right have no representation in the *People's Assembly* (National Parliament)⁴. These municipalities include cities and communes such as Arandjelovac, Bajina Bašta, Bujanovac, Indija, Negotin, Piroć, Prijepolje, Raška etc – many of them important industrial centers or strategically sensitive regions bordering onto neighboring countries or potentially volatile areas. On the other hand, 16 municipalities that constitute Serbia's capital Belgrade (**1.576.124** inhabitants) are represented by **84** MPs in the **250**-seat legislative body.
5. *Freedom House's Nations in Transit Report 2008* warns that political freedoms and civil rights in many of the 193 countries reviewed have suffered serious setbacks – a development that can have serious regional and even global consequences. The *Freedom House 2008 NIT Report* (including introduction, criteria, narrative reports and tables) can be viewed at:
http://www.freedomhouse.hu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=196

³ Mr **Bajatović** has caused considerable uproar with his statement on the [assassinated Prime Minister **Zoran** **Djindjić's** alleged accountability for [former SPS, Serbian and FRY President **Slobodan** **Milošević's** arrest and transfer to The Hague, when he said in a TV talkshow: „One of those responsible has already paid for that“. He repeated this statement on several occasions instead of distancing himself from it.

⁴ Source: <http://www.crmps.org.yu/xdoc/arhivavesti/poslanici2008CMV.htm>





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Democratization process in Serbia continues to meet challenges, while political resolve to consolidate earlier achievements is still weak, the *Report* states. The part on Serbia – authored by a person who is prominent in the segment of so-called “cooperative” NGOs close to the ruling *Democratic Party* (DS) and *eo ipso* not immune to views that reflect that fact - is to be viewed at:

http://www.freedomhouse.hu/images/fdh_galleries/NIT2008/NT-Serbia-final.pdf

6. The new *World Bank* report on Worldwide Governance Indicators deals with a broad range of issues pertinent to the level of development of democratic institutions, political stability, good governance, corruption level in 212 countries and territories. The report can be viewed at: http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/sc_country.asp
A detailed country report on Serbia is available at:
<http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/pdf/c246.pdf>

Outlook:

Notwithstanding the paramount importance of serious problems burdening Serbia's economy, agriculture, infrastructure, education, health care, science, technology and other areas of vital importance for her accelerated development, modernization and accession to the European Union, the new Government is expected to pay special attention to the creation of more favorable conditions for the development of democratic institution and uphold of human rights and freedoms. Should it fail to do so, the Government runs the risk of repeating its predecessors' mistakes and perpetuate Serbia's extremely low rating in this respect.

