

# Letters from Serbia - the 8<sup>th</sup>

## Preventive Amnesia

by László Végel

July 2010

---

One of the paradoxes of this great Serbian summer becomes obvious when you consider the following: the more the ever-wakeful keepers of order (and the order of hierarchy) boast about how much effort has been invested in the energetic fight against various mafias, the more there are politicians who require their special kind of protection. Not only the President of the Republic but a dozen more state functionaries, and opposition politicians are under special 24 hour police protection (surveillance). It would, however, be wrong to only focus on that growing tide of violence which is, truth be told, becoming more and more prominent. It would be very wrong to only fight against this type of violence. The main cause of politicians being endangered is the decline of moral values in the last twenty years. In other words, this is about the expansion of the post-conflict (post-war) moral syndrome which contains all of those founding principles that Serbian politics defined in the nineties - the silent giving of amnesty to violence.

In the nineties this violence expressed itself brutally through persecution of Albanians and then Muslims. After the Dayton Peace Accords and, especially, after the NATO intervention it was suppressed within the borders of Serbia, then it "moved" to Vojvodina where atrocities against minorities (Roma people) suddenly multiplied. The police and the justice system did not adequately respond to this, the issue was put on the agenda only after the European Parliament's energetic warning, and even then it was only to put the matter ad acta as soon as possible, arguing that these were only sporadic incidents. Violence expan-

# Pisma iz Srbije, 8.

## Preventivna amnezija

od Lasla Vegela

jul 2010.

---

Jedan od paradoksa velikog srbijanskog leta ogleda se u sledećem: što se više poslovično budni čuvari reda (i poretka) hvale uložnim naporima u energičnu borbu protiv raznih mafija, sve je više političara koji iziskuju njihovu specijalnu zaštitu. Ne samo predsednik republike, već čitavo tuce državnih funkcionera, ali i opozicionih političara, nalaze se pod danonoćnom posebnom zaštitom (nadzorom) policije. Ali, bilo bi pogrešno ako bismo držali u fokusu pažnje isključivo samo taj talas nasilja koji, doduše, poprima sve veće i veće razmere. Bilo bi veoma pogrešno boriti se samo protiv toga. Osnovni uzrok ugroženosti političara jeste srozavanje sistema moralnih vrednosti tokom poslednjih dvadesetak godina. Reč je - drugačije rečeno - o ekspanziji postkonfliktnog (posleratnog) moralnog sindroma u kojem su sadržana sva ona temeljna načela koje je srpska politika formulisala u devedesetim godinama. A to je prećutno amnestiranje nasilja.

To nasilje se u devedesetim godinama na vrlo brutalan način ispoljilo u besomućnom progonu Albanaca i, potom, Muslimana. Posle dejtonskog mirovnog sporazuma i, naročito, posle NATO intervencije ono je potisnuto unutar granica Srbije, pa se „preselilo“ i u Vojvodinu, gde su se naglo namnožili atociteti prema manjinama, odnosno prema Romima. Na sve to ni policija, ni pravosudni organi nisu adekvatno reagovali, stvar je stavljena na dnevni red tek posle energičnog upozorenja Evropskog parlamenta, ali i tada samo zato da bi što pre stavljena ad acta, pod parolom da je reč samo o sporadičnim incidentima.



HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG  
JUGOISTOČNA EVROPA

Dobračina 43, 11000 Beograd — T: +381 (0)11 3033833 — F: +381 (011) 2180049 — E: info@hbs.rs — W: www.boell.rs

PISMA IZ SRBIJE 8 | 07 | 2010

LETTERS from SERBIA 8 | 07 | 2010

ded unrestrained to the streets, and once on the streets it didn't need a nationalist alibi. Aggression had become a widely accepted canon. If a young man who had been accused in the USA of aggravated assault and then smuggled out of the country by the state of Serbia, that is consular employees, to Serbia where this violent man is then met and greeted as a hero by an influential Parliamentary party in the building of the Parliament – then we should not be shocked that we have hooligans and other lowlives of the streets. The scandal over drug lord Darko Saric didn't start yesterday either but when the Parliament approved a privatization law which did not care much about the origin of money. The oligarchs acquired huge assets through the use of money of unknown origin, all thanks to a decision reached too easily and according to which – there is no such thing as bad money. Patriotism too is about hypocrisy: it started out with big words and warrior slogans and ended up with off shore companies. The oligarchs avoided paying taxes by swearing patriotic oaths.

Nasilje se širilo neobuzdano, izašlo je na ulice, a na ulicama, potom, nije uvek bio potreban nacionalistički alibi. Agresija se pretvorila u širokom krugu prihvaćeni kanon. Ako momka koji je u Sjedinjenim Državama optužen za izuzetno teško nasilništvo, državni, to jest konzularni službenici, lažnim papirima prošvercuju u Srbiju, gde tog nasilnika jedna od veoma uticajnih parlamentarnih stranaka, u zgardi parlamenta, dočekuje kao heroja – ne treba da se čudimo pojavi huligana i druge manguparije na ulicama. Ni afera narkobosa Šarića nije počela juče, nego kad je parlament doneo takav zakon o privatizaciji koji se ne interesuje za poreklo novca. Oligarsi su se dokopali ogromnog imetka kapitalom nepoznatnog porekla, zahvaljujući olako donetoj odluci po kojoj – nema novca koji smrdi. I patriotizam je u znaku dvoličnosti: počeo je s krupnim, ratničkim parolama i nastavio se sa off shore firmama. Oligarsi su izbegavali plaćanje poreza sve se zaklinjući na patriotizam.



This story was analyzed by Srdja Popović in his latest book which was published recently by Pescanik. The book, titled *Those Bitter Tears After*, contains a collection of Popović's notes made since 2000. This is a harsh book about the loss of hope after the changes of the 5th of October, a book that warns that we haven't learned anything from the cautionary examples of the nineties. Popović is one of the few lawyers who did not sell out to the

Ovu priču analizira Srđa Popović u svojoj najnovijoj knjizi koja se nedavno pojavila u izdanju Peščanika. U njoj su, pod naslovom *One gorke suze posle*, sabrane Popovićeve beleške nastale posle 2000. godine. Opora knjiga o gubitku nada posle petooktobarskih promena, knjiga koja upozorava na to da nismo ništa naučili iz opominjućih primera devedesetih godina. Popović spada među one malobrojne pravnike koji se nisu prodali vla-

authorities – he did not sell his professional knowledge. This is no small thing, especially not these days, when there are many of those who as “independents” roam around or strut in their “glow” of authority, when around every corner there is a politician educated in law, an advisor-analyst, who craves a University teaching position.

Popović’s book uncovers many issues, including that, for example, the name of the war that broke apart former Yugoslavia is questionable. Namely, in the beginning the foreign press wrote of a *civil war* and this classification was then taken over by the Western European politicians. I accept this terminology because in the beginning it did seem that way but later on it slowly became known that this long war had, however, many characteristics of a civil war but was at the same time without a doubt an *ethnic war*.

With his sharp logic of a lawyer Srđja Popović cleared up this chaotic terminology. He thinks that by accepting the Constitution of September 28th, 1990, Serbia parted from the Yugoslav federation and became an independent state. From that moment on it is only possible to talk about *wars between states* and not *civil war*; which is to say without a doubt that Serbia attacked its neighboring countries. According to the mentioned Constitution Serbia considered federal laws binding only if they were not in conflict with its interests. Article 72 of the Constitution unambiguously states that Serbia is a sovereign and independent state which has appropriated the powers that belonged to the federation. Truth be told, Yugoslavia had a role in the Constitution – but how can one sovereign and independent state (Serbia) be subordinate to another sovereign and independent state (Yugoslavia)?

stima – nije rasprodavao svoja stručna znanja. To nije malo, naročito danas, kad je mnogo onih koji, kao „nezavisni“, švrljaju, ili se šepure u „ozračju“ vlasti, kad u svakom grmu leži po jedan pravnički obrazovani političar, savetnik-analitičar, gladan univerzitetske katedre.

Popovićeva knjiga otkriva mnoge stvari, pa i to, na primer, da je i imenovanje rata kojim je razbijena nekadašnja Jugoslavija – sporno. U početku je, naime, međunarodna štampa pisala o građanskom ratu, pa su tu kvalifikaciju preuzeli i zapadnoevropski političari. Uvažavam ovu terminologiju, jer je u početku baš tako i izgledalo, ali potom se postepeno pokazalo da je taj višegodišnji rat imao, doduše, mnoga obeležja građanskog rata, ali da je ujedno bez sumnje bio etnički rat.

Srđja Popović je svojom britkom pravničkom logikom, raščistio i ovaj terminološki kaos. On smatra da se Srbija, ustavom donetim 28. septembra 1990. godine, izdvojila iz jugoslovenske federacija i postala nezavisna država. Od tog momenta, pak, moguće je govoriti samo o međudržavnim ratovima, a ne o građanskom ratu; što će reći da je Srbija, bez sumnje, napala susedne zemlje. Prema slovu tog ustava, naime, Srbija je savezne zakone smatrala obavezujućima samo ako oni nisu u suprotnosti s njenim interesima. U članu 72. tog ustava nedvosmisleno piše da je Srbija suverena i nezavisna država koja je prisvojila ingerencije koje su, inače, u nadležnosti federacije. Istina, u ustavu figurira i Jugoslavija - ali kako može da bude jedna suverena i nezavisna država (Srbija), podređena jednoj drugoj suverenoj i nezavisnoj državi (Jugoslaviji)?



These ideas of Srdja Popović had, at the time of their publication, provoked harsh discussions, which had however died down quickly and today no one thinks about them any more. Even though they make a very important point about how events regarding Yugoslavia should be judged, considering that the Serbian Constitution had come to power a little less than a year before Croatia's, and Slovenia's, separation from Yugoslavia. It is no wonder then that in July 1991 in the so called Yugoslav Presidency after Croatia had voted in the new Constitution, Stjepan Mesić defended this act by saying that Croatia had simply copied Serbia's constitutional model.

Croatia had just followed Serbia's example in leaving the federation. In this book Srdja Popović, aside from the circumstances of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and the issue of Kosovo, tries to clear up and bring to light the political background of Prime Minister Djindjić's assassination, which is still under a veil of mystery. Popović – even though he highly respected Djindjić's politics – contests the doctrine of the October changes. In his opinion Milošević wasn't brought down by the people, or opposition politicians, but by Serbian tycoons, the secret police and military. All of these forces were sincerely afraid that the growing dissatisfaction in the country would culminate in a peoples' uprising which would take Milošević out of the picture, but them as well with him. This is why they reached the conclusion that it is necessary to think about preventive measures. They opted for a "revolution", judging that governing should be given to the opposition. These were then the real forces which Djindjić faced.

And they gave their response. What followed was the so called strike of the "red berets" which Srdja Popović qualifies as an armed revolt. Djindjić's government didn't even have a minimal chance of breaking this revolt since then President of Yugoslavia, Vojislav Kostunica, as commander of the armed forces, sided with the "red berets" thus forcing Djindjić to make a series of compromises. The armed revolt of the "red berets" was followed by the assassination of the Prime Minister.

So, this is no ordinary mafia confrontation but a political murder the roots of which are in the nineties. The nineties are still a puss filled ulcer in our recent history. How right Srdja Popović is, is becoming evident these days when the dailies and weekly magazines are publishing more and more new details about the political background of Djindjić's murder. Two members of the "Zemun mafia",

Ove teze Srđe Popovića u vreme njihovog publikovanja izazvale su oštre polemike koje su se, međutim, ubrzo utišale, i danas se više niko i ne obazire na njih. Iako su one veoma važan momenat u sklopu prosuđivanja jugoslovenskih događaja, s obzirom na to da je dotični srpski ustav donet bezmalo godinu dana pre akta hrvatskog, odnosno slovenačkog izdvajanja. Nije ni čudno da se jula 1991. godine, u takozvanom jugoslovenskom predsedništvu, posle donošenja hrvatskog ustava, Stjepan Mesić branio time da je Hrvatska naprosto preslikala srpski ustavni model.

Hrvatska je, dakle, samo sledila Srbiju u izlasku iz federacije. U ovoj knjizi Srđa Popović pokušava da raščisti, osim okolnosti raspada bivše Jugoslavije, i pitanje Kosova, a i da osvetli političku pozadinu ubistva premijera Đinđića koja je i do danas pod velom tajnosti. Popović – mada visoko ceni politiku koju je vodio pokojni Đinđić – osporava do sada poznatu doktrinu oktobarskih promena. Prema njegovom mišljenju, Miloševića nije oborio narod, niti su to učinili opozicioni političari, već srpski tajkuni, tajna policija i vojska. Sve ove snage su se iskreno plašile da će vladajuće nezadovoljstvo u zemlji kulminirati narodnim ustankom koji će sa scene počistiti Miloševića, ali i njih. Zato su i došli do zaključka da je neophodno razmišljati o preventivnim merama. Opredelili su se za „revoluciju“ procenivši da vlast treba prepustiti opoziciji. Sa tim snagama se našao suočen, zapravo, Zoran Đinđić.

A odgovor nije izostao. Usledio je takozvani štrajk „crvenih beretki“ koji Srđa Popović kvalifikuje kao oružanu pobunu. Đinđićeva vlada nije imala ni minimalne šanse da skrši pobunu, pošto je tadašnji predsednik Jugoslavije, Vojislav Koštunica, kao komandant oružanih snaga, stao na stranu pobunjenika, usled čega je Đinđić bio prinuđen da uđe u niz kompromisa. Posle oružane pobune „crvenih beretki“ usledilo je ubistvo premijera.

Prema tome, nije reč o ordinarnom obračunu mafijaša, nego o političkom ubistvu čiji koreni sežu u devedesete godine. Devedesete, dakle, i dalje važe kao svojevrsni gnojni čir naše bliže istorije. Koliko je u svemu tome Srđa Popović u pravu, pokazuje se baš ovih dana u dnevnim i nedeljnim listovima koji objavljuju nove i nove detalje političke pozadine Đinđićevog ubistva. Dvojica članova „ze-



Miloš Simović and Sretko Kalinić fell into the hands of the police (due to a confrontation between the two). The Special Prosecutor for Organized Crime, Miljko Radosavljević, questioned Simović and from his statements it seems that the "Zemun mafia" was in continuous contact with general Aca Tomić, the director of the military security department (directly subordinate to then head of state, Vojislav Kostunica) and with Vojislav Šešelj, the leader of the Radical Party who is currently in the Scheveningen jail.

The prosecution has promised to start an inquiry based on the new information. According to Popović it is the prosecutor's task to find out what role Aca Tomić had played, but also that he cannot be considered to be someone who is outside of politics. Some members of Parliament are suggesting a Parliamentary committee be formed. Good morning prosecution office (meaning: you have finally come to your senses) – this is what Rajko Danilović, Djindjić's family attorney, has to say. Members of Parliament, celebrities, are all becoming more vocal in demanding that Vojislav Kostunica address the public and say why they swept this sensitive information under the carpet. Dušan Mihajlović, the Minister of In-

munske mafije" Miloš Simović i Sretko Kalinić (usled međusobnog obračuna) pali su u ruke policiji. Specijalni tužilac za borbu protiv organizovanog kriminala Miljko Radosavljević je saslušao Simovića, iz njegovog iskaza pak jasno proističe da su Zemunci bili na stalnoj vezi sa generalom Acom Tomićem, šefom vojne službe bezbednosti (direktno podređen tadašnjem šefu države, Vojislavu Koštunici) i sa Vojislavom Šešeljom, liderom radikala koji, trenutno, boravi u ševeningenskom zatvoru.

Tužilaštvo je obećalo da će, o posedu novih saznanja, pokrenuti istragu. Prema Popovićevom mišljenju, zadatak je tužilaštva da ispita ulogu Ace Tomića, ali da se on ne može smatrati političkim autsajderom. Neki poslanici traže formiranje parlamentarnog anketnog odbora. Dobro jutro tužilaštvo – tako se oglašava Rajko Daninolić, pravni zastupnik porodice Đinđić. Poslanici, javne ličnosti, sve glasnije zahtevaju da se se javnosti obrati Vojislav Koštunica, i da kaže zašto su počistili pod tepih ovu osetljivu stvar. Dušan Mihajlović, ministar za unutrašnje poslove u Đinđićevoj vladi, napisao je da je premijer – prema sopstvenom priznanju – bio prinuđen da napravi pakt sa đavolom. Prema njegovom

ternal Affairs in Djindjić's government, wrote that the Prime Minister himself admitted that he was forced to make a deal with the devil. He says that: "from a classical pragmatist and a Western type politician, Djindjić became a statesman with a vision, nationally conscious and responsible". This change disappointed some of those who supported him till then. The one time Minister of Internal Affairs very vaguely points toward the archives of foreign security services as the place where documents could be found which would shed light on the murder of the Prime Minister. In an interview for the Belgrade daily *Blic* he added, somewhat ambiguously, that Serbs have frequently been "a rock in someone else's hand".

More and more it is becoming evident that current scandals are mostly connected to the nineties, which means that to this day this relatively recent past has not been explained, it keeps coming back, interfering with our lives and, what's more, it influences our future. After 2000 many people had the wrong impression that we shouldn't deal with the past, that we should just keep looking forward, that faith in the future and a vision of the future are more important than everything else. Ten years later it is definitely obvious that this is impossible. The "preventive revolution" cannot be bypassed by "preventive amnesia".

The past will not let us be - it is most present regarding the issue of Kosovo. Serbian politicians are currently awaiting the International Tribunal for Justice's decision with optimism. Regarding the issue of Kosovo's proclaimed independence they are deeply convinced that the Tribunal will rule in Serbia's favor. The decision will be made public around July 22nd. Even Vuk Jeremic, the Minister for Foreign Affairs is certain that the ruling will be beneficial for Serbia. He is already cautioning our neighboring countries to restrain themselves during the United Nations assembly meeting when Serbia will request that new negotiations on Kosovo be started. The Serbian press has published Tibor Varadij's, an international law expert, statement that he expects that the majority (meaning eight of the fifteen judges) will decide in Serbia's favor, but that some judges will have differing opinions.

At the same time as this story is going on, there is another piece of dreary information making its way around the media, according to which in case of a negative decision by the Tribunal, Serbia would be prepared to accept a division of Kosovo. Citing well informed sources, the Belgrade daily *Blic* writes that Serbia

mišljenju Đinđić je od „klasičnog pragmatičara i političara zapadnog tipa postao državnik sa vizijom, nacionalno svestan i odgovoran“. Taj novi momenat je razočarao neke od onih koji su ga do tada podržavali. Nekadašnji ministar za unutrašnje poslove, vrlo maglovito, ukazuje i na to da bi o ubistvu predsedika vlade imali štašta da kažu (i) dokumenti pohranjeni u arhivama stranih obaveštajnih službi. U intervjuu datom za beogradski dnevni list *Blic* još je, u neku ruku dvosmisleno, dodao i to, da su Srbi često bili „kamen u tuđoj ruci“.

Sve više se pokazuje da su aktuelne afere većinom vezane za devedesete, što znači da sve do sada ta relativno bliska prošlost nije razjašnjena, stalno se vraća, meša se u naše živote, štaviše, utiče i na našu budućnost. Posle 2000. godine mnogi su se zavaravali da ne treba da se bavimo prošlošću, da treba gledati samo napred, da je vera u budućnost i vizija budućnosti od svega važnija. Posle deset godina je definitivno jasno, da je to nemoguće. „Preventivna revolucija“ se ne može zaobići „preventivnom amnezijom“.

Prošlost ne da mira, ona je prisutna ponajviše po pitanju Kosova, Srpski političari trenutno s optimizmom čekaju odluku Međunarodnog suda pravde. Što se tiče proglašenja nezavisnosti Kosova, oni su duboko uvereni da će sud odlučiti u srpsku korist. Odluka će biti objavljena oko 22. jula. I Vuk Jeremić, ministar za inostrane poslove je uveren da će presuda biti povoljna po Srbiju. I već upozorava susedne zemlje da se uzdržavaju na skupštini Ujedinjenih nacija na kojoj će Srbija podneti zahtev da se pokrenu novi pregovori o Kosovu. Srpska štampa donosi i izjavu Tibora Varadija, eksperta za međunarodno pravo, koji očekuje da će većina, dakle osomorica od petnaestorice sudija, odlučiti u korist Srbije, ali i da će neke sudije izdvojiti svoje mišljenje.

Paralelno sa ovim optimističkim scenarijem, u medijama se provlači i jedna sumornija informacija, po kojoj bi Srbija, u slučaju nepovoljne odluke haškog suda, pristala na podelu Kosova. Pozivajući se na dobro obavestene izvore, beogradski *Blic* piše da će Srbija baš u tom smislu da formuliše predlog nove re-

will write its suggestion for a new resolution on Kosovo (at the September meeting of the General Assembly of the UN) precisely with this in mind. The Belgrade weekly *NIN* however reminds us that dividing Kosovo was an idea of writer Dobrica Cosic, the father of the Serbian national idea. While on an international level the same idea was conceived in 1993 by the Italian Limes Institute. At that time the Serbian public didn't want to hear of it. Zoran Djindic also had a tendency to consider this idea – says Miroljub Labus, former vice-president of the government. But the Western powers were not prepared to discuss it. Labus later suggested the Dayton model, but that did not meet with the West's approval. And not only the West – this idea was shunned by the Serbian public, Serbian politicians, even though they would happily welcome it today. Labus also noticed that, unfortunately, Serbia's position in the negotiations is by far worse than it was in the early 2000s.

*(Translated from Serbian by  
Nina Đurđević-Filipović)*

zolucije o Kosovu koji priprema za septembarsko zasedanje Generalne skupštine Ujedinjenih nacija. Beogradski nedeljnik *NIN* pak podseća, da je podela Kosova prvobitno bila ideja pisca Dobrice Ćosića, oca srpske nacionalne ideje, a na međunarodnom planu istu zamisao je još 1993. protežirao italijanski Limes Institut. U to vreme srpska javnost nije o tome htela ni da čuje. I Zoran Đinđić je bio sklon da se ta ideja razmotri, svedoči Miroljub Labus, bivši potpredsednik vlade. Ali, zapadne sile nisu bile spremne da raspravljaju o njoj. Labus je kasnije predložio dejtonski model, ali nije naišao na razumevanje Zapada. Ali ne samo Zapada - od te ideje su zazirali i srpska javost, i srpski političari, mada bi je danas oberučke prihvatili. Nažalost, primetio je Labus, pregovaračka pozicija Srbije danas je neuporedivo gora nego što je ona bila u u prvoj polovini dvehiljaditih godina.

*(Preveo sa mađarskog  
Arpad Vicko)*

