

Report on the International Mission of the hCa to Belgrade

21 - 25 June, 1999

Aims of the Mission

- to investigate the current political situation in Serbia,
- to find out the position of the opposition in Serbia,
- to find out the position of local non-governmental organizations, civic groups and movements
- to discuss the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

Members of the Mission

Information about the mission members is available at the hCa International Secretariat.

The mission conducted interviews with the following people:

Vuk Obradović, president of the Socialdemocracy of Serbia – page 1

Nebojša Čović, president of the Democratic Alternative of Serbia – page 4

Goran Svilanović, president of Civil Alliance of Serbia – page 6

Žarko Korać, president of the Socialdemocratic Union of Serbia – page 8

Miloš Grabundžija, member of the head body of the Yugoslav Action Group from Vojvodina – page 10

Vlada Deanović, president of the Assembly of the Independent trade union of pensioners of Serbia – page 12

Dušan Janjić, president of Forum for ethnic relations, Belgrade – page 13

Biljana Kovačević-Vučo, coordinator of the Yugoslav Action Group, Belgrade – page 14

Miljenko Dereta, president of the Civic Initiatives, Belgrade – page 15

Milutin Matić, coordinator of Forum for ethnic relations, Kragujevac - page 15

The mission is also grateful to individuals who shared their opinions with the mission members

Vera Marković, vice president of Socialdemocratic Union of Serbia

Nataša Milojević, vice president of the Socialdemocracy of Serbia

Nikola Soro, president of Socialdemocracy of Vojvodina, Novi Sad

Jelena Santić, president of the Group 484, Belgrade

Djordje Zojkić, president of the Club 100, Pancevo

Report of meetings

Mr. Vuk Obradovic, president of the Socialdemocracy of Serbia

hCa: Could you please tell us more about your party?

VO: The Party of Social-democracy is one of the youngest political parties in Serbia. On July 12, we will celebrate the second anniversary. In March of 1997, we were talking about our “come back” to politics. All of us were very active in politics in the 80s-90s, then for years we were dissociated from any political and public engagement. *(Note: Vuk Obradovic was the youngest general of the Yugoslav Army and its spokesmen until the beginning of the war in Slovenia (1991). He resigned from his position after his public*

promise to soldiers' mothers that their sons would return from Slovenia was not fulfilled. He has been stripped of rank.) There were two options. First – to join some of the existing political parties, and second – to create a new party. Our estimate was that none of the existing political parties in Serbia, both in the ruling and the opposition corps, deserved our confidence, because we were aware that Serbia should turn to new political projects. There was no dilemma about the profile of a new party; it was enough to look to the political map of Europe and to conclude that social-democratic parties dominate in modern European nations and states.

Since 1997 Socialdemocracy has had a dynamic and stormy development. Now it has 20,000 members with a wide network all over Serbia, excluding Kosovo and Metohija. In the meantime, the party has been recognized as the party of responsible people with the principle political opinion on all vital questions of Serbian and Yugoslav political life.

We strongly believe that when Serbia and Yugoslavia finally return to the family of modern European states, our party will be a part of the future of our country.

hCa: How do you see the development of the political situation in Serbia and FRY in next two-three months ?

VO: Only God knows what the near future will bring to this unhappy country. The outcome of events could take such directions that even the best political analysts cannot predict at the moment. For example what if ten protests suddenly erupt within Serbia, similar to Krusevac and Aleksandrovac. Krusevac was considered to be a bastion of SPS and JUL (*Note: Milosevic's and his wife's parties*) and one day, completely unexpected even for the democratic opposition, six thousand citizens went out to the streets and started to run after policemen and soldiers with the sticks. I just learned that a similar protest will happen in Cacak, on the 28th of June. (*Note: It did happen, with more than 15,000 protestors demanding Milosevic's resignation.*) We will do our best to control the people, but we cannot guarantee that something unreasonable will not happen. What if workers rise up against the regime, what if the Serbs – refugees from Kosovo – start to protest? What if someone in the Army stands up and says stop, it cannot go in this way anymore. Maybe Milosevic will do something with himself, who knows? What if Montenegro decides to separate from FRY? There are so many questions that can hardly be answered. The task for all of us who are active in politics is to prevent violence and bloody confrontations. In short, the near future will not be easier than the previous period, the only difference will be the fact that people will not be killed and the country will not be further destroyed.

hCa: What is the opinion of your party on the Kosovo issue and on the NATO intervention?

VO: Milosevic did not create the Kosovo problem. It is a problem, which for decades has burdened Serbia and ex-Yugoslavia. But, Milosevic and his nationalistic politics and practice have had a crucial role in the escalation of the Kosovo problem, in the way it has escalated. He abolished autonomy, he minimized the significance of Kosovo's problems, and he even did not want to recognize that Kosovo problem existed. On the other hand, Milosevic inflamed this problem. Our party on 26th of June last year issued its plan for the peaceful and democratic solution for Kosovo. This plan was distributed to the republic and federal authorities, as well as to Kosovo Albanians and all international leaders. In our plan there were two main points: the solution for the Kosovo problem should be reached in the frame of respect to the territorial integrity of Serbia; and the full recognition of all minority rights to Kosovars, in accordance with the highest international standards. We

also made a model for Kosovo's large autonomy. Even though we got verbal support from European leaders, like Kinkel, this plan has not been used as the basis of negotiations. Unfortunately nobody wanted to listen to us, neither the International Community nor our governments, that every solution was better than war. When the war started our main goal was to stop it, to save even one life, to shorten the war even for one minute - it was our patriotic duty. Because of this approach and our statements that Milosevic is responsible for the war we were accused as traitors, fifth column and CIA agents. We, of course, have no single word of excuse for what the International Community has done to our country. NATO strikes at some point were without any reasonable purpose, it was just punishing and destroying of one nation. Unfortunately, we cannot replace Clinton, Blair, Schroeder and the others. Our duty is to find out how much we contributed to the tragedy of our country and who is responsible for it. Our answer is clear - it is Slobodan Milosevic, and he must go away. He has fixed up all the tragedies he should, except one - a civil war in Serbia. We must stop his insane, nationalistic and inhuman politics, which can provoke our people to kill each other.

hCa: All of us are witnesses of the celebrations of the "victory over NATO". How do you see it?

VO: The big tragedy happened in Kosovo. The Albanians were touched the most and we are very sorry about it. But, in the name of truth, it should be said that all citizens of Yugoslavia were touched as well. Several thousand people died, more ran away. Material losses are such that Serbia is turned back 50 years. We welcomed the Belgrade agreement because killing and bombing were stopped. Now, Milosevic and his allies are celebrating the victory. There is no victory in this war. We are all losers. The biggest are the Albanians, Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo, then Serbia and FRY, but the International Community as well. If someone thinks that he has the victory in his hands then it could be only Pyrrhic victory. On the other hand, this is not the defeat of either the people of Serbia nor of the Army of Yugoslavia, they were very brave in the war. This is the defeat and capitulation of one kind of politics, this is the capitulation of the Yugoslav and Serbian authorities with Milosevic at the head.

hCa: What are the demands of your party?

VO: Our demands are clear. First, we ask the suspension of martial law, as well as all decrees especially those connected to media and political parties. This is the first thing that should be done. If the regime decides not to fulfill this demand we will not obey these rules. Second, we demand the resignation of Milosevic and other responsible officials of Serbia and FRY. Third, we ask for establishment of transitional republic and federal governments. The transitional governments should be composed of politically un-discredited persons. The new governments should have three main tasks - to take part in the negotiation process on the future of Kosovo, which should start as soon as possible; to schedule premature general elections on the republic and federal level in October/November of this year, and to create new relations with the International Community. We also demand the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the USA, Great Britain, France and Germany.

hCa: Why elections in October/November?

VO: We think that until this time it is possible to adopt a new Election law and the new Law on media, and to have a successful pre-election campaign. The elections should be under strong international control. Everything that Milosevic is doing now looks like a pre-election campaign, all these celebrations, speeches about reconstruction and other stupidities that can be seen on TV. It seems that he wants to have elections in September. The regime is very afraid of the winter, they are aware that at that time people will be completely out of money, there will be no heating, electricity, etc. So they will force elections before the winter.

hCa: How do you see the future of Serbia?

VO: Serbia must start reform in all fields, from the economy, the health system, education, to the military and police forces and state organisation. This reform should have four basic directions. First, Serbia needs political reconstruction and democratisation, which means a lot of things – from the passing of a new constitution to a different approach regarding the national question, as well as decentralisation and regionalisation of the country. Second, Serbia needs full economic reconstruction with a free market, enterprises, and trade unions as well as with a good tax system and stable currency. Third, we need complete reform in the social field, a reduction of bureaucracy, military and police forces, creation of cheap, modern state structures which should be replaceable and controllable. Fourth - integration into international institutions and organisations.

hCa: What is the position of the opposition in Serbia?

VO: The Serbian opposition, before the 24th of March, was in the phase of reaffirmation and rehabilitation. Unfortunately, this war punched us very strongly. Every single newspaper is under a strong censure, we cannot travel even to Novi Sad or Nis, to speak to the people. On the other hand, our members ask us what kind of democracy they should fight for – they do not want to fight for the Western type of democracy, which was bombing them. So, the position of the opposition is very delicate and very difficult.

Mr. Nebojša Čović, president of the Democratic Alternative of Serbia

hCa: How do you see the current political situation?

NC: Now we are in the phase of pre-culmination of the crises that started ten years ago. I do expect culmination this year, but I hope very much that civil war will not happen, although all factors are going in that direction. Milosevic used Kosovo from the very beginning to come to power. He misused citizens of Kosovo, who were voting for him and his allies, and he got votes for 40 representatives in the parliament of Serbia and 20 representatives in the federal parliament. For Milosevic it was the best solution to do nothing with the Kosovo problem. The status of Kosovo has never been clear, *de jure* it was a part of Serbia and FRY; *de facto* Kosovo functioned as a parallel state. Milosevic's main mechanism for manipulation is the media, and he still manipulates with all these ceremonies – every day one can see and read about the festive laying of cornerstones of pontoon bridges, and phantom factories. In the first seven days of the war Milosevic was waiting for the natural homogenisation of the people, which was very normal – when a country is attacked it is normal that people unite in its defense. Then Milosevic, via the media, identified this homogenisation as support for his politics.

On the other hand, the economic situation is catastrophic. Only 10% of the factories are working. A large number of people are unemployed. In such circumstances it is very hard to expect any political or economical perspectives for the country. I am afraid that the international community will again trade with Milosevic as they did last year. *(Note: Greek and Italian companies bought "Telecom" and gave 900 million DEM. With that money Milosevic calmed down the social tensions, when people openly protested demanding their pensions and salaries).*

hCa: Could you tell us more about the Alliance for Changes?

NC: In the middle of last year we, as the democratic opposition, created the Alliance for Changes, with six opposition parties and two individuals. Our party was one of the founders of this alliance. We were trying to unite all opposition democratic parties and the beginning of our work was very good. But, NATO aggression and the war provoked a division in our attitudes. I support the opinion that, no matter what Milosevic has done, and for sure he has done a lot of terrible things to all of us, it is not justification for NATO to bomb Serbia and FRY. All destroyed bridges, factories, hospitals and buildings are not the property of Milosevic. To justify the bombing with the explanation that the people in Serbia must change their minds and must correct themselves regarding Milosevic is counterproductive. Generations of ex-Yugoslavians were very enthusiastic about American and Western-European democracy, we wanted to copy this model and to have such democracy in our country. But, after the aggression of the NATO countries things have changed, and it will be very hard to explain to the citizens of Serbia and FRY which kind of democracy our country should reach for.

hCa: How do you see the involvement of the international community?

NC: Our last meeting with internationals was in London, 15 days before the war started. We told them what military aggression would bring to Serbia and FRY. Unfortunately, we were right, the international community made a big mistake, their estimates were wrong. They were counting that for them the easiest way to get rid from Milosevic was aggression. It is true that Milosevic's political days are numbered, but it could be done without so much blood and destruction. But the decision-makers did what they did. They are now in Kosovo and both Kosovo and Montenegro have the good prospects for the future. Serbia has been left in the lurch, with all problems.

hCa: Last days the hot issue is the Stability Pact for South Eeastern Europe. What is your opinion on it?

NC: The Pact will bring us a better future. I have learned from this document that Serbia has an important role in this project, but not with Milosevic in the power. Even not with a new leader who is similar to Milosevic. I support the Pact, but Milosevic started a new manipulation by saying that this document will deprive Serbs national identity. It is the regime's new game. We will not lose our national identity if we will have 30 thousand dollars per capita, we will anyhow lose it with one thousand dollars per capita, as is case now.

hCa: What do you think about demands for premature elections?

NC: Milosevic already started his campaign. He counts that, if he will be forced to have premature elections, the best time is when the people are in the phase of drowsiness. When the war was over, the people were in the phase of relief, now they are in depression and this phase will last some time. Then we will have a hangover, when people do not care about anything, and this would be the best time for Milosevic. Because of that, I am against having elections before the adoption of a new law and before we have free media and freedom of expression. Of course, any elections in this country must be under the control of the OSCE. But not with the OSCE I have experience with, when Milosevic obtained the monitors.

hCa: You were a part of Milosevic's politics for a long time. Why did you split up with him?

NC: I started to do politics in 1991. It would have been better if I broke my legs instead of that, because politics is some kind of drug. I left the Socialist Party because I could not accept the election fraud in November 1996. At that time I was a mayor of Belgrade. When Milosevic continued to molest me I said I would be back, especially because I worked off my mandate honestly in the very specific period of sanctions, and I was not politically discredited. I admit that Milosevic was smarter than I was, so he used me. The big problem is that he is very intelligent and he is excellent in putting the puzzle together in order to remain in power.

Mr. Goran Svilanović, president of Civil Alliance of Serbia

hCa: How do you see the current situation in Serbia?

GS: When we, the Civic Alliance, analyze the current situation in Serbia we are, on the one hand, optimistic, but it is hard to tell how far is this all going to go (especially the new role of Milosevic and Šešelj is unclear). But, in spite of all the optimism, there is a hard period in front of us, elections and also the poor state of civil (and citizens) rights in post-war Serbia.

hCa: What are political alternatives in post-war Serbia?

GS: There is a strong radical lobby around Milosevic, they are unhappy for being beaten in yet another war, and are looking for a new one. These people are following Šešelj and his policies. Šešelj is the man behind the law on media and the law on the university. The radical lobby has grown stronger with Šešelj entering the coalition government, and with his help they will eventually be able to replace Milosevic.

The prospect of living under Šešelj's rule is horrible. A somewhat better scenario would be temporary government, or the government of experts, which would be too much for Milosevic. This temporary government would consist of a "coalition" between the Serb Radical Party (Šešelj) and the Serb Renewal Movement (Draskovic), with the eventual replacement of the republic and Federal parliament (with Djukanovic).

Nowadays, Šešelj rules Serbia or said in better way he is "asked to rule Serbia", and he is getting more and more support because Šešelj is not making compromises like Milosevic.

hCa: How do you see ideas about premature elections?

GS: If the elections take place in this year, that would be a catastrophe from our point of view. Regular elections for local and federal institutions should take place in November of the 2000 (republic elections in 2001). Many people suggest that elections on all the levels should take place in 2000. Milosevic has already started his campaign, but that does not have to mean that he is going to shift elections to an earlier period. This winter is going to be really harsh, so he will maybe decide to have elections before winter, or if his analysis shows that the winter would not be such a bad period, then in the spring. It depends a lot on the energy situation, but they have better information than we do.

hCa: How fast will the situation in Kosovo improve?

GS: Currently, there is a massive campaign for returning Serbs to Kosovo. I am skeptical, about this campaign, all of Serbs wanting to move. The Serb problem is also that they have lived up to the role of being the dominant group in Kosovo, and they can not realize that this has changed. Serbs had power, Albanians had money, I do not think they will want to live there with a situation as such. Up until now, Kosovo, at least, did not have war, revenge and the genocide experiences that they have now, so this credit of a more or less peaceful coexistence has been spent now.

hCa: Do you think Albanians from Kosovo would want to enroll in political life in Serbia?

GS: We met with Bakali, Agani, Malici and others before the war. They have always been strongly opposed to any elections in the frame of Serbia. I suppose they oppose such an idea even more strongly now. Albanians want only the elections organised by the OSCE and only Kosovo-wide elections. They were not interested in the situation in Serbia, when we met in Paris, in November of last year, so I do not suppose they are more interested in it now.

hCa: Tell us please some more information about the Serbian opposition.

GS: The Serbian opposition is strongly divided, not only Slobodan Milosevic is a problem, but also divisions among us. Although Milosevic is going from one political defeat to another, we are not able to take him down. Citizens of Serbia would welcome a solid and respectable organisation, instead of Milosevic's corrupted regime, but none of the opposition has had a chance. There has always been a distance between the opposition and ordinary people, and we have to work in order to change that, to create an atmosphere of trust between the people and us. There is hope—the last local elections saw the opposition getting a grip on power in certain regions, cities and towns. Opposition representatives have stayed, in spite of many difficulties, in power. But in order to accomplish more, the opposition has to make personal changes, as we already did when I have replaced Vesna Pestic; the same people can not take us any further.

The Alliance for Changes, of which our party is a member, is a good thing, but we need a complete unification of all the democratic opposition forces in Serbia.

hCa: What do you think about the condition that Serbia will not get any help from the International Community until Milosevic is removed from the power?

GS: I think this decision is wrong. Isolating Milosevic through embargo suits him and helps him stay in power. It is possible to help cities and towns directly, where the opposition is in power. There are 46 municipalities where the opposition is in power. All

kinds of humanitarian help and support should be distributed to these municipalities directly--not over any Federal or republic structures, but through non-governmental organizations or non-governmental companies.

Mr. Žarko Korač, president of the Socialdemocratic Union od Serbia

hCa: How do you see the current political situation in Serbia?

ZK: My estimate is that Serbia is in a state of agony and dangerous instability, some kind of detrimental boiling pot. How the situation is dangerous could be seen from the example of Belgrade, where the SPO (*Serbian Renewal Movement*) is officially in power, but cannot rule without SPS (*Socialistic Party*) because the SPO has no absolute majority in the city assembly. That means that if SPS decides to pull the rug out from under Draskovic's feet, he will lose Belgrade in 24 hours. It could be predicted that in the next weeks a coalition between Milosevic's socialists and Seselj's radicals would try to take over power in Belgrade. What Draskovic will do then, no one knows. Maybe he will ask people for a demonstration, like in the winter 96/97. I must say that I will not be glad if the transition of power happens in the streets - Serbia is full of weapons; almost all people are very passionate; aside from 700,000 refugees from Croatia and BiH, there are now more than 40,000 refugees who fled Kosovo and who are in a traumatized psychological state. It could be very dangerous and bloody. I want to defeat Milosevic with democratic tools - he has to suffer a real defeat. On the other hand, someone must lead the street protest; the masses as such could not reach transition. This leading person could be someone completely unexpected, like Iliescu in Romania, and I am afraid of it. I would prefer this person to be someone I know, rather than someone who will rise from the street to the stage, and you do not know what is his approach. In short, I do not agree with those people, especially internationals, who think that in Serbia things could not be worse. In Serbia things could be worse than now, there still exist very strong nacionalistics right forces here. Seselj, for example, is a permanent sword of Democles over our heads.

hCa: What is the rating of particular political parties after the last events?

ZK: The recent very respectable poll shows an incredible fall in the popularity of the ruling SPS party; they have got only 20%. On the other hand, Vuk Draskovic and his SPO - for the first time have got an incredible 14%. (*The best results that party ever had was 9%*). The fall in the popularity of other parties is also very evident, especially of the Democratic Party and its leader Zoran Djindjic, who is politically dead in my opinion. (*Note: This is not only Korac's opinion, almost all people we spoke with shared this attitude. Djindjic left Belgrade at the beginning of the NATO air-strikes and moved to Montenegro.*)

It is very characteristic - this fall of both the position [ruling parties] and the opposition parties. It means that most of the election body is in favor of change, but this body also has not recognized any alternative option. The attitude of the Socialdemocratic Union is to create circumstances like in Slovakia and Croatia and to unite the opposition as the first step to the definitive transition.

hCa: You stressed the divisions among the opposition, as well as the fact that Vuk Draskovic, as the most popular politician, is not strong enough to fight alone against Milosevic. Keeping in mind all differences in the opposition, how it is possible to create any opposition block against the ruling regime?

ZK: There are several alliances among the opposition. There is the most known Alliance for Changes, but we created the Alliance of Democratic Parties. The name of this alliance, SDP - clearly shows that our final aim is to create a new, Socialdemocratic party of Serbia, uniting all of us.

hCa: What do you think about the ICTY indictments against Milosevic and his allies?

ZK: We are very disappointed with some things regarding the indictment. The Hague Tribunal has lost its credibility in Serbia because this court is just a political instrument. When we were asking for indictments they did not happen. They appeared when somebody was interested in them. We have some indications that the ICTY will change the indictments from crimes against humanity to genocide. There is the list of 300 people from Serbia who cannot enter the Europe, as well as a large list of companies the internationals are forbidden to trade with. We hope these lists will be enlarged; this is also a way internationals could help in the transition of the power.

hCa: How do you see the recent activities of the Milosevic's regime

ZK: The regime has already started with its propaganda. Milosevic, in contrast to his custom, visited Novi Sad and Aleksinac. He and his allies promised the reconstruction of the country without any international support. Milosevic openly said that they made secret plans for the reconstruction even before the war started. Now they are desperately trying to stop the exodus of Serbs from Kosovo. On the other hand we have the Orwell media rules in the country for the first time -- every evening all TV stations in the country must broadcast the main state TV news.

hCa: How do you see the role of the Serb Orthodox Church?

ZK: This is the second time in last two years that the Serb orthodox church openly asked for the resignation of Milosevic and his regime. The Kosovo myth was the only thing that was politically connecting them. Because of that fact it is impossible they are going to reconcile again.

hCa: There were many ideas about solving the status of Kosovo. What is your opinion on all this?

ZK: One of the ideas for solving this issue was the idea of exchanging Kosovo for Republika Srpska. It would mean, give Serbs Republika Srpska in exchange for Kosovo, which they have already lost ethnically. This idea was supported by Henry Kissinger, among others, and as you know it was refused. The second idea was the one about the division of Kosovo, one aspect was also this confrontation between NATO and the Russians. The idea of division was also supported by the Orthodox Church, and because the West opposed this idea it was also refused. I think there will be many problems with Kosovo, and I am not optimistic about that situation. Leaving the Kosovo-Albania border completely open is a great mistake; there is no control of who is entering Kosovo. I think that this crisis has landed in Macedonia, and it is possible that the Albanians will start creating their parallel state there. Macedonia will maybe turn into BiH, only without war, although many Macedonians are not sure if it is going to be peaceful at all. We have made an analysis of the resolution of the Security Council and we have come to the conclusion that it is very weak in many aspects. One of the things that is not mentioned at all, if you

have at least the formal sovereignty of Yugoslavia, is allowing presence of, at least, symbolic number of Yugoslav Army troops on the border of Kosovo. Nobody is trying to find a permanent solution for Kosovo, this problem has been shifted to a five or fifteen year period.

hCa: What do you think about Rugova's position after this war and how do you see the political situation in Kosovo?

ZK: By supporting the KLA the West is eliminating Rugova from the position of being representative of Kosovo Albanians. I did everything I could to convince the West not to eliminate him; Rugova cannot even return to Kosovo because KFOR would not guarantee him safety if he did so. I think that Rugova has not lost as much support as he is considered to have lost. Many Albanians are aware that they have twice elected Rugova to be their president. Rugova has never given up on the idea of an independent Kosovo, even when he was taking a lot less radical positions, and was ready for compromises. Nobody can predict the behavior of the Albanian election body, in Kosovo, in the coming period. We do not know if it is going to become more and more radical or just partially radical, but I think a chance is being given to a group of people that lead the KLA; it is a group of young and radical people unsatisfied by the situation in Kosovo. I do not think that this organisation or these people represent the interests of the majority of Albanian people in Kosovo. The statement made by some Albanians, that they would live with the Serbs, also should not be underestimated. Things are very confusing there right now, it is understandable after all these killings, Agani for instance, and all the other things that had happened. Relations between many Albanian politicians in Kosovo are very hostile; the opinion that all the Albanian politicians are united is wrong. Along with that there has been a serious twist in Albania as well, Sali Berisha now supports Rugova, and Majdani, the president, supports Taci. So we are not sure how will the situation develop, because support from Albania is also an important factor for Kosovo, they watch TV Tirana etc. We have to stop the possibility of repeating the BiH scenario, you know very well, once the shifting of ethnic groups occurs there is no going back. So it means it has to be stopped before it starts. There are already many cases of robbery, revenge, killings and such things. KFOR has also made many fundamental mistakes, their plan is a military plan; they do not account for civilians [in their mandate] and are not flexible, they do not adapt to the situation on the field. Orders are given and they have to be fulfilled; they should instead try to make some changes, and protect the civilians.

Mr. Milos Grabundzija, member of the head body of the Yugoslav Action Group from Vojvodina

(Note: the Pancevo municipality has 127,000 inhabitants. During the NATO intervention this town was severely destroyed because of its chemical and petroleum industry.)

hCa: Could you please tell us something more about the Yugoslav Action Group and its activities?

MG: I would like to start in chronological order, because I was one of the founders of this NGO. We wanted to make an organisation where all of the initiatives would come from people, and an organisation that would work, in a first place, to satisfy the needs of our citizens. Creating such an organisation would be our contribution to creating civil society

in Serbia. That is very hard to accomplish, or to be more precise it is impossible to accomplish such a goal, with the current system in our country. YAG is lobbying to change certain passages in the Constitution. We have already started to work on our proposal for these changes, or even for adopting a new Constitution. Our organisation also wants to change a law about local structures and their role in the political system. In another words, we want to work on the decentralisation of power and expanding the competence and responsibilities of local governing structures.

hCa: Can you comment on the current situation in Serbia, and describe actions that you are planning?

MG: The coming period is going to be very hard, there is lot of persecution--for instance one of our colleagues has been arrested; two men-refugees who have fled Kosovo have been arrested under the charge of not "informing the police about the change of their place of residence," etc. We think these things do not suit modern civil society. Yugoslav Action Group wants, on the basis of public opinion and the wishes of our population, to put pressure on the government, in the name of these citizens, to start solving these problems--these arrests--along with all the problems concerning or endangering the rights of our citizens. We do not want to take over the role of state institutions; we want, in the name of our citizens, to monitor the activities of these institutions. These institutions have to deal with the problems that are under their competence, they have to fulfill their constitutional obligations. We are also of that opinion that some kind of Marshall plan should be adopted by the International Community, not only for Serbia , but for the whole territory of ex-Yugoslavia, as this territory is a compact area. We have also been against the war, against martial law and against the practice that has taken place during this war of ruling the state by regulations and decrees. The Yugoslav Action Group also works on enlarging its network that would cover all the state. We want to adopt a regional policy for the YAG because the different regions of this country face their specific problems. The situation, and the problems in Novi Pazar, for instance, are different from the situation in Vranje, not to mention those in Kosovo. We want to show the presence of a positive force in Serbia and to support every party or NGO which has declared creating a civil society as their main goal. We, the Pancevo people, in the frame of the Yugoslav Action Group, are also making projects in order to create new employment positions, opening small businesses, repairing destroyed ones, etc., and developing the local economy and attracting foreign investors to our region.

hCa: Can you comment on the situation during the war in your region and the damages caused to your region?

MG: This war has been a great catastrophe to our city and our region as a whole. During the bombing campaign, much of the cities' industry and infrastructure were destroyed, including many non-army facilities. The much bigger catastrophe, that will not have influence just on this region but to the whole of Europe, is the destroying of three factories producing chemical products: a petro-chemical factory, a petroleum refinery and a fertiliser factory. A great threat occurs by combining the poisons that have been released into the atmosphere by destroying these facilities. Many other facilities, military and non-military, have also been destroyed, including the buildings of airplane factory Lola-Utva, which has been out of use for seven years. This bombing has left more than 7000 people without work, the 3000 people that worked in Lola-Utva are not included in this 7000. We are very

well aware what this game of world powers and our government has brought to us; it has brought only bombs, poison and unemployment.

hCa: How can we, the hCa, help Pancevo?

MG: Pancevo can be helped through connecting Pancevo with the other structures of your organisation. We want to be informed and in synch with European and world trends and policies. The concrete help you, the hCa, could give to us is in organising seminars that will help us co-ordinate our policies with the policies of the European Union. We are in Europe and we see our future only in the frame of the European Union. These seminars would, of course, require the presence of representatives of the European Union, and you, as a influential NGO, could maybe help us with that. We are willing to be a part of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly. In matters of global policies we would like to consult with the hCa. We are also prepared to give our contribution to the work of the hCa through different actions, seminars, and campaigns, organised by our activists.

Mr. Vlada Deanovic, president of the Assembly of the Independent trade union of pensioners of Serbia

hCa: Can you please tell us your opinion on the last events that took place in Serbia?

VD: We have to work towards changing the current government structures. That has to be done in the first place for the welfare of the younger generations; there are no good prospects for them. We do not want to be a "social case of Europe", to depend only on the humanitarian aid for years and years to come. Our wish is to get into Europe so that the people could see that we are not all beasts. There are many beasts here; we know that better than anyone, and we do not question that, but we do not want to pay for the crimes of Serbs that have behaved like beasts. We also think that it is necessary, after all that has happened, to ask the West many important questions. They, the West, have created Slobodan Milosevic. He, Milosevic, was entitled, by the West, to sign the Dayton agreement, a peace agreement in another state. So they have considered him to be someone who could sign that agreement, but when he does something against their wishes we get bombs. I think that they, the West, have their share of the responsibility in all this and they have to admit it to themselves.

hCa: Can you please, as a president of the Assembly of the Independent trade union of pensioners of Serbia, tell us something about the current situation of pensioners in Serbia?

VD: Serbia has 1,270,000 pensioners, 70 percent of them have income of 70 DM per month, on average. These pensions are, after paying the rent, telephone etc., too little to live a semi-normal life. After all this, even these small pensions are coming late and the people are in a big crisis, they do not have money for food and medicine. Last year in Serbia 40,000 pensioners passed away; suicide was a very frequent cause of death. I fear that, after all this, this already large number will dramatically increase. Last year we, the pensioners, had 18 protest meetings in Belgrade and 11 in Pancevo, but until the rest of the population starts complaining about their life conditions--workers get approximately 200 DM, which is also terrible--we can not do anything.

Mr. Dusan Janjic, president of Forum for ethnic relations

hCa: What do you think happened during the NATO strikes?

DJ: A completely new phenomenon, I call it “new patriotism” appeared then. It was horrible at the beginning. For example, some intellectuals explain that the USA is the originator of ethnic cleansing and genocide. People are shaming their professions, their approaches and everything; and their conversion mostly ruined the chances of the so-called democratic opposition and touched even the third sector. The fact is that people who were connected with American funds and foundations the most, are becoming the biggest Serbs. Probably because of fear they started to protect themselves with patriotism. Can you imagine that Sonja Licht has become a patriot? That was funny in every way but really tasteless, you know these expressions ... "those barbarian strikes, caused by nothing". One part of the political leaders and individuals went that way; the other part, like Vuk Obradovic who counted on NATO too much took another way. Obradovic's statements were brave and clear, but there was a problem - the timing, his members did not like this brave attitude only against Milosevic, they wanted the same statements against NATO. This group of people believed that everything would be over in 15 days, that Milosevic's regime would fall, and they would come into power. The same way Sonja Licht and the others believed that NATO is going to lose the battle here, and that Milosevic is staying for the next 200 years.

hCa: What happened with the non-governmental sector in Serbia?

DJ: The NGO sector was particularly divided. One part, those who were well informed, ran away, and they did it in a panic, believing that Milosevic would fall quickly. And then two sorts of behaviour started. Behaviour that was supposed to prepare money for the return of the people who ran away, immediately. With, of course, the main stories that there is nothing to do in the country. And the other behaviour which is really marginal, in few cases it broke an organisation. For example, Sonja Biserko, she fell into the propaganda machine of NATO. Madeline Albright welcomed her, The New York Times published that Serbian voice that asks for continuation of the strikes appears, while she did not inform, and not to mention, she did not organise her organisation to work. That means that generally the non-governmental sector is ruined, even such strong anti-regime organisations as the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights and the Humanitarian Law Centre.

hCa: Tell us something about the work of the YAG.

DJ: At the beginning, 16 organisations came together, to see what to do. It started on March 28, and already on April 1 we had 40 organisations. Then we started with the appeals. Our general opinion was: we are against violence, the regime caused the situation that led to war, but also we say no to NATO strikes and we say no to ethnic cleansing. That means we always held to those three things: criticism of the regime, criticism of NATO strikes, and criticism of ethnic cleansing of the Albanians. So we already in the second announcement, on April 13, wanted our place, that means YAG, as a representative of civil society in future negotiations about the implementation of a political solution for Kosovo and participation in implementation. For that reason there is our Civil house in Pristina. The second thing we want is to form a Permanent conference of NGOs from the Balkans about peace, reconciliation, development, co-operation and security, with the idea that the

conference should have different shapes of work, but there is one basic goal: to reach the Stability Pact. We only can articulate this idea to the level we did and to fight out strongly. Realisation must be carried by much more factors, including non-Balkan NGOs. Two things happened. When we started to do that, local movement parties started to join us and the large anti-war movement started. There are three fields we are going to work on: human rights, trade unions and social rights, and ecology. When the elections come YAG has two possibilities. Either to lobby and give our votes to one of the parties or to demand to lead some parties itself. We are closer to the second possibility; we think that the YAG has more a mature leadership than the parties.

hCa: How could the hCa support YAG?

DJ: I think you could be interested in two possible projects. Civil houses in Kosovo and Sandzak. Specially Sandzak because the hCa was very active in that area. You can have your own offices, your own projects as well as comon projects with the YAG or other NGOs. Particularly, Sandzak is a very important area because we still can prevent the conflict that could arise there. We want to organise the Civil houses as the main point for different purposes -- to make counsels for human rights, a center for reconciliation, a center for civil education, but we slowly want to make friendship through those public places, cafes and so on. We already have a Serb-Albanian workshop, inside the house, but in the beginning it would be just relaxed book promotions, a few scientific discussions, etc. Then we are going to try to do some projects on reconciliation, mutual understanding, multi culturalism, etc. We have the same plan for a Civil house in Sandzak, and I think that the role of hCa International is crucial in that issue.

hCa: What is your opinion on premature elections?

DJ: I am against the premature elections. I have worked a lot with America and Europe, and I know it is in their interest to have the elections in three months, but it can only harm the opposition. I am saying that premature elections are just the Americans' excuse that democratisation is not possible, to make new military escalation and to stay in this region for a long time.

Mrs. Biljana Kovačević Vučo, coordinator of the Yugoslav Action Group

hCa: What do you think about this after-war period and especially about the amnesty for deserters from the Yugoslav Army?

BKV: Amnesty is one of our main projects, a main political campaign of the YAG. Right now we are examining the public opinion on this issue; we cannot address the population with this yet. Our organisation is doing a survey, in Belgrade, in order to see whether the population of this city agrees with amnesty. We do not present this proposal as a political amnesty, as in BiH, for all the actions in the war, but we only want this amnesty for the deserters. We are awaiting the results of our survey and we are quite sure that the results will be disastrous.

hCa: How can we, the hCa, help your organisation, the YAG, with this campaign?

BKV: In this amnesty campaign, the help of an organisation such as yours is very necessary and wanted. We would like to have your support in the lobbying and your help

with this campaign. You should convince the International Community that this amnesty would be in their interest too. If this law is passed then, the people could return safely to their homes and that is one of the goals that the West has declared to be their priority. We would also need your concrete help for creating a budget for this campaign, consulting and to help us with acquiring top priorities so we could start our work to the fullest, because in the current situation we are able to be involved only in personal cases. Our colleagues are doing this in their free time and, because of the lack of support, we are unable to launch a massive campaign.

Mr. Miljenko Dereta, president of the Civic Initiatives

hCa: How do you see a role of foreign NGOs in these recent events in Serbia?

MD: They, the foreigners, have made many serious mistakes and have shown an absolute lack of information about the situation. And I have to say that the actions of many foreign NGOs, for instance statement of Norwegian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights--as a reaction on our appeal, had meant a serious blow to us as an organisation. The HCHR is a respected and influential organisation and their position made many of our friends insecure. We were forced to answer many questions and give many explanations over and over again. We have to work on changing the view of the situation issued by many foreign NGOs. This binary view, one is bad, the other is good, is the main problem we are facing in our relations with foreign NGOs. If one is against the NATO intervention it does not mean that he/she is Milosevic supporter. On the contrary, the more common opinion was and still is to be against both NATO's methods and Milosevic.

Mr. Milutin Matic, coordinator of Forum for ethnic relations, Kragujevac

hCa: Can you please tell us about the new situation in Serbia, after this war?

MM: I think the situation in Serbia is now completely different and nothing is the same as it was before all this. A lot of things have changed, and we have to take full advantage of that. That means we have to change the way we act and behave and to change, or modify, many organisations and to changes the people in power, not only government but also the people leading the opposition forces. Our political organising in Serbia has to be different. I think that after all this, all the parties, the ones in power and the ones in the opposition have spent their credit, and we have to look for new forms of organizing. A party is no longer satisfactory, we have to go towards a mass movement. There is a good time for it now, there was a war and the people have shown great solidarity and unity over issues of defending the country, defending freedom and defending Kosovo and many other issues. Now while this unity is still strong I think is the right time for a movement to be born, a democratic movement that would replace everything we had, on the political field, in Serbia up until now. We need to change the leaders, left and right, and new, politically educated and un-discredited leaders should take their places. We need people from the top all the way to villages and cities.

hCa: How could the International Community help you achieve such a goal?

MM: The International Community has to change their stand towards our country, the IC should welcome such an initiative and realize that a movement as such would like to cooperate with the IC. We need two major approaches. First, that this Yugoslav Action Group has a chance to grow into the democratic movement, with clear political ideas. And the second is a financial approach, or that all the finances for the Serbia go under our movement. If that would be accomplished I think the situation in Serbia would change rapidly and soon we would have a completely different picture of Serbia.

hCa: What do you think about lobbying for change of the Law of media?

MM: I think that is only a partial solution. My belief is that the only way is to set elections for a Constitutional Assembly, and meeting the requirements for it to start from the beginning. That assembly would create a new Constitution, which would be different from everything that we had until now, and would legalize a new political organisation and set new economic relations, including also freedoms and rights of all citizens according to international practice and all the other things that the Constitution should contain. In the frame of the Constitution Kosovo's status should also be included, because this status is now very unclear. This process should start right now.

Note: Evaluation and analyses by the mission members as well as the suggestions for the hCa involvement in re-establishing of the civil society in FRY will be sent in the next few days.