

Introduction

HISTORY OF MODERN SERBIA

CHRONOLOGY

1804 - 2006

In order to fully understand present-day Serbia, its doubts and failures, one must look back into history. By doing so, one will not find all the answers but will get a better grasp of the problem.

During the 19th century, Serbia followed, for the most part, in the footsteps of more advanced European nations. Its history was little different than that of its neighbors, Romania, Bulgaria or Greece. The entire century was chiefly marked by a long-lasting process of modernization, nation building and social emancipation.

In the course of the 20th century, two key events altered Serbia's path to modernity. The first was the creation of Yugoslavia in 1918 and the second was the victory of Communism in 1945.

Before embarking on an analysis of Serbia's present, pointing out crucial events in the last 200 years of Serbian history seems most appropriate.

1804 - 1903

After centuries of Ottoman rule, Serbian peasant leaders rose against the Turks in the First Serbian Insurrection, early in 1804. Despite considerable success in liberating the country coupled by the beginnings of State building, the Serbian rebels could not endure long against a far more powerful adversary. Their com-

mander was Karadjordje Petrovic (Black George), a well-off peasant from central Serbia with some military experience as a frontier fighter for Austria against Turks in the 1790s. The war of independence lasted until 1813 when finally crushed by the Ottomans.¹

Two years later another prominent Serb, Milos Obrenovic, instigated the Second Serbian Insurrection with the identical end: To liberate the country from Ottoman rule. Unlike his predecessor whose struggle was one of constant fighting, Milos sought to negotiate, and finally won autonomous status for Serbia in 1830, including hereditary succession. Serbia was entitled - an autonomous Principality

It turned out that the two leaders of the two uprisings founded the two rival dynasties (Karadjordjevic and Obrenovic), whose members would replace one another on the Serbian throne throughout the 19th century.

Along with fighting the Ottomans, Serbs met many challenges in developing their own government and administration. Knowing little of building public institutions, their early experience was that of unlimited power of the Crown Prince, voluntarism of the ruling elite, widespread abuse of authority and frequent power struggles among leaders. The initial effort to adopt a Constitution in 1835 proved a success in view of its modern and democratic character (it was drafted by a Serbian intellectual from Vienna) but was short-lived, since Prince Milos Obrenovic would have no limitations on his power².

Political, economic and cultural ideas from Western Europe gradually infused Serbia, late in the 1850s. Their champions were the first generation of Serbs to receive their education abroad. Strongly influenced by romantic liberalism in Europe ("national liberation and individual freedom are two sides of the same coin") they shared the same dream as their mentors in Italy,

¹ Russia and Turkey previously concluded a peace treaty in Bucharest (1812).

² He abdicated in 1839 and left Serbia, only to be called back to the Serbian throne in 1858. He died in 1860. Serbia was ruled by Karadjordje's son Prince Aleksandar Karadjordjevic for 16 years before he was removed from power by a popular vote in 1858.

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Germany or Poland. The idea of a cultural and political unification of all Serbs in the Habsburg and Ottoman empires (developed in the well-known document entitled "*Nacertanije*"³ in 1844) reflected similar national agendas throughout Europe. Polish nationalist Adam Chartorysky encouraged Serbian statesman Ilija Garasanin to develop the document, while Czech Frantisek Zach helped draft it.

From 1860 to 1868, Serbia was led by Prince Mihailo Obrenovic, younger son of Prince Milos, an enlightened despot impressed by European culture and manners rather than its political ideas and institutions. Well educated, Mihailo dreamed of a Balkan alliance against the Turks, but did not live to see his dream come true. He was killed in an assassination plot (1868), the background of which was never fully revealed.

War between Serbia and Turkey, from 1876 to 1878, was triggered by a Serbian revolt in Herzegovina in 1875. Serbia did not exactly win the war, although Russia joined, in 1877. Rather, it was imperial Russia that used the victory to impose its own order in the Balkans. According to the provisions of the Treaty of San Stefano (March 1878), Greater Bulgaria was created (stretching from the Black to the Aegean seas) as an exponent of Russian interests in the Balkans.

Alarmed at the outcome, European powers called for an international conference presided over by the German Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck (Congress of Berlin, July 1878). Final provisions of the treaty granted full independence to Serbia and Montenegro, allowed the Habsburg Empire to occupy Bosnia-Herzegovina (Ottoman territories) and establish military control over Sandjak of Novi Pazar (an Ottoman dominion located between Serbia and Montenegro); Greater Bulgaria was to be dissolved and Bulgaria proper partitioned between the autonomous region of Eastern Rumelia and the autonomous Principality of Bulgaria, both under Ottoman sovereignty.

³ "The Draft". The document was secret until the beginning of the 20th century.

In 1882 Serbia became a Kingdom; its first King in modern history became Milan Obrenovic, grand nephew of Prince Milos Obrenovic⁴.

The earliest political parties emerged about the same time. First, the National Radical Party⁵, founded in 1881, developed an ideology based on democratic principles, constitutionalism, broad decentralization based on local self-government, secularization and free and compulsory primary education. Very much under the influence of French Radicals of Leon Gambetta and Georges Clemenceau, Serbia's Radicals uncompromisingly opposed King Milan's personal power. Two more political parties were founded soon after the Radicals, the Progressivists (conservative intellectuals loyal to the King) and the Liberals (pro-Russian intellectuals).

Strong pressure from the Radicals forced the King to endorse a democratic Constitution in 1888, introducing a parliamentary system with nearly universal suffrage and strict limitations to monarchical prerogatives, free press, local self-government and free education. King Milan soon abdicated in favor of his son Aleksandar Obrenovic and left the country. Serbia's new sovereign was no more a democrat than his father and abolished the Constitution in 1894.

King Aleksandar Obrenovic and his wife were assassinated in 1903, in a plot organized and carried out by a group of young military officers. The 1888 Constitution was restored, Petar Karadjordjevic, grandson of Karadjordje Petrovic, was elected the new King and the Radicals finally came to power.

⁴ In 1881 King Milan signed the so called "Secret Convention" with Austria-Hungary that made Belgrade completely dependent on Vienna.

⁵ Chairman for life was Nikola Pasic (1845-1926), a statesman with an extraordinary career stretching over 50 years. In his time, Pasic was Prime Minister of 19 cabinets (9 in Serbia and 10 in Yugoslavia). He outlived three monarchs and served under four. Pasic was the chief architect of the Yugoslav unification in 1918.

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1903 - 1918

The period from 1903 to 1914 is often described as the "Golden Decade" in modern Serbian history. Serbia was structured as a parliamentary monarchy with functioning democratic system; its economic growth was steady and budgetary discipline strict.

From 1904, Serbia had free and democratic elections on a regular basis, as well as quite developed free press. The first independent political daily in the Balkans was launched in Belgrade in 1904⁶. Belgrade's "Velika skola" ("High School") was upgraded to University of Belgrade in 1905. New political parties were founded; the most interesting among them being the Serbian Social Democrats, created in 1903, whose chairman was at one time the Speaker of the Parliament.

Serbia not only emerged victorious from an economic war with Austria-Hungary in 1905, but was successful in liberating its foreign trade from the Habsburg dominance⁷. Serbia's economy was mostly agricultural and its produce reached markets all over Europe, bringing in substantial foreign exchange. During this period, Serbia had solid economic development that enabled stability of its domestic currency (dinar), which was fully convertible and equivalent to the Swiss franc.

Throughout the 19th century Serbia went through a process of Westernization, rejecting old Ottoman and local traditions to embrace European lifestyles, ways of thinking and social organization. Land reform carried out early in 1830s facilitated this process.

Unofficial, yet continuing, political influence wielded by the military officers who conspired against King Aleksandar Obrenovic cast a dark shadow on burgeoning Serbia in the first decade of the 20th century. By 1911, they had control over a large secret

⁶ "Politika" celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2004.

⁷ Until then about 90% of Serbia's foreign trade was with Austria.

organization in the army⁸. Their program was based on extreme Serbian nationalism (liberation and unification of all Serbs) applying terrorist methods and posed a serious threat not only to neighboring countries, but to Serbia's political order as well.

The decision of Vienna to annex Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 almost triggered a war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia. The local Serbs⁹ responded harshly, as did the government in Belgrade. The Russian Emperor interceded in the last moment and the crisis was defused. As a result, relations between Austria-Hungary and Serbia deteriorated even more.

Serbia's foreign policy at the time turned from pro-Austrian under King Milan to pro-European under the Radicals. In 1912 and 1913 Serbia participated in two Balkan wars¹⁰ and emerged victorious from both. Consequently, it gained territories to the south (Vardar Macedonia), driving Turkey out of the Balkans with only small area around Adrianople left¹¹.

Serbia's name stands in every history book due to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Habsburg heir to the throne, in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. The assassin was a young Serbian nationalist and the conspiracy was masterminded by a secret Serbian organization called "Unity or Death"¹². The incident triggered WWI.

In 1914 and 1915, the Serbian army carried off a few surprising and heroic victories against the far stronger Austrian army, at one point completely liberating the country of enemy troops. But after a joint German-Austrian attack and a Bulgarian campaign from the southeast, the Serbian army, together with its government and Parliament, embarked on a lengthy retreat across the

⁸ The official title was "Unity or Death," better known as the "Black Hand", led by Dragutin Dimitrijevic called "Apis", counterintelligence officer in the Serbian military.

⁹ According to official Austrian figures, ethnic Serbs accounted for 44% of the population in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1910.

¹⁰ First against Turkey, second against Bulgaria.

¹¹ Albania was recognized as an independent State.

¹² In July 1917, the masterminds of the assassination were court-martialed by a Serbian military tribunal and received harsh prison sentences. Dragutin Dimitrijevic "Apis" and two other conspirators were sentenced to death and executed immediately.

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Albanian mountains in the hope of reaching the coast of the Ionian Sea. Suffering heavy losses, the Serbian soldiers finally found refuge on the Greek island of Corfu in 1916. After recovering and reorganizing, the Serbian army was transferred to northern Greece, where it joined the Allied forces (French, British, Italian and Greek) to form the Salonika front.

The robust military campaign was launched in September 1918 and ended successfully by November. Serbia emerged from the war as one of the great victors against the Central Powers.

The effect of four years of warfare was disastrous. Serbia lost almost half of its population and its army suffered severe loss of life and the country was ravaged after three years of occupation.

In summer 1917, the Serbian government opened talks with representatives of South Slavs from Austria-Hungary¹³. The two parties issued a declaration after the conference, expressing willingness for the creation of a common Yugoslav State after the war, rallying all South Slavs in the Balkans and joining their territories (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina) with the Kingdom of Serbia. They also agreed that the new State should be a monarchy under the Serbian Karadjordjevic dynasty¹⁴.

Yugoslav unification took place in Belgrade on 1 December, 1918. The official name of the new State was - Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. A few days prior to the event, Montenegro and Vojvodina declared their integration with Serbia.

¹³ The Austrian South Slavs were represented by the Yugoslav Committee, a political organization founded in Paris in 1915. It is worth noting that Austro-Hungarian South Slavs repeatedly requested to be allowed participation at the Versailles Peace Conference, but were rejected every time.

¹⁴ Document known as the Corfu Declaration.

1918 - 1941

Yugoslavia was sadly misfortunate from inception. Rifts between the two largest ethnic groups, Serbs and Croats¹⁵ and their political elites, stamped the period between the wars in Yugoslavia.

The first confrontation arose on the new Yugoslav Constitution. The majority of Croats rallied in one political party (Croatian Peasant Party) and supported a federal type of state organization giving Croatia a high level of autonomy. Serbs were divided among several political parties (Democrats, Radicals, Agrarians and several smaller parties) and proposed a number of options for the new Constitution, ranging from centralism with a strong monarchical status, to broad decentralization with local self-government and autonomous regions based on the historical principle. After more than two years of bitter political debate, the acting King (Aleksandar Karadjordjevic, the great-grandson of Karadjordje Petrovic) imposed his view of a centralized state with powerful royal prerogatives. The Constitution was passed in Parliament by a narrow majority, since the Croat Peasant Party and the Communists boycotted the vote, in June of 1921. Instead of becoming the cornerstone of the unified State, the Constitution became a source of deeper tension between Serbs and Croats.

In subsequent years, the political climate in the country became heated to the point of open conflict. The crisis culminated in 1928 when a Serbian nationalist shot at three Croatian deputies during a session of Parliament, being provoked by their insults. Stjepan Radic, the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party and undisputed political leader in Croatia, was mortally wounded and died soon after¹⁶. Yugoslavia was on the verge of a civil war.

In January 1929, King Aleksandar issued a decree assuming all political authority. He banned all political parties and dis-

¹⁵ It is important to note that Serbs are Eastern Orthodox Christians who established their independent (autocephalous) church early in the 13th century, while Croats are Roman Catholics.

¹⁶ The tragic incident took place on 20 June, 1928. Stjepan Radic died 49 days later on 8 August, 1928.

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solved the Parliament. It was a *coup* followed by Aleksandar's personal rule. Beside its authoritarian character, the new regime was strongly based on integral Yugoslavism and thus hoped to ease the ethnic divisions. Despite the immense effort, it achieved little. By 1931, Aleksandar ended personal rule and proposed a new Constitution, practically legitimizing his government and allowing restricted civil liberties.

King Aleksandar was assassinated by a Macedonian terrorist during his visit to France, in Marseilles in October 1934. The plot was put together by a fascist Croatian organization (the "Ustashi") that was supported and financed by revisionist circles in Italy and Hungary. The Ustashi were never held accountable, although the debate about their involvement continued until WWII broke out.

Naturally, the tragic incident deepened the crisis and distrust between Serbs and Croats escalating to ethnic hatred.

King Aleksandar was succeeded by his first cousin Prince Pavle who assumed royal prerogatives in the name of Aleksandar's minor son Petar¹⁷. A British graduate and champion of the "policy of appeasement", Pavle avoided confrontation with Italy and Germany. The international course Yugoslavia pursued is best defined as "active neutrality". Seeing major European powers retreating before Hitler and making important concessions and the domestic situation extremely volatile, Prince Pavle and his government tried to stay out of the conflict in Europe.

At home, Pavle felt it necessary to address the disturbed relations between the Serbs and Croats. In August 1939, agreement was reached proposing larger Croatian territory and the broadest autonomy (Banovina Croatia). The effect was not what Pavle had hoped for. Now that the Croats were satisfied, the Serbs felt betrayed. Prince Pavle saw the maneuver as a segment of a larger picture of the "policy of appeasement". Influenced by his London friends, he followed their example with loyalty so typical of the British.

¹⁷ The Royal Regency consisted of three members; Prince Pavle was the first Regent, while the other two Regents had practically no political influence.

But by 1941, that policy was no longer in effect. Yugoslavia was forced to take a side. In March, Prince Pavle went to Germany to meet Hitler and a deal was made: Yugoslavia was to join the Axis formally, but it was up to her own independent judgment to choose the precise time of becoming actively involved. In the meantime, Yugoslavia had no obligations toward the Axis, except to allow German supply shipments to pass through the country on the way to Greece. Hitler guaranteed Yugoslavia's territorial integrity as well. The pact was signed on March 25, 1941¹⁸.

The next day, Belgrade was the center of large-scale demonstrations against the pact. Traditional anti-German sentiments were inflamed among Serbs by a network of British agents who flooded Belgrade in 1940-1941, which sparked another political crisis.

A speedy and bloodless military *coup* took place early in the morning on 27 March. Prince Pavle and his government were dismissed and young King Petar was declared of age which enabled him to assume complete royal duties. The new cabinet was headed by an Air Force General and included many prominent Serb and Croat politicians.

Yugoslavia was on the brink of war.

1941 - 1945

Germany attacked Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941. The Nazis bombed Belgrade and other major cities heavily and with full capacity. In a desperate attempt to defy the Germans, the Yugoslav army could hold out no longer than eleven days. Yugoslavia capitulated by mid-April¹⁹.

¹⁸ Hitler obviously wanted to secure southeastern Europe as soon as possible prior to his major campaign in the Soviet Union. He already had Romania and Bulgaria on his side and was mainly concerned about Yugoslavia and Greece.

¹⁹ King Petar Karadjordjevic, his immediate family and the government fled from the country and moved to London.

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The country was immediately occupied and partitioned among the Axis powers and their satellites. On April 10, the Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed in Zagreb under the supreme authority of the Third Reich. Essentially, it was a puppet state controlled by the "Ustashi" organization²⁰.

A group of Yugoslav military officers who escaped German capture rallied in Western Serbia and started the first resistance movement against the occupier (early May 1941). Their leader was then Col. Dragoljub-Draza Mihailovic. They instantaneously announced their loyalty to the King and government-in-exile.

Only after Hitler broke the August 1939 pact with Stalin and attacked Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 (plan "Barbarossa") the Yugoslav Communists²¹ decided to take action. Their resistance did not begin before July.

The two movements had sporadic contact in fall 1941, and eventually clashed against each other. It was specifically this conflict that stamped the civil war in Yugoslavia. Ideological differences and opposite visions of the postwar political system in the country, increasingly widened the gap between the two movements. There was no space left for compromise²².

From the strategic point of view, Yugoslavia was of no particular interest for the Great Powers during the war (except for a short while when Winston Churchill considered the possibility of the opening of the Adriatic front). It was on the outskirts of the war in Europe and came into focus when the Western Allies and the Soviets raised the question of their respective areas of influence after the war. Yugoslavia was more important at confer-

²⁰ The Ustashi were responsible for massive war crimes and genocide against non-Croats (Serbs, Jews, and Roma). Emulating the Nazis, they set up several concentration camps (Jasenovac was the most notorious) where hundreds of thousands of people were tortured and murdered.

²¹ The partisan movement was led by Josip Broz Tito, Secretary General of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (since 1937) and former agent of the Comintern. The first movement is often referred to as "Royalist" or "Chetnik" and the second as "Communist" or "Partisan".

²² In fall 1941, the German authorities in Serbia punished the death of every German soldier by executing 100 civilians. Basically, this made any overt resistance pointless. In towns of Kragujevac and Kraljevo about 12,000 people were executed in October 1941 alone.

ences and negotiations among the victors than in strategic war plans.

Yugoslavia's future was settled in spring 1943, if not earlier²³. After the Allies eliminated the possibility of opening a second front in Europe by taking the Yugoslav Adriatic coast, Yugoslavia was obviously headed toward the Soviet sphere of interest. As a result of this arrangement, the Red Army entered Yugoslavia in October 1944, advancing from Bulgaria and decisively contributing to the ultimate collapse of the German occupying force in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav Communists came to power together with the Soviet army and thanks to their overt support.

Things were not so clear in and about Yugoslavia, though. From 1943 onwards, Western Allies shifted their logistics and assistance from Mihailovic's forces to Tito's army. Well aware that support was going to the Communists, Churchill believed that some degree of influence could be wielded on Tito. Officially, the shift in the Allied policy was explained by the "fact" that Mihailovic had been ineffective in fighting the enemy and that Tito's partisans posed a serious challenge to the Germans. Pro-Russian propaganda in the West accused Mihailovic of collaborating with the occupiers.

In March 1943 Tito sent three close associates to Zagreb to open talks with the German commander in the Croatian capital²⁴. They concluded an agreement that included three important points: 1. Joint (German-partisan) military action in case of a Western invasion of the Adriatic coast; 2. Both parties consider the movement led by Gen. Mihailovic as their main enemy; 3. Exchange of all prisoners of war²⁵.

²³ This decision was confirmed at the Tehran Conference of the Big Three (Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin) in November 1943. The so called "Percentage agreement" concluded between Churchill and Stalin in Moscow (Fall 1944) specified fifty-fifty influence in Yugoslavia. Since the Red Army was already in Yugoslav territory the agreement had little bearing. However, after Tito and Stalin split in 1948, it became a basis for long-term balance in Yugoslavia.

²⁴ The three negotiators chosen by Tito were: Koca Popovic, his supreme military commander, Milovan Djilas, his confidant, and Vladimir Velebit his personal diplomat. Their German counterpart was Col. Glaise von Horstenau.

²⁵ Walter R. Roberts eludes to this important piece of information in "Tito, Mihailovic and the Allies 1941-1945", New Brunswick 1973. A facsimile of the

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Several times in 1944 the Allies bombed major Yugoslav cities. Air raids on Belgrade in April and September were especially severe, causing thousands of civilian casualties. These bombings were a major contribution by the Allies to the final defeat of Nazis in Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia's future was definitely settled in June of 1944, when the new government-in-exile led by Croat Ivan Subasic struck a deal with Tito, paving the way for Communist victory. Everything was over by 1945. Tito and the Communists came to power thanks to the decisive role of the Red Army²⁶.

The Yugoslav capital and its population were subjected to severe prosecution and terror in the first months of Communist rule. At least 20,000 people are believed to have disappeared in Belgrade during the initial revolutionary period. Similar steps were taken all over the country.

Timorous attempts by prewar political parties to put together an opposition movement against the Communist Party were crushed almost momentarily. Towards the end of 1945, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia followed the Soviet revolutionary example and established full control of all segments of life. Tito emerged as the undisputed leader of both the Party and State.

1945 - 1987

The first step by the revolutionary regime was to eliminate the monarchy. A referendum was called in November of 1945 and controlled entirely by the Communists, so that the outcome was known well in advance. A decree followed in 1947, banning the

document, however, was first revealed and published only after Tito's death, by Yugoslav historian Vladimir Dedijer ("*Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*", Belgrade 1981, 810).

²⁶ It is interesting to note that Tito fled Yugoslavia in May of 1944, met with Churchill in northern Italy in June and then left for Moscow. He returned to the country only after the Red Army and the partisans entered Belgrade in late October 1944.

return of the Royal family, revoking their citizenship and nationalizing their property.

Yugoslavia got a new Constitution in January 1946. It was a simple replica of Stalin's Constitution of 1936. Total authority, including all branches of government, was assigned to the Communist Party. The country was named Federal Peoples' Republic of Yugoslavia and was organized on a federal principle, divided into six socialist republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia). Differences between Serbs and Croats were ironed out, albeit only on the surface. The Communists eliminated non-Communist political elites, establishing full harmony in the Party apparatus and civil obedience. The slogan on "brotherhood and unity" sought to propagate the new ideology: Marxism-Leninism was the sole response to any kind of nationalism. Deep down however, old frustrations simmered underneath the superficial peace among the Yugoslavs. The lack of freedom could have only a fragile stability.

Abandoned by the Allies, Dragoljub-Draza Mihailovic was captured, trialed and sentenced to death²⁷. He was executed in July 1946. A number other prewar politicians and public figures were prosecuted at the same time and than either executed or imprisoned.

The revolutionary regime set out immediately to nationalize private property. The process continued for several years, ending in 1950. Again, it was done by the Soviet model.

From 1944 to 1948, Russian instructors and advisors were appointed in important government offices as the Yugoslav Communists had little experience in revolutionary practice.

Suddenly, the Cominform (alliance of all Communist parties of the Soviet bloc) issued a statement accusing Tito and the Yugoslav Communist Party of "revisionism, disloyalty and betrayal

²⁷ More than 400 American pilots were forcefully parachuted on territory controlled by Mihailovic and rescued by his men, sent an official request to testify in support of Mihailovic. The request was not granted. As a sign of gratitude and honor President Truman decorated Gen. Mihailovic posthumously with the Congressional Medal of Merit, in 1948.

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of socialist ideals". It was made public on June 28, 1948. The event brought an end to the smooth relations between Moscow and Belgrade and opened the first crack in the monolithic Soviet bloc. Due to immediate assistance from the West, Tito was able to resist the potential threat and survive the break with Stalin. Tito's Yugoslavia soon became a country and system praised by the West, often labeled "Yugoslav socialism with a human face". Substantial funds poured into the country, enabling the government not only to sustain the split but to prosper economically.

The fact that Tito resorted to the most draconian Stalinist methods to prosecute pro-Soviet Communists caused no harm to the image of Tito's regime abroad. About 12,000 people were sent to Tito's *Gulags* where they were tortured physically and mentally without standing trial or receiving a sentence. Thousands died from hard labor and disease, many were murdered in cold blood. Those who survived were forced to live under constant suspicion and surveillance for a long time after being released. The terror once applied to opponents of the Communist ideology backfired on former comrades with greater force and stronger hatred.

Despite the atrocities that Tito and his regime were accountable for, their popularity in the West continued to rise. Tito was generally viewed as a champion of "tolerant and open socialism".

A new challenge to Tito's despotism came in 1953 from a close Communist associate and personal friend, Milovan Djilas. Djilas dared to criticize the public behavior and moral standards of the new Communist elite in a series of articles published in the Party gazette. The response was swift and vengeful. The Communist machinery launched a witch-hunt against Djilas, condemning him of "bourgeois tendencies" "pro-Western orientation" and "deserting the Party line". He was soon stripped of all Party and public offices and expelled from the Communist Party. Because of his continued anti-Titoist writings, Djilas was arrested and put in jail, where he remained nearly 10 years (1957-1966). His books were translated and published in the West, which momentarily made him the most prominent political dissident from Yugoslavia.

From the mid-1960s, the strong revolutionary grip began to relax. The process was a slow and gradual one and never really jeopardized the supreme authority of Tito and the Communist Party. Actually, it gave more breathing space to the majority of the population. Due to financial support from abroad and virtually no political opponent posing a threat at home, Tito felt confident enough to allow a small degree of overall tranquility. The process was further enhanced by the sudden increase in unemployment. The regime's response was to open State borders, enabling Yugoslav families to emigrate to Western Europe, North America or Australia. According to official statistics, about 1 million people left Yugoslavia in 10 years²⁸. Indeed, throughout the 1960s, Yugoslavs were the only Communist nation with free passports to travel abroad, though a small number of people actually made avail of the opportunity.

In foreign policy Tito needed a new course beyond the existing blocs. Together with the Indian and Egyptian leaders, Nehru and Nasser, he was most responsible for the creation of the so called Non-Aligned Movement. The inaugural conference was held in Belgrade in 1961. Most of the new nations from Africa and Asia, former European colonies, joined the movement, forming an association of over 100 members. As they were extremely diverse, ranging from richest to poorest, from socialisms to monarchic, from atheist to religious, the Non-Aligned Movement could never attain the level of effective unity and accord in foreign policy. Occasionally confronted by wars between members, the movement was a peculiar kind of organization. Nonetheless, it was a comfortable international umbrella for all who sought to avoid siding with either bloc.

Constitutional changes were made in Yugoslavia in 1963²⁹. Even though the document emphasized the leading role of the

²⁸ In 1971 Yugoslavia's population was about 20 million.

²⁹ Even though the Constitution was not altered completely, the changes in 1950 introduced so-called "workers' self-management". The 1963 Constituting introduced the term "social ownership" instead of "State property". Neither term had any substantial effect on the Communist nature of Tito's regime.

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League of Communists³⁰ and Tito, it paved the way for possible economic reform. The reform sought to liberate the market and allow competition among economic subjects without changing the form of ownership. Even these reforms, limited in scope and intensity, allowed excessive economic freedom in the country. Dissatisfied with the impact of the economic changes, Tito halted the process and eliminated the core of liberal leadership with support from Party hardliners.

The early 1970s were marked by preparations for a new Constitution reform. By then, Tito was well aware that rising nationalism among Communist leaders, chiefly in Serbia and Croatia, but also in other republics, needed appeasing. The Constitution of 1974, therefore, sought to meet these aspirations and nearly turned the country into a confederation. Each republic acquired almost sovereign rights in handling its affairs. The situation in Serbia was particularly controversial as two of its autonomous provinces (Vojvodina and Kosovo) attained the same kind of status and were completely independent of Belgrade. Tito was proclaimed President for life of both the Party and State; Yugoslavia was to be governed by an eight-member collective presidency. Each republic and autonomous province had a seat on the revolving presidency with chairmanship for 12 months³¹. The system was designed to continue functioning after Tito's death. Public opposition by a number of Serbian intellectuals against the draft Constitution was immediately crushed, leaving hidden but lasting resentment among the Belgrade intelligentsia.

Josip Broz Tito died on 4 May, 1980 at the age of 88.

Years of inertia followed. Yugoslavia moved sluggishly on, with a lifeless system unable to change. The Party oligarchs in each of the republics and provinces had complete control over their respective domains and populations. Yugoslavia was a whole only on paper.

³⁰ The Communist Party of Yugoslavia changed its name to the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in 1958.

³¹ This system was designed to survive after Tito's death as a transitional solution.

Signals in the 1980s that the Soviet bloc might collapse opened a new phase of political development in Yugoslavia. Many Western political analysts expected Yugoslavia to be the first socialist country to denounce socialism and embark on the process of transition. Some of them believed that Yugoslavia would be the best model for the process.

A showdown among leaders of the Communist Party of Serbia in September 1987 revealed an individual named Slobodan Milosevic, whose rise to power passed by almost unobserved. At the time no one foresaw how ill-fated that victory would prove.

1987 - 2000

The only effort to reform the Yugoslav socialist system took place between 1988 and 1990. Led by Prime Minister Ante Markovic, a Croat reformist, Yugoslavia witnessed substantial economic liberation with changes leading toward private enterprise and a free market economy. Markovic enjoyed sympathy from the West but not the support he needed. He was undermined from every side and finally resigned in December 1991.

In January 1990 the Yugoslav Communists convened for the last time in Belgrade. Due to irreversible differences between the reformists from Slovenia and Croatia and Milosevic's hardliners, the delegations from Slovenia and Croatia walked out. Basically, this event spelled the end of the Yugoslav Communist Party.

As a direct consequence, Croat nationalist Franjo Tudjman won parliamentary elections in Croatia in spring 1990, as did the democratic coalition in Slovenia. The two republics immediately raised the question of Yugoslavia's future, openly voicing plans to set up independent states.

The crisis peaked when Milosevic objected to the appointment of the new Croat candidate for the rotating Yugoslav presidency even though it was Croatia's turn to head the presidency. Europe first intervened in August 1991, proposing a compromise: Milosevic will approve the Croat candidate and Slovenia and Croatia will postpone their declarations of independence for three months. In the meantime, Europe would host a conference

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where all disputes and outstanding issues would be addressed. The conference took place in The Hague, presided over by British diplomat Lord Carrington, in fall of 1991. After Milosevic turned down every proposal for a compromise, the issue was reduced to a simple question of sovereignty. Milosevic argued that whoever wanted to leave the Yugoslav federation was entitled to do so, but those who wanted to stay together were entitled to continue as Yugoslavia. The others countered that in the event of secession by any of the constituent republics, Yugoslavia would cease to exist as a state. The question was referred to the Arbitration Committee headed by French jurist Robert Badinter. The verdict was simple: Yugoslavia was in the process of disintegration (December 1991).

Slovenia and Croatia declared independence in June 1991, postponed until October, Macedonia in November 1991, and Bosnia-Herzegovina in March 1992. In April 1992, Serbia and Montenegro formed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY).

This was the last signal for Milosevic that war was the only remaining option.

The armed conflict that broke out in Slovenia in 1991 escalated into real war in Croatia (1991-1992) and spilled over into Bosnia-Herzegovina, where large-scale atrocities and acts of genocide against civilians were committed from 1992 to 1995. The war in Bosnia ended with the Dayton accords in fall 1995³².

Nearly 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men were killed by Bosnian Serb troops and Milosevic's paramilitaries in Srebrenica, a U.N. safe haven, in July 1995.

The final scene of Yugoslavia's tragedy was in Kosovo. Milosevic ordered a full-fledged military campaign in Kosovo in 1998 and 1999 in an effort to curb the Albanian rebellion demanding independence for Kosovo. The operation ended in col-

³² The Dayton agreement defined Bosnia-Herzegovina as an independent State consisting of two entities, the Serb Republic (49% of territory) and the Bosnian-Croat Federation (51% of territory), established heavy international troop presence and supervision by the Office of the High Representative, appointed by the international community. The document was accepted and signed by all three sides (Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia) and guaranteed by the authority of the international community.

lective deportation and slaying of innocent civilians. International efforts for a peaceful settlement at the conference in Rambouillet³³ in January 1999 finally failed. As a result, Serbia was bombed by NATO for 78 days before Milosevic conceded defeat (from March to June 1999). NATO troops and the U.N. administration were deployed in Kosovo in June 1999.

Large-scale protests of the Serbian democratic opposition were held for the first time in Belgrade in March 1991, and were crushed ruthlessly by the police.

The second wave of protests against Milosevic were organized again in Belgrade and lasted for seven days (June-July 1992).

The third attempt by the democratic opposition to topple Milosevic took place again in the Serbian capital. This time demonstrators tried to enter the Parliament building. They were dispersed with teargas and brutal force, in June 1993.

Civil unrest over local election rigging continued for three months and spread to more than 50 towns in Serbia, from November 1996 to February 1997.

Opposition rallies were staged all across Serbia, demanding Milosevic's ouster and early elections (from July to November 1999).

2000 - 2006

Presidential, federal, and local elections were held on 24 September, 2000. Vojislav Kostunica, the presidential candidate of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) won a landslide victory against Milosevic, beating him by nearly 1 million votes. DOS also triumphed in the federal and local elections.

Since Milosevic refused to recognize the result of the presidential vote, a rally was staged in Belgrade on 5 October, 2000, that brought together close to 1 million people. The event turned into a bloodless democratic revolution that finally removed Mi-

³³ A chateau near Paris.

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losevic from power. Kostunica was inaugurated as the first democratic President of Yugoslavia.

Early parliamentary elections in Serbia held in December 2000 saw a massive win for DOS. Zoran Djindjic became the first Serbian non-Communist Prime Minister in more than 50 years, in January 2001.

From October 2000 to January 2001, Serbia was run by a three-party interim government that included Milosevic's Socialists.

Slobodan Milosevic was arrested on 31 March 2001 and transferred to the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) on 28 June 2001, on charges for crimes against humanity and genocide.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was transformed into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in February 2003, bringing an end to Kostunica's tenure as President.

Zoran Djindjic was assassinated on 12 March 2003, nearly two years after Milosevic was arrested.

Vojislav Kostunica formed a minority government backed by Milosevic's Socialists in February 2004.

Slobodan Milosevic died while on trial, in March 2006.

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Part One

ACCOUNTS OF AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT

The Serbian democratic opposition first challenged Milosevic's government in 1991, but all its attempts were futile until 2000. It took a decade of war, destruction, and turmoil to pave the way for the removal of both Milosevic and his regime. The years of 1999 and 2000 were critical in achieving that goal.

*Crucial Visit to Washington
(November 1999)*

The political consequences of the 1999 NATO air strikes on Serbia were twofold.³⁴

First, U.S.-led Western powers finally decided to help the Serbian opposition bring down Milosevic and his regime.

Second, the Alliance for Change, the precursor of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), staged rallies across Serbia, accusing Milosevic and his regime for the tragedy that befell the nation.

In November 1999, leaders of the Alliance for Change were invited to Washington to meet with important U.S. officials in the administration and Congress. The delegation that made the trip comprised the late Dragoslav Avramovic, the late Zoran Djindjic, Vladan Batic, Goran Svilanovic, Velimir Ilic, Zoran Zivkovic, and Milan St. Protic³⁵.

³⁴ After Milosevic rejected the agreement reached in Rambouillet and decided to pursue military and police operations in Kosovo, NATO, led by the United States, decided to bomb Serbia. The air strikes began on 24 March 1999 and continued for 78 days. Only then did Milosevic agree to the terms that brought an end to the bombing, which consisted of the pullout of all Serbian forces from Kosovo, the deployment of NATO troops (KFOR -- Kosovo Force) and establishment of an international administration under the auspices of the United Nations (UNMIK). This solution was verified by U.N. Security Council Resolution 1244.

³⁵ ³⁵ **Avramovic, Dragoslav** - financial expert and long-time employee of the World Bank, architect of the 1994 monetary reform in Serbia, turned against Milosevic and joined the opposition, died in 2001. **Djindjic, Zoran** - Chairman of the Democratic Party, mastermind of the democratic opposition, first non-Communist Prime Minister in Serbia after the fall of Milosevic, assassinated in March 2003. **Zivkovic, Zoran** - local leader of the Democratic Party from Nis (southern Serbia), democratically elected Mayor of Nis 1996-2000, Yugoslav Interior Minister 2000-2003, succeeded Djindjic as Chairman of the Democratic Party and Prime Minister of Serbia. **Ilic, Velimir** - local democratic leader from Cacak (western Serbia), Mayor of Cacak 1996-2000, a hero of October 5, 2000, incumbent Serbian Minister For Capital Investments. **Svilanovic, Goran** - youngest opposition leader, Yugoslav Foreign Minister 2000-2004. **Batic,**

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The delegation was welcomed with due respect and attention, as a group ready and capable of bringing down Milosevic. After talks in the Senate, the House of Representatives and a meeting with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Washington expressed enthusiasm to help the opposition efforts in Serbia. Federal and local elections were due in fall of 2000. Everyone agreed that they would be crucial for the final victory of democracy over dictatorship in Serbia. The only condition set by Washington was that all anti-Milosevic forces rally into a single democratic bloc.

* * *

On the last day of our visit, we were invited to dinner by Richard Holbrooke, then U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. and major broker of the Dayton Peace Conference in 1995. The invitation came as a total surprise since it had not been scheduled in advance.

The venue for the dinner was a lavish hotel in Washington. Table was set in a separate room with separate waiting service. The food was typically American, with steak as the main course, wine, and no appetizer. Holbrooke was nearly half an hour late, arriving in the company of Christopher Hill and two associates. He was tall, rowdy, and clearly in a good mood. An overbearing American, so forthright he was aggressive; pretentiously kind, with a sharp caustic tone and superior air. The meeting was in English, the translation softly superimposed.

Holbrooke began:

"I truly believe that you, gentlemen, are Serbia's future. You are Serbia's only hope. I am sure that I am sitting tonight with the future President of Serbia. I don't know exactly which one of you will become so, but I know for sure that it will be one of you".

He paused briefly, and continued:

"You of course know, gentlemen, that U.N. Security Council Resolution No 1244 proposes a conference on Kosovo, similar to the one we had in Dayton back in 1995. I am interested in one

thing. What would be your position at the conference, as the future Serbian government"?

It was an easy bait and a calculated provocation. In the next half hour, all sorts of proposals were tabled, possible and impossible, making little sense but voiced with much passion.

Holbrooke left me for the end, probably because we had an uncomfortable discussion about Serbian history before dinner. It was only when Hill murmured who I was that Holbrooke gave up discussing the topic.

"And you, professor?" Holbrooke addressed me this way for the first time. He sounded pretty cynical.

"Do you want a sincere answer?" I asked back.

"Of course."

"I think your question is unfair."

"What do you mean?"

"This is what I mean. Milosevic was the decision-maker on Kosovo for 10 years and he brought about its collapse and tragedy. You tried to make a deal with him in Rambouillet and you failed. Then you marched into Kosovo with troops and civil administration. Now you ask me what the future of Kosovo should be. I had better ask you what will become of Kosovo."

"But", said Holbrooke, "you have a responsibility to your people. What will you tell them?"

"The same thing I am telling you. The truth. We have neither the means nor the power to influence Kosovo's future. It's your show all the way, Sir, your sole responsibility, not ours."

"But what will you say at the conference?" asked Holbrooke.

"Nothing, I'll be quiet."

"That won't be possible", he retorted.

"Just watch me", I said aggressively.

"You're aware, professor, that American people will not have our troops there forever", he said.

"That's your problem. It is no concern of ours how you'll explain your actions to Americans. You can leave Kosovo tomorrow and declare its independence. But I repeat, the consequences for that will be yours alone. Let me tell you something else, and that will be my final word. Your policy in the Balkans, Sir, yours personally, had been quite unsuccessful. You reckoned you

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would achieve peace and stability in Southeastern Europe through a pact with Milosevic. When he deceived you and refused to sign the agreement in Rambouillet, you bombed our people for no reason whatsoever. Then you deployed an army and administration, and after all that you're asking me about the future of Kosovo?" I said in one breath.

"Oh, oh, hold your horses, my friend! I have the feeling you think I wanted to preserve Milosevic's government, but let me assure you that my only intention was to stop the war in Bosnia and to make peace in Kosovo", Holbrooke replied.

"Maybe what you're saying is true, but you certainly gave an entirely different impression", I said trying to end this disagreeable discussion.

The conversation resumed in a better atmosphere with lighter topics. A little later, Holbrooke picked up his favorite theme, the meals he had with Milosevic. We had to listen to his discourse on lamb and fish. When he ended, I could not resist a comment:

"Allow me, Sir, just one more remark. If Milosevic had signed that agreement in Rambouillet, you would not be wasting your time dining with us in Washington. You'd be savoring that lamb with Milosevic in Belgrade right now".

The instant I heard myself saying this, I realized I went far overboard. Yet, I could not resist the opportunity; Holbrooke was getting on my nerves for a long time.

This was too much. Even cool-headed American had his limits:

"That's not true, it's not true!" He started shouting.

"I always respected the Serbian opposition! Always!"

I waved my hand.

Holbrooke's final speech was in his usual sarcastic style:

"Since each of you had made your point, let me tell you what I think. You can win in Serbia only by the Philippino scenario. You need a united opposition and one person as a symbol of resistance. In the Philippines it was Kori Akino. Who is your Kori Akino?"

Djindjic replied first:

"Sitting beside, you. It is Mr. Avramovic."

"Okay", said the American diplomat maliciously, "I grant you that Mr. Avramovic is a better economist than Kori Akino, but she's much better looking, you'll agree, won't you?"

No one said anything.

Richard Holbrooke's plan was obvious from the start. He wanted to provoke us to get completely different answers on the question of Kosovo, and then brief Clinton's cabinet on the disunity and immaturity of the Serbian opposition. This would confirm his view on Serbia and our poor image. Unfortunately, he succeeded for the most part, despite the brief duel with me.

Alas, the rest of the team failed to draw the right lesson from this episode.

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The Path to Final Showdown

After the return to Serbia, anti-Milosevic rallies continued throughout winter and spring 2000.

In January, DOS (Democratic Opposition of Serbia) was created as the broadest coalition that would fight Milosevic.³⁶ "Otpor" and "G17 Plus" (Serbian opposition NGO's) were becoming increasingly active as well³⁷.

Preparations for the election campaign began. The two U.S. agencies -- the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute -- helped out substantially. The former was in charge of training and preparing controllers for the voting process, while the latter taught Serbian opposition activists how to wage a direct campaign. The training centers were in Budapest and Szeged (Hungary), Banja Luka (Bosnia-Herzegovina), and Podgorica and Budva (Montenegro). Thousands of opposition activists attended these courses, and then organized similar ones all over Serbia as campaign instructors.

Opposition leaders participated in professional presentations of various U.S. election campaigns and listened to lectures by leading U.S. campaign experts.

The Serbian opposition was never as prepared as then.

Milosevic made a mistake that proved to be self-destructive. He arbitrarily changed the federal Constitution, introducing a direct vote for President and called for elections. His idea was simple: To win the election and renew his legitimacy before the public at home and abroad and reappear as absolute ruler in Serbia-Montenegro. The changes he made, however, opened a space for the opposition to challenge and defeat him.

In DOS, the question of a joint presidential candidate emerged as soon as the elections were announced. The initial idea of Avramovic as candidate was abandoned in the spring after his health

³⁶ The coalition rallied all Serbian opposition parties, 18 of them.

³⁷ At the time Otpor and G17 Plus were nongovernmental organizations that supported efforts for Milosevic's ouster.

suddenly deteriorated. The contest began and ended with one name: Vojislav Kostunica. Intimately, each of the leaders thought Kostunica would be good material for manipulation, considering his mellow character and innate insecurity. Actually, Kostunica was chosen for his weaknesses rather than his merits. However, DOS leaders failed to observe that someone else had already begun to wield his influence on the future Yugoslav President³⁸.

Only Vuk Draskovic³⁹ and his party (Serbian Renewal Movement) were opposed to Kostunica's nomination. They insisted on their own candidate, arguing that it would have been better if DOS appeared with two candidates. That proved to be unacceptable for the others, so the Serbian Renewal Movement walked out of the coalition.

It was no easy task explaining this development to the Americans. They were firmly convinced that the opposition had no chance against Milosevic without Draskovic. Foreign pressures toward a compromise mounted on a daily basis. Finally, it was decided that two DOS leaders go to Budapest and explain the situation to the Americans. Svilanovic and I went.

We were greeted by a full team: James Dobbins, Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and two of his aids, his deputy Jim Swygert and Nicolas Hill, younger brother of Christopher Hill and an expert on Serbia. The meeting was long and tough and our arguments failed to persuade the U.S. threesome. The conclusion, however, was to carry on with the election projects unhindered.

From the American standpoint, Milosevic's fall was not certain even if DOS achieved what it planned, if it won the elections. Milosevic's government was so well organized that he could maintain power quite easily. The Americans also knew they were unable to influence the Serbian armed forces, mostly because sentiments in the army and police were extremely anti-American.

³⁸ One can make a pretty safe guess that Kostunica had been contacted by the people from the military intelligence right about that time.

³⁹ Long-time opposition leader.

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Therefore, they had to seek indirect routes, and they found them.

* * *

Later on, quite by accident, I discovered another piece of this mosaic. During a diplomatic dinner in Washington, I met a tall American in his 60s. He approached me and introduced himself. His name did not ring a bell. But when he said, "former U.S. Ambassador in Moscow", he had my full attention. Here was an opportunity to check up on an old assumption, I felt. We exchanged a few words of introduction before our conversation became interesting:

"I'd like to ask you something, Mr. Ambassador", I began.

"Do you happen to know anything about Russia's role in the events that took place in my country on 5 October 2000?"

For a second it seemed the question had caught him unaware. He pulled himself together quickly:

"What specifically do you mean, Ambassador?" he countered.

"Nothing specifically, but I have a feeling that Moscow played a certain role in Milosevic's downfall. I have no evidence, just a gut feeling. You probably don't know, but the key development that enabled the opposition victory was the sudden visit of then Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov to Belgrade the morning of 6 October. He had a long talk with Milosevic and a brief one with Kostunica. That afternoon Milosevic conceded Kostunica's victory. I kind of figured that Ivanov's mission had something to do with it", I said naïvely, but frankly. I really had no reliable information whatsoever.

"You know, Ambassador, that's a topic for a long conversation. I can tell you that I was in Moscow throughout your elections in September and the event of 5 October. But let's save the story for a separate meeting. I'll be pleased to discuss it with you alone, over lunch perhaps?", he said.

"Excuse me for insisting, but what was the purpose of your stay in Russia at the time, and I agree we continue the conversation at another time," I answered, concealing my eagerness.

"My job was to maintain unhindered coordination between us and the Russians with regard to your case. But, I propose we

Milan St. Protic

have lunch together and talk in about 20 days, when I get back from a trip," said my collocutor calmly.

We never met again because my recall from Washington cut off many plans, including this one.

* * *

What was the real backdrop of 5 October 2000, when Milosevic fell?

If the whole sequence of events cannot be related in detail, conclusions can nevertheless be drawn.

First, the United States adopted a new policy toward Serbia following the air strikes, which implied bringing down Milosevic with the help of the united opposition.

Second, the role of the Western powers, primarily the United States, was limited to aid and support of the Serbian opposition in its preparations for the vote. This was important, but not crucial.

The plan for and implementation of 5 October was the independent doing of a few DOS leaders, excluding Kostunica and masterminded by Djindjic.

Third, it seems rather realistic that the Yugoslav Army's refusal to become actively involved in suppressing the popular uprising on 5 October came after military leaders contacted Moscow, as Washington stood by. We can only speculate as to the kind of arrangement that took place between the United States and Russia. The circumstances in which this was carried out are unknown, as well as whether some guarantees were given to Milosevic and the General Staff in order to peacefully hand over power.

Finally, the question about Kostunica's possible contacts with Moscow and the Yugoslav military intelligence before 5 October still stands.

Did he assume any commitment regarding Milosevic, and if so, what kind?

This is why it is impossible to answer today the question of all questions:

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Was 5 October truly a democratic revolution or merely a government changeover?

Most regrettably, as time goes by, the latter seems more likely.

Milosevic's Demise
(5 October, 2000)

1

No one believed Milosevic could be beaten.

European diplomats in Belgrade called me for a meeting right before the end of the campaign in September 2000. The host was the Spanish Ambassador in FR Yugoslavia.

All envoys from major European countries came to lunch. They made no secret of their concern about the result of the elections. Their unanimous forecast was that DOS had little chance against Milosevic and Seselj⁴⁰ united. Furthermore as Milo Djukanovic and his party in Montenegro decided to boycott the federal elections. The foreign diplomats saw two ill omens in Podgorica's⁴¹ decision. First, the experienced Djukanovic⁴² did not believe in Milosevic's defeat, thus his decline. Second, Europe thought that without Montenegro's support, the chances of the Serbian opposition were nil.

One of the Europeans, the Englishman, was quite personal:

"Excuse my frankness, but I am really curious to hear what motivated you to take up this fight against Seselj and Goran Matic⁴³. As far as I know, you are an intellectual and a professor, whereas fighting those two requires rather different qualities and capabilities. Are you not afraid?"

I could hardly tell him that I was nominated to lead the DOS's ticket for Belgrade municipalities of New Belgrade and Zemun in my absence, mainly because none of the other opposition

⁴⁰ Extremely nationalist Serbian leader who supported Milosevic's belligerent policy. Accused for war crimes. Presently waiting for trial in the Hague Tribunal.

⁴¹ Podgorica is the capital of Montenegro.

⁴² Milo Djukanovic has been at the head of Montenegro more than 18 years, as Prime Minister and as well as the President.

⁴³ Milosevic's infamous Minister of propaganda.

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leaders wanted to or dared to contest those polling precincts. New Belgrade was considered Milosevic's foothold in the capital, while Zemun was completely under Seselj's control. Those polling precincts were seen as lost in advance, as they had been so many times in the past. In every election since 1990, those parts of Belgrade persistently voted for Milosevic and his government.

I replied briefly:

"Don't worry Sir, we're definitely winning. No question about it. After three weeks of active campaigning, I'm more assured of it today than ever before. Don't let Matic and Seselj worry you. They might look terrifying, but really they're nothing more than paper tigers".

Europeans were visibly surprised by my self-confidence. Having gained favorable impressions from my meetings with voters and craving success so badly, I probably sounded more convincing than I actually was. At the time, I was absolutely sure of our victory.

* * *

Luckily, Sunday 24 September, the last year of the 20th century, confirmed my predictions. According to the ballot returns, Milosevic was on his knees⁴⁴.

Not only were DOS candidates leading in local and federal elections, they were leading in the most crucial presidential election, with Kostunica far ahead of Milosevic. When the ballots were counted, he had come very close to 50% of the turnout, which meant that Milosevic was finished in the first leg.

The government challenged Kostunica's victory immediately, calling a second leg in two weeks. DOS, on the other hand, declared Kostunica's election victory. It was certain that the regime and its leader would not quietly cede power the next day. A new battle laid ahead.

⁴⁴ Each election ticket for the Federal Parliament had five candidates, since five deputies were being elected from each precinct. The election ticket headed by DOS - Vojislav Kostunica for the New Belgrade - Zemun polling precinct, with Milan St. Protic at the head, won three mandates, while the ticket headed by Slobodan Milosevic barely won one mandate. The ticket headed by Vojislav Seselj won also one mandate.

Internal relations in DOS had never been harmonious. Instead of the landslide victory eliminating differences and appeasing vanities, it deepened and intensified them. The first doubts emerged during the ballot count. DOS was announcing one figure, Kostunica's staff another. Strangely enough, both camps confirmed Kostunica won, yet they would not work together. They made separate counts, criticizing and disputing each other's figures.

The gap widened between DOS and the Democratic Party of Serbia.

There was no discussion on what should be done. Everyone was scheming covertly, Kostunica as well as DOS, while time was running out.

* * *

Those days I met Kostunica a few times alone or in a very close circle of people. Svilanovic insisted on the meetings, probably because he did not know the President-elect very well and wished to get to know him better.

At one of these meetings, possibly on 27 or 28 September 2000, I asked Kostunica directly:

"What are you going to do? Milosevic is obviously not going to recognize your victory. As far as I see, you have two options: Either you go on as the proverbial John The Landless, or you call a protest and take your chance in the street. I don't see any other way".

He replied:

"The figures are on my side, there is no doubt about that. We counted every ballot fairly; you know how accurate we are in these things. Our figures show that I won without a doubt. We'll see what the relevant authorities say. I'm waiting for a response from the Russians. They must take a clear position on this. They can not evade saying where exactly they stand. They must issue a public statement about the situation in Serbia".

I went on, as if I sensed what this was about:

"I have to ask you something else, and I mean well by it", I said.

"Sure, please go ahead".

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"Has anyone contacted you from Milosevic's camp? Anyone from his *entourage*, from the army or police? Has anyone tried to make contact with you?"

"No, nobody," he lied without batting an eye.

The conversation raised more questions than answers. His mention of Russians in particular.

Events began to unravel in such a pace that I was quite unable to settle my thoughts and make sober conclusions. It took some time before I could go back and re-analyze Kostunica's words.

* * *

At the time, Europe looked for a compromise. And the Greeks were chosen for the job

Fearing a conflict and violence, it proposed a second election leg as the most reasonable solution, stating the following arguments:

Milosevic will not hand over power peacefully until he was forced to do it by an irrefutable election result. Though the result of the first leg had placed Kostunica far ahead, the question remained whether the figure exceeded 50% of the turnout. The use of violence was precarious and could justify Milosevic's stay in power should the opposition be accused of stirring unrest. That would be exactly what Milosevic had wished for: The annulment of the election result. The difference in votes between Kostunica and Milosevic was so wide that it would discount any possibility of an unfavorable surprise, with Kostunica certain to claim even greater victory. Milosevic had nowhere to draw additional votes from and would even lose some of the votes he won in the first leg since people in Serbia never liked losers.

All in all, the argument amounted to a simple advice: Decide on a safe course without risk, do not gamble everything away.

Thus Aleksandar Rondos, special advisor to the Greek Foreign Minister⁴⁵, arrived in Belgrade early in October 2000 bearing such a message.

⁴⁵ George (Jorgos) Papandreou, son of the most famous Greek politician and statesman Andreas Papandreou, born and educated in the United States. With such a family background, George was predestined for a great political career.

I met Rondos a few months earlier at a large political conference in Athens, organized by Crown Prince Aleksandar Karadjordjevic⁴⁶, in mid-April 2000. Serbian opposition leaders (except Kostunica) attended as well as members of the Crown Council, dignitaries of the Serbian Orthodox Church and few selected journalists, for a conference at a hotel on the Aegean Sea, not far from the Greek capital. This was to be an occasion to bring together opponents of the Milosevic regime, under the auspices of the Crown Prince. The result of the much advertised summit came to nothing.

An unexpected event, though, turned the attention of the Greek public to the conference, elevating it to such unwarranted heights.

What happened during the meeting of Serbian opposition leaders and monarchists that stirred such a commotion?

Aleksandar Rondos greeted the assembly on behalf of the Foreign Minister. Diplomatically polite, the Greek opened his speech with the following words:

"Your Royal Highness, Holy Fathers, Ladies and Gentlemen..."⁴⁷

The next day, Athenian papers carried his words and were united in their allegation that he had made a diplomatic *gaffe*. The Greek public, extremely sensitive about the monarchy after its bad experience with the King, saw the ghost of the past returning through Rondos's utterly harmless speech. To make matters worse, Serbian Crown Prince Aleksandar is closely related to

⁴⁶ Born in 1945, Aleksandar is the son of the last King of Yugoslavia Petar II Karadjordjevic (1923-1970) who was deposed by the Communists in 1945. Aleksandar was born in London and spent all his life abroad. He visited Serbia for the first time in 1991. Since 2001 lives permanently in Belgrade.

⁴⁷ Alexander Rondos was born in Africa to a family of Greek intellectual émigrés. He attended a British school and majored in history at Oxford. His broad European education and culture leaves a strong impression on his collocutors. He is not a career diplomat, but was appointed Papandreou's first advisor as a personal friend. Thus he has none of the rigidity and formality most frequently observed in Western diplomats. His sophisticated manner of expression and refined British humor blended with his Mediterranean and Balkan roots, indeed make him a special personality and a valuable acquaintance.

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the Greek dynasty and his wife Katarina is Greek. The Greek press literally shattered our unfortunate host and his superior.

Journalists assailed us from all over, posing awkward questions mixed with accusations of a "monarchist plot in republican Greece".

Our efforts to explain the true nature of the conference and Rondos's role were futile, and he was forced to resign. Only after the dust settled and the matter calmed was he inconspicuously restored to office.

Meanwhile I saw him a few more times in Athens, on various occasions⁴⁸.

Thanks to our acquaintance, I was partly involved in plans for a second election leg. Well aware that the idea was unacceptable to Kostunica and DOS, still I agreed to meet with Rondos to discuss the issue when he came to Belgrade on 3 October 2000. I told him what I thought, that his mission was in vain. As much as Rondos and others tried to persuade Kostunica and the others that a second leg was the least painful option, their response was unchanged and negative.

Europe's idea thus failed with no chance of success.

* * *

By then, the situation was rather clarified. Milosevic and his government would not concede defeat, DOS would not renounce victory. The outcome was to be in the streets.

We in DOS had only one question: How many people do we need to bring Milosevic down?

From our many experiences in the past, we knew that large numbers and expansiveness were key factors for the success of a street uprising. This meant that stirring only Belgrade would not suffice. We needed all of Serbia on its feet as during the winter

⁴⁸ During the election campaign Minister Papandreou visited Belgrade, met with Kostunica on behalf of the European Union and extended full support. That was of paramount importance for our success. At Rondos's request I went to Athens urgently to arrange Papandreou's arrival and a meeting with our presidential candidate. Everything proceeded as we had arranged. The message was the perfect one: The E.U. was on our side and ready to help Serbia if DOS and Kostunica won.

of 1996-97. This time we had to go all the way. We had neither the time nor the space for a deal.

A week before 5 October, I received a secretive call for a meeting. I was told to come to the seat of Covic's firm at 7 pm, alone, and not to say a word to anyone. That was all.

I did as I was told. I was admitted and accompanied to Nebojsa Covic's office by a few unfamiliar lads. I sat for about 15 minutes and then quietly transported to a sports arena in Zeleznik⁴⁹. A couple of guards took me through the edifice, across the basketball ground, and then by narrow steps through a dark hall next to the kitchen, to a covert and small room. Covic himself greeted me at the door⁵⁰. A few opposition leaders were sitting inside. Covic told us that the room was protected against audio surveillance so we could talk freely. I remember dinner was served and our discussions stopped when food was being brought in.

Djindjic had the main say.

This was the first time he presented a comprehensive plan to bring down Milosevic. First, a blockade of the main towns where DOS was in power, which meant suspending all communication in and out of the towns. Second, staging a general strike throughout Serbia, which referred mostly to public enterprises. Third, gathering a large protest rally in Belgrade that would be preceded by an organized arrival of people and vehicles from several major roads. A large number of protesters from the interior were to group in the capital, in addition to Belgraders.

Djindjic's plan depended on the impression it would make. It was imperative that the three-step operation created an image that the whole country had risen against Milosevic and that vital levers of power had expressed disobedience. The message to Mi-

⁴⁹ Belgrade suburb.

⁵⁰ Nebojsa Covic was a prominent member of Milosevic's party and Mayor of Belgrade. After his fallout with Milosevic, he joined the opposition. After 5 October 2000, he was Deputy Prime Minister of the first democratic government in charge of dealing with the problem of Kosovo. An indictment had been issued against him at that time, for stirring miners in Kolubara. Boris Tadic was indicted along with him.

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losevic's entourage was: "Milosevic is finished. We are in charge. Leave him and join the winners' camp".

Djindjic was calm and matter-of-fact. It seemed everything was arranged and settled beforehand, that those present were required only to nod and act on orders.

Perhaps Djindjic's commanding tone made the others hesitate for a few minutes. During the brief respite one could feel strong pressure mounting.

The first who plucked up the courage to speak was Zoran Zivkovic, Mayor of Nis⁵¹ at the time, and deputy chairman of Djindjic's party.

"I must say Zoran, I disagree. It is again we from outside the capital who bear the biggest burden, while you guys from Belgrade wait until the last moment. Let something start from here for a change and then we from the province will gladly join you".

Djindjic became irritable.

"Come on, Zoran, don't get on my nerves! This is the only plan that can work out. Things are as they are. We have power in the interior, not in Belgrade. You know as well as I do that it is impossible to block Belgrade and that it will be extremely difficult to make people in Belgrade turn out in the streets. I think everyone must realize that if we want to bring down Milosevic, this is the only way."

Dragoljub Micunovic⁵², one of those present, apparently wanted to say something but changed his mind in the last moment and remained silent. Yet, it was obvious that he had misgivings that he could not conceal. Later on, when we left and stood in the dark Belgrade suburb waiting for a taxi, he told me:

"It is easy for him", said Micunovic, referring to Djindjic, "he can get out and find shelter, while he pushes us into the front lines of combat. Remember the air strikes when he fled to Montenegro and abandoned all of us. I've known him a long time, and

⁵¹ Nis is the second largest city in Serbia, located approximately 120 miles to the south of Belgrade.

⁵² Belgrade University professor and the first Chairman of the Democratic Party, replaced by Djindjic in 1993. The two maintained correct relations. Micunovic belongs to the older generation of Serbian politicians.

I know him well. Take care that he does not draw you into something that will end badly for you".

My fears were of a different kind. Quite the contrary, I was ready to take any risk only to bring Milosevic down. I liked the proposal right away. The only thing I was worried about was our habitual poor organization.

Djindjic's plan was carried out successfully and it produced the best result.

We needed a little luck for the final triumph and we had it.

* * *

I spent the night of 3 October at the "Kolubara" mines⁵³.

A few days before, the miners had suspended coal production that supplied the biggest thermoelectric power plant in Serbia. The strike threatened to plunge Serbia into darkness very soon. It was a crucial element for the final blow against Milosevic and his government. The miners' chief demand was purely political: That Milosevic recognizes Kostunica's victory.

I arrived at "Kolubara" in the early evening. A large caterpillar tractor was pulled across the gate to prevent the entry of large vehicles into the factory grounds. In the courtyard, in front of the administration building, there were crowds of civilians who gather to encourage the miners' protest. I was told that people came from all over Serbia. The strike management waited for me in a hall similar to a classroom. Most of them were members of DOS parties. Empty tables, coffee cups, brandy glasses, and tin cans serving as ashtrays. I noticed the weary and exhausted faces of the strike leaders. Their expression was of worry and fear. We began talking. The conversation was intermittent, with frequent interruptions. They told me that Gen. Pavkovic⁵⁴ and his men stormed the place the previous night and threatened to use the army. They were afraid that he may return. I understood that the entire area was surrounded by special police units. When I asked

⁵³ About 40 miles from Belgrade.

⁵⁴ Milosevic's main support in the army. Indicted for crimes against civilians in Kosovo. Waiting for the trial in The Hague.

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whether there was a forcible attempt to break inside, they said no.

I felt that they did not trust us either. The miners suspected we would leave them high and dry, that in the end they would be the only ones to suffer. They kept saying that if they had been attacked, none of them would survive, that they would all be killed and that they would be the only victims of the uprising against Milosevic. The "Kolubara" miners feared it would happen very shortly. They kept crying loud that they could not hold out long and that we must do something to end their agony.

Still, I knew it was unlikely that the police and army would strike the miners. Clearly that would be suicidal for the regime. Gen. Pavkovic's performance was supposed to overawe and intimidate the strike leaders. The presence of the police served this purpose as well. If they planned on using force, they would have employed it already. They would not have waited.

However, these rational explanations had no effect on my glum hosts. Only my presence could reassure them.

During the night, I went outside and addressed the crowd, to assure them I haven't left. In between, I opened various topics with my hosts that were not related to politics and the current situation. I was only partly successful. Home-made brandy was far more effective than my stories.

I left the miners and engineers of the "Kolubara" mines next morning, the October sun high up, with a hangover and tobacco poisoning.

One must admit that these courageous people endured to the last. They neither flinched nor yielded. Their resistance to Milosevic was the purest and most honorable. The most risky, one had to confess. Their blow to the regime was the most painful. Ordinary working class rising against the Socialist Party of Serbia and its leader.

How DOS paid them back is as visible today as ever. A visit to Kolubara would suffice, it is immediately clear.

A disgrace.

It was Thursday, 5 October 2000. A beautiful sunny day, as often it is in early falls in Belgrade.

An uninitiated observer could not foresee what was about to take place in Serbia's capital that day. The morning was calm and peaceful. City life bustled with a haste that sets big cities apart from small towns. The flurry and traffic jams would have been unbearable but for the fresh autumn air that swept away the soot and drowsiness.

Belgrade was not brimming with excitement and expectation, though its residents knew what was about to happen that afternoon that day. There was one question and one fear in their thoughts. Will sufficient number of people turn out this time?

Unlike the capital, Serbia was teeming with agitation. For several days, large towns had been completely blocked and on that day, convoys of vehicles and people set out at dawn toward Belgrade. One convoy was coming from the direction of Uzice and Cacak (southwest), another from Vranje and Nis (south), yet another from Sabac (west), then from the east, and the final convoy came from Vojvodina (north). The venue was familiar, the plateau in front of the Federal Assembly.

DOS announced it was staging a major protest rally because Milosevic's regime had refused to recognize Kostunica's victory in the presidential election. For days calls were made from every available source: "Come, the future of Serbia depends on you!"

* * *

We had our last meeting the night before. As always, we met in the premises of DOS, in a house in Skadarska Street, area of Belgrade that resembles Montmartre in Paris. We discussed final preparations prior to tomorrow's event. Again Kostunica failed to appear, though he was due to address the crowd. Everyone else was given explicit tasks.

After the meeting, a few of us lingered on to have dinner. Djindjic ordered barbecue and beer from a nearby tavern. I remember we discussed only one topic: How many people would turn out and how many would we need for Milosevic to fall. Djindjic seemed relaxed, but that meant little; he always ap-

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peared composed. He sat on the edge of a desk, with one foot on the floor, and said:

"If more than 200,000 turn out, there will be no problem; if not, we're done for".

"There must be at least that many", I said, heartening myself up more than him.

"You know, the people from the interior can create an impression that all of Serbia has come to Belgrade, but they cannot fill the square. You'll, see, there'll be no more than 50,000 or 60,000 of them. As always, it will depend on residents of Belgrade. If they come out, it'll be great. But one never knows with them".

I had no answer; everyone knew he was right.

Before we parted -- and it must have been nearly two in the morning -- he asked me:

"Where were you planning to sleep tonight?"

"At home, why?"

"I don't know, I'll nap at the office. I won't be able to sleep anyway."

I walked home with mixed feelings about the following day.

* * *

My first mission that morning was to visit Patriarch Pavle. My audience with the Head of the Serbian Orthodox Church was scheduled for 9 am.

I arrived at the Patriarchate right on time. I was not kept waiting.

"Bless me, Your Holiness," I bowed nearly to the ground to kiss his hand.

"Good day to you, Mr. Protic, God bless you", said the Patriarch in his nasal voice.

"Your Holiness, I'm sure you know what's taking place in Belgrade today".

"Yes", he said, drawing out the word.

"So we've come with an appeal. We've taken every precaution in our capacity to avoid clashes and bloodshed. But, alas, this does not depend entirely on us. There will be great many people and we're not sure what Milosevic is capable of. We therefore beseech you, that if things take a dreadful turn, you address the

crowd and try to prevent the death of innocent people. We would also like the church bells in Belgrade to toll, as a sign of popular resistance to Milosevic's dictatorship. This is our request to you".

"You know, I cannot interfere. You organized these yourselves, you bear the consequences. God sees everything, he is the judge of all people, and he will be on the side of those who are right. I will pray for all that violence does not break out, but do not ask the impossible of me. You must solve these mundane disputes in peace and understanding amongst yourselves, because you are all brothers and children of God. I wish you wisdom and prudence and good luck. All I can do for you is to send one of my Archbishops, as I have done every time in the past".

The old man got up, making it clear that our meeting was over. I had not finished the home-made tomato juice I was served. I bid the Patriarch farewell and left, my mission undone.

The highest dignitary of the church let us down again. His every word hurt me deeply. I could not admit that our church was not what it used to be, and that its loyalty to the national cause had neither the weight nor force it once had. Communism left its evil traces on it.

Walking back I comforted myself:

If the Serbian Patriarch was not with us, God had to be on our side.

And He was.

* * *

I went home and left again in a swing. I wanted to see how things were going and observe the situation in downtown Belgrade. Time was running out.

I walked up toward the Federal Assembly edifice and emerged on Nikola Pasic Square, the location of the afternoon rally. Everything seemed ordinary. There was no visible sign that anything particular was going to take place here in just a few hours. It was around 10:45 am.

The authorities refused our request to put up a platform in front of the Assembly building, so we were forced to improvise, setting up a framework with a scaffold and planks on the street. That was the reason why nothing was set up yet when I toured

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the square. There was no one about, either. I was pretty concerned.

* * *

It was past 11 when I looked at my wristwatch. I hastened my pace to reach the building of the State Television. Television employees and parents of staff killed in the NATO air strikes in 1999 were waiting for me. I could not miss this meeting of about 100 grieved and vengeful people.

Instead of wreaths and laments, the meeting turned into a mini-rally. My speech was fiery and belligerent; I spoke from the top of my voice, calling on attendants and passersby to gather for the main event before the Federal Assembly. Quite unexpectedly, the atmosphere became heated to the point of exploding. People began shouting and swearing, they insulted Milosevic and his wife and others along the way. They blamed them for the death of their loved ones and the misfortune and misery that befell us. They called for revenge and lynching.

Revolution was in the air.

Walking back toward the Federal Assembly, I saw the first stream of protestors arriving before the Assembly edifice. People from Cacak would not wait for the signal, but stormed the Assembly immediately upon their arrival, provoking a clash with the police. The first stench of tear gas poisoned the air. Protestors were pushed back by the forces of "law and order" towards the Old Court across the plateau.

The attempt proved to be a complete failure.

Not only that this preliminary blow produced unnecessary loss for DOS and its strategy, but caused another unfavorable consequence: It revealed our true intentions and enabled the police better to prepare for our main attack. Rashness of those people might have jeopardized the entire operation, or something yet worse⁵⁵.

The opening fracas was lost. The real battle was imminent, however.

⁵⁵ The group had with them quite a quantity of hidden weapons, stones, metal rods and heavy tools.

* * *

By 14:30 the plateau before the Federal Assembly building was filled with a crowd of which there seemed no end. Thousands and thousands of people were pouring in from all sides, filling the square and nearby park, flanking the building on both sides and nearby streets.

I stood by the platform with a few leaders of DOS, squeezed from all sides. We were waiting for the star of the day to come out, the great victor over Milosevic - the President-elect, Vojislav Kostunica.

But he was nowhere about.

Then we received the unpleasant news. Kostunica changed his mind and decided not to come. He gave no explanation, no excuse. There was no choice but for those of us who were there to get up on the platform and try to make up for his absence. Vladan Batic and I were the last to address the crowd. I had the microphone in my hand when a crowd stormed the Federal Assembly building. The platform rocked back and forth and we jumped off the improvised framework just before it collapsed. Pandemonium broke out.

Clamor, fighting, tear gas. A solitary gunshot and outcry. A human stampede, the smell of fire and burning. A dense fog and the first respite.

I found myself in the small park next to the Federal Assembly building. Fuming lads were breaking the side windows and glass, climbing inside, wrecking everything and burning.

Another wave of tear gas, stronger than the first, stinging eyes and mouths and making it more difficult to breathe. Again crowds ran, shouting and fighting everywhere. I took refuge in one of the nearby houses with about 10 people, some of them hurt and unconscious. I rang the first doorbell, asked the hosts to let us in and give us first aid. They made cold compress and put bandage. People insatiably gulped down precious glasses of water. Others lit cigarettes, drawing in smoke with horrid coughs.

About half an hour later I was out again, heading back to the square. On my left was a battleground, nearly empty. On the right, a crowd of protesters were waiting for the outcome. The

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only logical move, I thought, was to reach our DOS headquarters and see what was going on. That is what I did. Along the way, people cried out to me, "Hey, Protic, where is everybody else?" and "Hey, Protic, call Kostunica!"

Among some faces I recognized the sister of my best friend who had immigrated to New Zealand a few years before. A mother of two boys. I took her with me. One of the guys at the entrance of DOS headquarters took my companion to my house. Then I went inside.

Suddenly, message came for an urgent meeting of the leaders. I set out immediately moving toward our destination. As I was walking through downtown Belgrade I heard shouts: "Where's your President, eh?", "Kostunica ran away letting us all down!" and "Hey Protic, what happened, cold feet, ah?!" This time they were swearing too.

The scene inside the premises was surreal. Security lined up in front of an iron gate. In the hall, journalists and cameras mingling with secretaries and staff. Everyone in frenzy.

In a closed room a long conference table was barely visible from the cloud of smoke. Kostunica was not there, but everyone else was. The odor of alcohol. Silence. Most people looked absently. Only a few responded to my greeting: "Hey". Expressions spoke more than words: "What are we going to do now? Are we finished?" Taking a vacant seat, I lit a cigarette and gazed out the window.

It was early evening, already.

Even the usually composed Djindjic looked glum. No one had any reports of what was going on in the streets. The last thing we heard was that the police broke up the protesters with tear gas, drove them out of the Assembly and off the square. It sounded like a defeat.

Eventually, Djindjic received crucial news by telephone: Our people took final victory and prevailed over the police, people were celebrating inside the Assembly and on the square. The police were gone, only the leaders of DOS were nowhere about.

We cobbled together a new plan. Two of the leaders, Vladan Batic and me were chosen to leave right away and join the people.

We left straight away pushing our way out together towards the square, and then we lost each other. I went on alone until I reached the doors of the Federal Assembly. Black smoke was coming from the building. The crowd was cheering, jumping, and singing. They shouted out my name and called me inside. I turned toward them and yelled from the top of my lungs:

"I have reached the threshold of the Parliament, but the right to be the first to enter belongs to the man you elected President - Vojislav Kostunica".

Then I went across to the other side of the plateau straight to the Old Court building.

Darkness had descended on the Serbian capital.

* * *

I had scarcely said hello before I was asked to address the people from the terrace of the Old Court edifice. Climbing onto the balcony, I saw theater actor Bane Vidakovic, an old friend, who shoved the microphone into my hand and said:

"Hey, Milan, my friend, it's great to see you. Where've you been, man? Caught in heavy traffic, ah?" he could still make jokes.

Saying that, he became dead serious:

"Please, Milan, my brother, don't say just a few sentences, as you normally do. Speak for as long as you can, I beg you. I desperately need to take a break".

To be honest, I still do not know what I told the crowd. The only thing I remember is hearing my voice as if it was someone else's. Words were coming out by themselves and my voice was gradually giving up on me. I heard shouts from the crowd, half-aware. I could not understand what they were saying. Whether they were yelling out my name or saying something else, I really cannot tell.

I returned inside and dropped into the first armchair. Fatigue and weariness were suddenly coming over me.

Just then, unsure whether I was dreaming or not, I saw my lawful wife, mother of my two girls, right in front of me. We had a firm agreement that she was to stay home with the kids. What was she doing here?

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"What are you sulking about? Get up! We won! Everything is over. Everyone is celebrating the victory all over the city. Milosevic is finished," she was genuinely thrilled.

"Who let you in? For Heaven's sake, how did you get here?" I asked, completely dazed.

"I came from home, I told them who I was and they brought me in here", said my Marijana calmly.

"My dear Mara, we're either winners or losers. We've crossed the Rubicon and there's no turning back. You should know that".

"Oh, come on, cheer up! This is your great day. You fought for this all of your life. Finally you made it!"

"Please, go home, dear", I kissed her and saw her to the staircase.

I wished I was as certain as she was.

* * *

Kostunica appeared only once that day. He came to the Old Court at about 7 in the afternoon, climbed up to the balcony and gave a speech. Then he disappeared again. We did not see him during the evening or that night. He was with the rest of us for no more than half an hour.

Supposedly, he was in his office at his party head office, so we were told, for security reasons. As the one who defeated Milosevic and the legitimate President-elect, his safety was foremost now.

By then, we had become used to his absences and avoidance, his going into hiding. So none of us insisted that he joins us.

From the beginning we regarded him a figure and symbol without real political weight and influence. That was, of course, our biggest and most fateful error.

* * *

While at City Hall⁵⁶, I was approached by the head of Djindjic's security staff:

⁵⁶ Belgrade City Hall and its administration are located in the Old Court building. For that reason, that same edifice is sometimes referred to as the City Hall.

"Listen Milan, I've been looking for you all over. There's pandemonium at the police station, the one right around the corner of your house. Hooligans have set the place on fire and they're trying to break down the door and get to the weapons. All the policemen have fled. We've got to stop this, otherwise we're going to have a big problem. If they start shooting around town, you're going to be responsible for the bloodshed. You can't allow that to happen, you know that, right?"

We rushed down the stairs toward a side entrance. I ran into Sivilanovic⁵⁷ and asked him to come with me, but he vanished instantaneously as if he hadn't heard me. Then Boris Tadic appeared from somewhere⁵⁸. Seeing us in such a hurry, he asked what was going on. I asked him to come with us and he agreed without delay.

We stepped into the city in dark and passed by broken shop windows, toppled garbage containers, traffic signs knocked down. Belgrade resembled a combat zone. We made our way through rabble and debris. Not a soul was about.

We ran into the building that was ablaze and, after some persuasion, managed to drive out the demonstrators one by one. Most of them left when told to do so, but some of them we had to throw out by force. The station was packed with weapons, obviously well stacked for a showdown with us. We left and returned to the City Hall urgently, leaving two of the guys to watch over the police station⁵⁹.

This episode turned out to be the first example of the efficiency of DOS's "law and order".

* * *

Bookish men are not very quick and resolute in action. Usually, they gauge and weigh every option before they make a move. Their actions are not instinctive, but rational. Pondering is closer to them than acting. They shun unpredictable situations and off-

⁵⁷ Opposition leader, later Minister of Foreign Affairs.

⁵⁸ Then an official of the Democratic Party, today President of Serbia.

⁵⁹ The weapons were quickly transported to the City Hall. Two machineguns were installed on the roof, in case of an attack from the air.

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hand decisions. Their biggest fear is to make a mistake and suspicion is their strongest weapon.

Sometimes, however, a circumstance is so dramatic, that it overrides fear and eases rational insecurity. One discovers in oneself unknown capabilities and powers. The more one realizes ability to control people and events, the more one becomes aware of the role of a leader. One sees oneself issuing orders and managing things swiftly, absolutely convinced of their correctness.

5 October, 2000 was exactly that kind of event.

* * *

I walked into the Mayor's office, a very specious room. All of the DOS leaders were present already, except, of course, Vojislav Kostunica. Vladeta Jankovic⁶⁰ was there on behalf of the DSS⁶¹. Djindjic was the one explaining our next moves.

He first proposed that our men make a tour of major government institutions and check out the situation in each one: Whether there was anyone there and was there any security forces protecting them.

Second, he suggested that contacts should be made with the authorities to negotiate on handover of power.

Third, he said that we ought to elect at least one official of the new government in order to "legalize" what we had achieved in the streets. Lastly, Djindjic concluded that if the Old Court building was to be attacked by Milosevic's forces, it would probably happen at dawn between 4 and 6. In that case, he added, our only defense were the crowds outside. It was paramount for us not to let them disperse. We had to address them from the balcony continually and keep them posted about our intentions.

Djindjic's plan was accepted without a debate. The men set off immediately and we soon received encouraging reports on the situation in key government institutions: All of them were dead empty and abandoned. Djindjic proposed that every DOS leader take with him about 10 men and occupy a specific institution. As

⁶⁰ University professor, Deputy Chairman of Kostunica's party, Ambassador to Great Britain after the democratic changes in Serbia.

⁶¹ Democratic Party of Serbia, Kostunica's political party.

soon as we seized control of the media, we would broadcast that DOS had taken over all power in Serbia.

Kostunica's envoy among us was fiercely opposed to this, after consulting with his boss:

"That is out of the question! We will not have a violent seizure of power. We call for legality and respect of the election results. The only thing that belongs to us is our victory in the elections of 24 September, and let me remind you if you have forgotten, they were presidential, Yugoslav, and local elections. We must not infringe upon the Serbian government".

Even though Jankovic was alone, as everyone else had upheld Djindjic's proposal, his voice tipped the scale and Djindjic retracted:

"Okay, if that's the way you want it, fine. I believe this is a chance we mustn't miss, but since you disapprove, we'll go the harder and slower way".

The rest were silent with approval.

Djindjic's other idea was to call for a session of the new Federal Parliament and inaugurate the new President that very night. The DSS envoy was opposed to this as well:

"That is out of the question! Kostunica will have no meetings tonight. He won't have any improvisation. Everything must be in line with parliamentary and democratic procedure. We know the steps that precede inauguration: verification of mandates in the Parliament, constitution of the parliamentary majority, election of the Speaker, and so on. It is just not feasible to do it tonight".

This, too, was accepted without opposition.

Then Djindjic suggested the election of Belgrade Mayor. That was realistic to be done in the shortest time possible. We needed to bring together more than half of the elected deputies and call a session of the City Hall Assembly⁶².

⁶² The Belgrade City Hall Assembly consisted of 110 assemblymen, which meant that we needed 56 for a valid election of the Mayor. DOS had won an incredible 105 seats. It is important to note here that the election referred to the head of the City Assembly (Parliament) and not of an official with executive prerogatives.

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There were around 60 of us in the conference room in the attic of the Old Court. We sat in semi-darkness around an oval table. The eldest addressed the gathering:

"Gentlemen, as the eldest elected councilman among you, it is my duty and pleasure to propose the only candidate for the President of the City Hall Assembly, and that is Mr. Milan St. Protic. Who is in favor?"

All arms were up except one.

"Who is against?"

Only one.

"One".

I could not vote for myself.

"Based on the result of the vote, I proclaim Mr. Milan St. Protic President of the Belgrade City Hall Assembly⁶³. Congratulations to you, Sir".

That was it. No written record or official minutes. On the night that Milosevic fell.

It was precisely 23:37 pm.

* * *

During the night, the media withdrew its allegiance to Milosevic regime. DOS leaders fled in all directions, using the favorable opportunity to make as many public speeches as never before.

The historical pendulum was nearing our victory.

The only thing that was missing was a public statement that Milosevic had lost power.

The Old Court was full with anticipation of the final outcome. No one dared to say yet that Milosevic was finished. There were still occasional reports on movements of troops and armored units. Someone mentioned a helicopter circling over the City Hall building. We were afraid for people in the streets. Will Milosevic lose control completely and start an all-out war?

That night seconds seemed like hours.

I stopped briefly at my house around 3 am, a benefit of living just a few hundred yards from the Old Court edifice, finding a

⁶³ Mayor of Belgrade.

full house. Friends awake and joyful, kids sleeping peacefully. They welcomed me as a great victor, asking for stories and details from the inside.

I took a quick shower, left them with a brief report and hastened back. Along the way, I noticed that crowds in the streets had started to disperse. I wondered whether this was the right moment for Milosevic's counter offensive. Intoxicated by laurels, I told myself:

"This must be it. I can't wait to court martial him. He's ours now, whatever he does. It's now or never".

Returning to the Mayor's office, I found the atmosphere only seemingly quiet. The leaders were overcome with fatigue.

Que sera, sera...

* * *

Around seven in the morning, I heard on State Television news that Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov was about to land at Belgrade airport, planning to see both Milosevic and Kostunica.

At the same time, looking through the window, I spotted an endless streak of youths and students moving toward us, celebrating victory. It was 6 October and it seemed we could relax at last.

Not for long, though.

3

One question remains above all questions.

There is almost no one in Serbia who has not posed that question to himself or others, over the past six years.

And this is the question:

What was the true political achievement of 5 October and why did it not accomplish more?

It seems possible today to make certain conclusions about the event and its consequences, even if it is not possible to provide a full answer.

For at least three reasons.

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First, the time that has passed enables it. Second, nearly all the facts have been revealed shedding light on 5 October. Third, passions have calmed, and that is an important circumstance for sober and thorough analysis.

One thing is indisputable.

There is hardly anyone in Serbia who is indifferent to 5 October 5, 2000. People either praise this date and predict that Serbia's history will be counted from this day, or they revile its bearers for the worst deeds and lowest of motives. For the majority it represents the biggest date in the life of contemporary Serbia. For some it was a disgrace in which traitors and servants of foreign powers took victory over veritable patriots.

The fact that there is no balanced and unbiased opinion about 5 October makes it special. Whenever people are divided over something, between fiery supporters and angry opponents, the object of their enthusiasm or hatred is surely worthy; otherwise it would not elicit such strong emotions.

The question remains, however, whether the event will be of primary significance for future generations as it was for contemporaries.

We will know the historical weight of 5 October 2000 only in the test of the future.

Yet, this cannot prevent us from examining and questioning the circumstances and spirit of the event today, despite the actual limitations of such an attempt.

* * *

Another aspect of 5 October 2000 is the role of the foreign factor.

To what extent were foreign secret agencies involved in this historic event and in what way? Was DOS an outpost of foreign powers and did its leaders obtain funds from abroad to topple Milosevic and his government? In other words, did 5 October take place to accomplish a strategically important interest of the international community or because a large part of the population no longer wanted to see Milosevic in power?

The truth is that the answer to these questions is not very difficult or controversial.

The fact is that, until the very last, Milosevic had negotiated with representatives of the United States and European Union. To make matters worse, he did so behind closed doors and revealed nothing of the content of the talks. His relations with the West continued without interruptions throughout his rule. Those relations went through different stages, but they never stopped. His major diplomatic success in Dayton resulted from negotiations with Western leaders. He was considerably rewarded for a job well done⁶⁴.

In the 24 September 2000 elections, DOS and its presidential candidate Kostunica won a landslide victory against Milosevic and his right arm Vojislav Seselj. This strongly corroborates that a vast majority of people gave them a no-confidence vote and ousted them from power.

It is true that members of DOS received counsel and support for organizing the elections from professional international agencies. It is also true that Serbian independent media received funds to redress the distorted image that was being broadcast by regime-controlled media. Finally, it is true that a few DOS leaders, the less influential ones, were subsidized for personal and political propaganda.

In spite of this, however, the West did not help Serbian opposition when it should have and it did not help as much as it could have.

Hence, only one conclusion is accurate:

The people of Serbia and no one else decided who would run Serbia and who was to be stripped of power.

* * *

Was it good or not that the revolution ended peacefully, without bloodshed?⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Today we know for certain that the sale of Telecom Serbia was actually that rich reward to Milosevic for his signature in Dayton. The sum amounted to about \$1 billion.

⁶⁵ Official data say only one person was killed, a young woman, member of the DSS.

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No one sane would dare say that it would have been better if there had been street fighting and violence with people dead or suffering. After everything Serbia went through with Milosevic, after a decade of terror and misery, the last thing Serbs needed was to start killing each other. No doubt about that.

Yet, should the people responsible for Serbia's tragedy in the 1990s, headed by Milosevic, has been held accountable?

The answer is yes.

Was this feasible?

The answer is affirmative again.

Why, then, it hasn't happened?

Frankly, because the DOS leadership was not prepared to do it. Kostunica opposed it first and the others followed.

If the nation expected anything of the winner, then that was the most draconian punishment for Milosevic and his officials. Refusal to do so was the first disappointment.

What was the reason for not doing so?

At one point or another, some among DOS leaders joint with some of Milosevic's men. Among DOS leaders, the key figure in that dishonorable affair was Vojislav Kostunica. Most probably some of the others too.

Thus a side view of 5 October makes for a poor theatrical performance. The piece was written in advance and the roles assigned. The directors knew the end of the show. Only Serbia was deceived.

Apparently, the initial plan was as follows: Milosevic publicly recognizes defeat and hand over power to Kostunica; in return he resumes political activity as chairman of his political party; things go on as nothing had happened. Milosevic's meeting with Kostunica after 5 October is telling of this. This could explain his strong resistance to Milosevic's arrest and extradition to The Hague Tribunal.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ The most indicative detail was Kostunica's visit to Milosevic in the company of Gen. Pavkovic, on the night of 5 October. His partners were sitting at the Old Court building gearing up for an armed attack, while he was paying a visit to the arch enemy, doing so in the utmost secrecy, without the knowledge of anyone in DOS.

Kostunica's new presidential staff was quickly filled with individuals associated with Milosevic's secret service and military intelligence.

His objection to the idea of taking over all power in Serbia on 5 October was discussed above.

It is widely known that it was precisely Kostunica who exercised his authority to protect Gen. Pavkovic as chief of the General Staff and Radomir Markovic as head of the Serbian state security⁶⁷.

He was the one who insisted on the so-called "legalism", which, in fact, meant preserving the existing order and institutions. It was him who would not make a clean break with the previous regime, enabling continuity with Milosevic's system.

Finally, Kostunica established close cooperation with the Montenegrin Socialists, Milosevic's erstwhile partners and members of a party that campaigned for Milosevic in Montenegro, against Kostunica, and most stridently challenged his election victory.

These are the real reasons why Milosevic and his people were not held accountable for their most destructive policies.

* * *

Yet, Kostunica cannot be faulted for everything, although he deserves most of the blame.

The question is why the other leaders of the revolution did and winners over Milosevic remain silent, although they knew very well where this was taking Serbia?

Why did no one challenge Kostunica and his policy until it was too late?

Why was the public not told what this was about, when everyone in DOS could see what was going on?

The shameful fact is that most of the leaders quickly developed a taste for power. They succumbed to all temptations that were being offered. They fell in love with black limousines, driv-

⁶⁷ Both were considered to be Milosevic's confidants. Markovic was charged and sentenced for masterminding the assassination of former Serbian President Ivan Stambolic and for two assassination attempts on Vuk Draskovic.

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ers, planes, offices, secretaries, money and status. They enjoyed the delights and privileges of power-holders, easily reneged on their promises, oaths, and the public interest. The dissolute lifestyle and obsession with power won them overnight and they suddenly cared for nothing else.

It is an ancient truth that power is the biggest of all human weaknesses because it makes its claim right away, without waiting. One does not gradually fall, stumble or struggle. A person in power changes instantly, wipes out what he believed until the day before and accepts his new role as most natural. His opinion of others becomes cynical and of himself the highest. A power lover lies to himself as well as to the others. He speaks of sublime goals but thinks only of his own success.

Nothing else matters any more.

Another important factor was that too many of DOS leaders had been in Milosevic's service, dismissed at one point or another. Those people had experienced power and were only too eager to return. For others, those who belonged to the opposition from the out start, the climb up the rungs of power was unexpected. They were not about to renounce their new position at any cost. Thus they bowed and tolerated Kostunica.

Unfortunately, there was more. The DOS leaders pretended they really had power and that something actually depended on them. They left the impression that they were making vital decisions and that 5 October made an essential difference. Yet, they knew perfectly well that after 5 October, power was in the same hands as it was prior to that date. The difference being that now they became representatives of the government, no longer its opponents.

The revolution was not betrayed only because Kostunica betrayed it, but because other leaders knew and kept silent. The fact of the matter is that Kostunica did not win because he was stronger, but because the others let him win.

* * *

The date of 5 October 2000 belongs to the past, no question about it. It was a great opportunity for Serbia that was unfortunately gambled away. There is no point discussing it today. The

Milan St. Protic

wheel of history simply cannot be turned back no matter how much we would want it to happen.

Today, six years later, it is our obligation to reveal the whole truth about ourselves and others, as a debt to those who trusted us and a legacy for those to come after us.

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Kostunica Meets Powell (May 2001)

In May 2001, Kostunica unexpectedly received an invitation to visit Washington and meet with its top officials, including President George W. Bush. Of the numerous encounters, the last one with Colin Powell was the most interesting one.

We met with the Secretary of State in his office. Powell was seated comfortably opposite to Kostunica, his legs crossed, ready to give due attention to his guest.

Our President obviously had only one speech, prepared beforehand, which he repeated at every occasion. He carried on about the necessity to abide by the law and what complied with the Serbian Constitution and what did not. Of course, not a single word about the cooperation with The Hague Tribunal.

Powell's answer was brief and crystal-clear:

"Mr. President, I want you to understand, so I'll be very frank. I am merely an officer of the government and my primary duty is to implement the law. My hands are tied by a law that was passed by the highest legislative body of the United States. The law says that we cannot help you unless you cooperate with The Hague Tribunal. In order for me to help you, you must help me".

That was all. It was as silent as a grave.

Miroljub Labus⁶⁸ plucked up the courage to say:

"If I understood you correctly, Mr. Secretary, it would suffice if we passed a law on cooperation with The Hague Tribunal in order for you to participate at the Donors' Conference for Yugoslavia later in June".

The U.S. General shot him a glance and responded, in his capacity of the Secretary of State:

"No", he said in a tone that would freeze one's blood. Silence again.

⁶⁸ **Labus, Miroljub** -- economist, opposition leader, chairman of the G17 plus, Yugoslav deputy Prime Minister after Milosevic, Serbian deputy Prime Minister, resigned in May 2006.

Labus made one more attempt, visibly distressed:

"Could you perhaps change the term for the Donors' Conference and pass it on for the talks with the Paris Club about our international debt scheduled for August? These two months are precious for us and they cannot mean much to you".

Powell made the same movement with his body and gave him another stern look. He need not have said anything. His answer was clear.

"No", the word resounded in our ears, "and let me explain why. Because the law passed by U.S. Congress said Donors' Conference, not the Paris Club. And your President knows as well as I do the meaning of the power of law".

His words, spoken in a soft tone, were as cutting as a sword. We lost every wish to continue the discussion and could scarcely wait for permission to leave.

Upon our return to the Embassy, no one was in the mood for conversation.

* * *

Less than a week after Kostunica's return to Belgrade I was called to the National Security Council, through a message marked urgent.

"Ambassador, apologies for the invitation at such short notice, but the matter cannot be delayed. Of course, you know your President wrote to our President", said my counterpart rather casually.

"I have no idea", I replied, as no one had informed me about any letter. There was no point in lying.

"We received a letter from President Kostunica by fax, believed or not".

"How can I help you?" I asked, playing dumb.

"Look, there's a sentence in the text that we're not sure was accurately translated from Serbian. You know a kind of formulation not customary in official communication between heads of state. We wanted you to have a look at it."

"I'd be glad to, but I have to read the whole letter", I opened my cards.

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"Unfortunately, Ambassador, we are unable to provide you with it, considering the circumstance that Belgrade hasn't informed you about it", said my acquaintance, responding to the diplomatic duel.

"I'm sorry, but I can't help you then. I can't accurately interpret one sentence that is taken out of context", I said calmly.

Belgrade sent the letter and did not tell me about it. I had to find out what it was about. Apparently, it was something of delicate matter. I waited patiently to see how the American diplomat would act. The trump was in my hands. Either he shows the letter or he does not get my interpretation.

After briefly thinking it over, the official from the National Security Council laid out his cards.

"Okay, Ambassador, you win. We'll let you have a look at the letter, but we cannot give you a copy of it".

I never asked for a copy, I only wanted to read it.

"Okay", I agreed with the sense of triumph.

The letter was not long, but the content was very interesting. In the letter, Kostunica expressed his fascination by the visit and welcome he had received in Washington. He generously complimented everyone he met and particularly uttered admiration for President Bush. He elaborated on the 100 years of mutual friendship, the alliance of our countries in two world wars, the leading role of the United States in the world, and so on.

Then, without any reservation, he offered guarantees that the legislation cooperation with The Hague Tribunal would be passed urgently, paving the way for speedy arrests and extraditions that the Yugoslav government was resolved to fulfill its international obligations. It was that last sentence the Americans wanted clarified:

"I assure you, Mr. President, I pledge my personal reputation that the law which implies the extradition of inductees to The Hague Tribunal shall be passed as soon as possible".

The phrase "pledge my personal reputation" puzzled the Americans. The customary expression in standard diplomatic correspondence was "all my political authority" or "everything in my power". A personal note in correspondence is seen as a promise that closes off space for possible maneuvering. There was no

disputing the English translation. "Personal reputation" is what it said.

I confirmed the accuracy of the translation and hurried to the Embassy, realizing the importance of the letter. I composed a note right on the spot and sent it to Kostunica in the form of a highly classified dispatch. In it I had to underscore as strongly as I could that Washington took his message very seriously and that there was no more room for retreat. He simply had to keep the promise he made. I omitted the fact that he had not informed me about it. I received no reply.

Few weeks later, the bill on cooperation with the Tribunal failed to win majority support in the Yugoslav Federal Parliament. Again I had to confront the National Security Council's representative. I was greeted with a question at the door:

"What happened, Ambassador?"

"Nothing, the law was not passed".

"What about your President's personal reputation?" the questions were getting worse.

"He did what he could. The Montenegrin Socialists are to blame. They refused to vote for it", I tried to defend the indefensible.

"If that's the case, then let me ask you this: How could your President make a pledge before he secured the support of his coalition partner? Those Montenegrins are your coalition partners, are they not? After the letter, the least we expected was for your President to address the Parliament, give a speech on the need to cooperate with the Tribunal and persuade the majority to support it. None of that happened. We can only conclude that your President went back on his word", the facts were on his side.

I was mute. I simply had nothing to say to that. The man was absolutely right.

*Duel With Richard Goldstone*⁶⁹
(End of May 2001)

The Washington Holocaust Museum occasionally hosts public debates on certain topics, in addition to its regular archival activities. The lectures are highly regarded in the U.S. capital and usually draw a considerable audience.

Hon. Richard Goldstone was appointed first prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for War Crimes in Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 1993. The South African jurist gained international recognition as a staunch fighter for human rights and an opponent of the racist regime in his homeland. This was his recommendation for the sensitive position of the Chief Prosecutor of the Tribunal.

In mid-spring 2001, Goldstone visited Washington. The Holocaust Museum invited him to participate in a debate on The Hague Tribunal. I was invited too.

I was looking forward to a dignified and academic dialogue, as befitted the venue and the participants. A lawyer of distinction, Goldstone's career was worthy of respect. Regrettably, the meeting became an intellectual battle and victory meant that one of us had to deliver a painful blow to his adversary.

Goldstone began the squabble. He first elaborated on the historical significance of the establishment of the Tribunal, saying it was a revolutionary step forward in the development of international criminal law. Then he went a step further, establishing Serbia's collective guilt for war crimes in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. The culmination of his judgment was that the toppling of the Milosevic regime on 5 October 2000 was a transparent fraud that was done to dodge responsibility for the horrendous atrocities against humanity.

It was too much.

⁶⁹ **Goldstone, Richard** -- prominent jurist from South Africa, first prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia in The Hague

Goldstone spoke for about an hour, giving me sufficient time to ponder ways to counter him. I had one advantage: The last say. So, I decided to speak briefly but harshly, on the edge of politeness. Instead of an academic debate, I would build up an attack gradually, giving him no opportunity to counter. This is what I said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I dare not challenge Mr. Goldstone in the theoretical sphere of international criminal law, as his name and title are worthy of sincere respect. Do not expect me to confront such an international authority. I must admit good manners prevent me from expressing what I feel right now. Mr. Goldstone's experience and senior years do not allow me to communicate my thoughts to the public. For that kind of response, I'm sure; our hosts tonight could find a better contender for Mr. Goldstone than me.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, I will remind the esteemed lawyer of a few facts from our recent past. You will easily recognize what I am talking about, as will he.

When Milosevic signed the peace accord for Bosnia-Herzegovina at Wright-Patterson base in Dayton, Ohio in 1995, he formally recognized the authority of the International Tribunal for War Crimes in Former Yugoslavia. He could have been indicted, detained, and handed over to the Tribunal then, while on U.S. soil. Justice would have been served and a great favor done to Serbia. But no, esteemed lawyer, this did not happen. There was no indictment, no arrest. On the contrary. Milosevic was warmly greeted on the lawn of the White House right here in Washington. And the international media which until then had used the vilest of terms to describe Milosevic, mostly "the butcher of the Balkans", now presented him as "a factor of peace and stability in Southeastern Europe". Milosevic returned to Belgrade with international appreciation for his immeasurable contribution to peace, only to pursue his bloody and criminal policy. Perhaps Mr. Goldstone's words are convincing, but the deeds are definitely not. Which is why they sound empty and insincere?

In October 2000, ladies and gentlemen, people of Serbia led by the democratic opposition managed to beat the bastard, excuse my language, and removed him from power. With their courage

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and force, Serbs saved themselves as well as others from this evil man, please do not forget that. To be honest, few people in the world believed at the time that Serbs were capable of such a historic feat. In March this year, the government arrested Milosevic in Belgrade. He sits, as we speak, in a prison cell in Belgrade waiting for the trial.

Mr. Goldstone, you had your chance in 1995 and you missed it. I'm sorry, Sir. It's our turn now. I rest my case".

It was bang on the mark. The public was on my side. Richard Goldstone ran out, steaming with anger.

No apology could ease his rage.

*The "Master Plan" -- Milosevic in The Hague
(June 2001)*

Our foreign policy was at a standstill. Apart from acquiring membership of the United Nations and renewing diplomatic ties with the Great Powers, we were making no progress.

The sentiments of the international public visibly improved, however. After 5 October, we became pets of foreign media. We should have known that the attention of the international public would be over sooner or later. Thus our primary task must have been to capitalize as much as possible from this favorable, albeit transient circumstance.

Every effort we made toward a particular end hit the walls of The Hague Tribunal. The policy of imposing conditions, which the Bush administration pursued after Clinton, suited them well, but was hurting us badly. Every issue we raised or request we made met with the same response: first cooperation with the IC-TY, then everything else.

Milosevic was our most compelling case in relations with the world. The United States most of all wanted him in The Hague, and we had him in prison. That should have been the core of our foreign policy, I thought. Milosevic deserved to answer for his crimes long ago. We should not have wavered over that. Besides, as his extradition to the Tribunal could benefit the nation, it was an opportunity not to be missed.

Pressure from Washington mounted day after day. If there had been any doubt about it, it became evident after Kostunica's Washington visit. Time to make a deal was irrevocably running out. Success depended on our skill to propose a solution that would not be a simple swap, but convey our belief that every inductee must be sent to the Dutch capital.

On the other hand, we needed to define our national interests to offset Milosevic's extradition. Lastly, we should check in advance whether Americans were willing to accept our offer.

Our first step had to be to find a way out of the "conditionality policy" and to conclude a comprehensive settlement with the United States.

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Regrettably, the Yugoslav government conducted a different policy. First, it tried to avoid cooperation with ICTY by all means. Second, it challenged the constitutional framework for Kosovo presented by the international community and tried to do so before the U.N. Security Council. Third, it kept on encouraging local Serbs to boycott the Kosovo parliamentary elections. Lastly, President Kostunica had not recognized the tragic state of our economy and the necessity to obtain foreign assistance.

* * *

Diplomacy is actually a simple mission, once protocol and form are disregarded. Two factors seem to be crucial: a sound concept and the right timing. When the two are favorably joined, success is almost guaranteed. This is a kind of political equation, where both sides should be evened out to achieve balance.

What we had to offer?

We had two strong cards. The first was Milosevic and a few other desirable inductees. The second was the constitutional framework for Kosovo. It was in our interest to address the question of the Tribunal and finish with it once for all. The constitutional framework for Kosovo could not be altered anyway. Obviously, it was a done deal. We would, therefore, be giving what we had to give.

And what should we have asked for?

There were two foremost demands. First, the recognition of Serbia's state and national rights in Kosovo. Second -- considerable and multiple financial aids.

Elections called in Kosovo under the auspices of the international community were an opportunity to achieve the first goal: For all Serbs and non-Albanians born in Kosovo to be entitled to vote. Providing a high turnout, they would win more than 40 of 120 seats in Pristina Parliament, leaving Albanians with less than the two-third majority needed to pass any decision on the Province's status. In other words, Serbs and non-Albanians would have been in charge of the future of Kosovo. In addition to this, the constitutional framework set a 7-member Presidency. This is how it was supposed to work: Serbs and non-Albanians were guaranteed one seat each. Based on the number of votes they

won, they would gain two more seats, which add up to four. In that case, Albanians would have been left with only three. Most important of all, Serbian interests in Kosovo would not have depended on the good graces of the international community but on its real power in the Parliament. The whole idea would have been carried through on the basis of purely democratic principles. And one more thing. The realization of this plan would have recognized full citizenship to Serbs and non-Albanians born in Kosovo, not just the miserable few left, after Milosevic's disaster in 1999.

* * *

I was haunted by the idea of a "master plan" since my arrival in the United States. Gradually, I was putting the pieces of this political puzzle together. My problem was that I lacked strong backing from Belgrade. In order for the idea to work, one of the key leaders at least had to support it.

A suitable opportunity arose when I met Mark Medish. He was a senior official in Treasury Department during the Clinton administration. He left the government early in 2001 and started a private consulting firm. His first client was then Yugoslav Deputy Prime Minister Miroljub Labus.

During a conversation with Medish, I told him of my idea. He was delighted:

"Hey, Milan, that's perfect. We've been planning something similar for some time now. Labus is the right man for this. My company could help you considerably; I propose we work together".

We made a plan. He took on himself to prepare the part about the financial assistance as well as the task to keep contact with Labus's office. I was in charge of the political aspect and dialogue with the Americans.

I went to the State Department and National Security Council a few times early in June 2001. During one of those meetings I plucked up courage to broach the topic:

"How about a major breakthrough?" I asked. I was course referring to Milosevic's extradition.

"What do you mean?"

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"You know what I mean".

"We're listening".

I said right away that I was not speaking officially on behalf of the government in Belgrade. I presented the main points of my plan, using select diplomatic language, but in such a way that everyone understood (the 'agreement on normalization of relations between the United States and Yugoslavia").

They were rather stunned, telling me to return the following day for the answer.

The next day's conversation went as follows:

"Are you aware, Mr. Ambassador, what you're asking for?"

"Yes I am. Absolutely. And are you aware what we're offering?"

"If we understood you correctly, you want one third of the Kosovo Assembly and an absolute majority in the Kosovo Presidency?"

"Yes, and you get Milosevic's scalp".

"If our answer is affirmative, what guarantees could you provide that your government will accept?"

"Leave that to me. Though I need a few guarantees as well".

"What are you referring to?"

"This is what I am referring to. The OSCE in Serbia is registering voters for elections in Kosovo. Let's say that all Kosovo-born Serbs and non-Albanians have the right to be registered".

"We can take care of that".

"Perfect".

* * *

Still, an agreement had yet to be formalized. My mission could only be a prelude to the final deal. The actual conclusion of the package had to be done by one of the top leaders from Serbia.

I informed Medish who in turn told Labus. Alas, there was no response. It did not take long for me to realize that Labus gave up. Agreeing to this meant breaking with Kostunica, and obviously Labus was not willing to do so.

There was only Djindjic left. I did not know how to reach him so I called his house from a telephone booth, as I dared not dial from the Embassy. My telephone was tapped from the day I arrived. This is how our conversation proceeded:

"Is this a safe line?" I asked.

"As safe as any other", I gathered that his phone was tapped too.

"Listen, Zoran, the reason why I am calling you is extremely important. I believe we are on the brink of a historic agreement over all outstanding issues that we have with the United States. You've got to come here as urgently as possible". Djindjic knew what I was talking about.

"Forget it. No chance. Perhaps you can't see things from over there, but the situation is extremely unstable over here. I can't leave Belgrade. Not for a single second, you have to believe me".

"Could you at least come to Zurich for an hour? I'll come from Washington. I need only two words from you".

"I get what you're driving at, but it's too late. We'll have to do it afterwards; you do understand what is at stake here, don't you?"

"I think I do. But I am telling you that it is going to be very bad for us afterwards, without a prior arrangement", I insisted in vain.

"I know, I know, but there's no more time. It's now or never. Otherwise we're done for. If I leave Belgrade for a single minute, things could get out of my control and then you as well as I might not have a place to return to. This is the most crucial issue now. When we've finished it, we'll think of something. Don't you worry".

I hung up and sat in a nearby bar to collect my thoughts. Things looked awful. Kostunica and his entourage had grown so strong that they had Labus terrified and Djindjic tense. Milosevic's people in politics, military security, police, and finance rallied around Kostunica and created a new center of power operating with old ideas. Their very headquarters were in the President's office. Kostunica agreed to be the successor of the ideology of Serbo-Communism. This is why there was no break with the old regime and why none of Milosevic's officials was held accountable. This is why it became dangerous to hand over Milosevic and other inductees and why Kostunica's policy was basically anti-Western.

Suddenly, everything became so clear.

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Now the whole truth was out. Kostunica did give up the Serbian democratic revolution. For that reason Labus dared not, Djindjic could not, and the rest were silent.

I finally figured it out.

* * *

Zoran Djindjic was the most responsible for Milosevic's handover to ICTY on June 28, 2001.

He was assassinated less than two years later on March 12, 2003.

9/11/ 2001

(Testimony of a Foreign Eyewitness)

Morning. Manhattan on fire. Shock. Disbelief. Panic. Grief. Fear. Action. Vengeance.

One thing is certain: Things will never be as they were. The world will never look the same again, nor the United States. Questions rise abroad as well as inside the United States. Questions that still wait to be answered.

Americans are in a dilemma. Is this the end of the American dream that lasted for more than 200 years? Is a new tragedy lurking? Where is the end to the war on terror?

Outside America, the world is just as terrified and wondering. Are we on the brink of a global conflict? Is the arm of terrorism so powerful it could bring down everything? Will the United States reach for its most powerful weapon? Has life inevitably become hopeless?

The 9/11 attack shook the United States more than anything else since the end of World War Two. It had Americans reexamining their way of life and their views of the world for the first time since the foundation of the United States.

America will recover from the huge material damage, no doubt. Hope, will and determination -- those had always been American virtues. All government bodies worked like clockwork, the administration, the Congress and the armed forces hand in hand. The differences between Democrats and Republicans were put aside. The political course was speedily determined, in harmony and presented to the public immediately. Diplomatic skill was in play as well. In virtually no time, Secretary of State put together a broad global coalition to back the U.S. war on terror policy. It involved nearly everyone in the world. Long-term conflicts were temporarily closed, though not resolved. Relations with Russia had not been better since the large-scale anti-Hitlerian coalition 60 years ago. All Islamic countries condemned the act of terror, even Iran and Libya.

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Everything the United States presented seemed confident and accurate, outside. Inside, however, everything was upset. Americans were worried about their "American dream".

What did it mean?

Since the creation of the United States, Americans believed they lived in a free country. The last line of the anthem goes "O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave". The Founding Fathers raised the individual freedom to a holy ideal. Many things changed over the centuries, but the belief in freedom remained intact.

Americans were accustomed to living in a safe country. Crime was restricted to specific districts of big cities, while most families in the interior used to leave their homes and cars unlocked. Sporadic outbursts of excessive violence in schools send a distorted image about the safety of American children. Every American sends his kid to school convinced that it is absolutely protected.

Apart from the big cities, neighbors are close to one another and celebrate the American way of life (my neighborhood) as they did 100 years ago.

People in America drive carefully, patiently and tolerantly. The number of traffic accidents is considerably lower than in other developed countries

Foreign image of the United States is mostly one-sided, obtained from movies or brief visits. Real America is life in suburbs or small towns, where the same rules of behavior have been in effect forever.

It is this America that was alarmed and disquieted. Ordinary Americans began to fear traveling, opening their mail, meeting new people. They started asking themselves: What is more important, my freedom or my safety? Has not the time come to give up our rights for the benefit of the government, so that it can protect us better? Is the time come to change our habits and beliefs?

Fear breeds resistance toward everyone and violence follows without reason. After 9/11, an American shot to death his Indian neighbor (a Sikh) who owned a gas station thinking he were a Muslim.

The nation became nervous because it could not find the right answer. Some were willing to take a chance and keep their freedom; others would give up their freedom only to be free of the uncertainty.

If the Pentagon was vulnerable, how can we be safe? Is the man beside me a terrorist or a friend? Is there deadly powder in a letter or not? The beginning or end of every thought, the worst question of all: What's next?

There is no ending yet, which is why there is no calm. America feigns peace at home, assuring itself that everything is okay. The catastrophe is over, there is grief, but we are moving on. Thanksgiving and Christmas are ahead, two most joyous holidays. A time for gifts and merriment.

This was only a desperate attempt to allay the unease and fear. Everyone is trying to overcome memories of the New York tragedy. There is a chance of success, provided there is no repetition.

The United States is severely wounded. It is on a path to heal, recovering gradually. It trusts its President, because harboring doubts will only make things gloomier. It continues to watch sports as fervently as ever, no longer to enjoy, but to drive away the darkest of thoughts.

And again it makes heroes. New York Mayor Rudi Giuliani became the star of stars. He had battled a serious illness and was the first to arrive on the spot. He rescued and cleaned away tirelessly, saying the magic words:

"After this, New York will be more beautiful than ever, and America stronger than ever!"

Today every American wears a pin with the national banner on his lapel. A symbol of unity, resolve, and eternity. Fear is unbearable in isolation.

Is this a new kind of patriotism?

Not at all.

It is just a struggle for survival.

* * *

Then the huge force moved. To demonstrate strength, to punish the culprits, to appease itself.

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It struck with all its might. Afghanistan, the place of contemporary evil and violence, was the first target. It was run over, but the main offender was not found.

The Great Power was next on Iraq, another deadly threat to mankind. It yelled out loud for all to hear:

"Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists".

It hit alone once again. This time, Iraq fell. But that was not enough. U.S. troops took Kabul and Baghdad, but America wanted reprisal. Someone had to pay for the terror in New York. And he did. The years-long demon of modern civilization, the arch enemy of the United States who sows death: Saddam Hussein. He was found in a pit and drawn out for the world to see. This is how anyone who dares to threaten the biggest power on earth will end up.

At last America can relax.

Yet, not to the end.

No one knows when a mad avenger will strike again.

My Contemporaries

THE LEADING FIVE

- Studies of Serbian Characters and Politics -

There are different ways to describe an era. I chose to introduce Serbia's recent past by portraying some of its most prominent figures.

My aim was not to create historical portraits. These are rather political portraits, yet they are not biographies. My intent was not to detail the lives of five people who shaped the last two decades of Serbia's destiny, but to provide testimony about an era in which I was directly and credibly involved.

Political time is a process of gradual, but constant change. Those changes, perhaps, could be best documented through its leaders. I tried, therefore, to describe Serbian recent history by writing about its key figures.

I trust that the benevolent reader will forgive the judgments and assessments in this chapter that he disagrees with. However, he can be assured that facts and events are credibly depicted.

I made no claim to being impartial. My role and actions in past years testify to the opposite. One thing is certain, though: in writing these pages I tried to be open and sincere to the maximum; nothing was purposely concealed or hushed up, let alone distorted or fabricated.

New generations of researchers and historians will appear, in quest of the truth about Serbia in our times. If the following chapter helps their mission at all, then its publication will have served its purpose entirely.

Slobodan Milosevic

Slobodan Milosevic⁷⁰ appeared on Serbia's political stage in 1985. He, in no way, stood out from the other drab Communist leaders of the time.

Right about then, Milosevic was elected to the post of the president of Belgrade League of Communists. He was quite unknown to wider audiences, acting as the stanch apparatchik of the regime, his bearing stiff and his speeches hackneyed. A one track mind, conspicuous somberness, and an ever-present frown made Milosevic fit perfectly in the image of a true successor to Tito.

Nothing about him presaged that such a man, with so common a name and surname, could rise to the top and that he would mark the next 15 years of the nation's destiny. There was no hint that this obscure Communist official had the destructive power of a ruthless autocrat.

1

The debate continues to this day on whether Milosevic was the cause or consequence of Serbian national consciousness created in the last two decades of the 20th century.

Some argue that his advent to power in the Party and State set the course for Serbian policy and led the country to ruin. They allege that Milosevic was a hard-line Communist who defeated a soft faction in the Communist Party, adopted a new national program and put an iron grip around Serbia.

Others believe that he arrived on the path of centuries-long Serbian nationalism and its aspiration to rule over others. They reject Milosevic's Communism as the key to understanding his governance. According to them, he was simply a bearer of a Serbian idea for conquest, developed in the 19th century, one that

⁷⁰ Slobodan Milosevic (1941-2006).

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the Serbs never renounced (from Ilija Garasanin⁷¹ to Slobodan Milosevic).

The views on Milosevic's political goals are differing too. The prevalent belief departs from the hypothesis that Milosevic wanted a so-called Greater Serbia, that is, to enclose Serbian historic and ethnic areas into one state. That would mean forcibly annexing parts of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to Serbia, and subjecting Vojvodina and Kosovo to Belgrade's authority.

Other observers of Serbian politics saw Milosevic as Tito's Yugoslav, whose goal was to appropriate Tito's legacy and himself become a new Tito. When this proved impossible, he pulled back territorially, but changed nothing of his basic Communist attitude.

Milosevic's relationship toward the international community also sparked different views. He negotiated with the West; he used Russia, yet relied on China. He maintained close ties with Iraq, Libya and other controversial regimes. Some people in Serbia still believe that he was America's man who had fallen out with Americans. Others assess him as a diplomatic pragmatist ready to make any deal that suited his interests. Others yet believe him to be the last offshoot of European Stalinism, a fire-brand of Communism in Serbia.

Conspicuously, his allies were solely Communist-like dictators, whether he found them in Asia, Africa, or Latin America -- they all belonged to the similar ideological club (anti-Western).

Milosevic wrought desolation: His governance was stained by wars, abuse, and untruths.

Though Serbia is free of his physical presence now, it is still a slave to the destructive concepts created during his government.

* * *

Milosevic's epoch could be divided into three periods, almost equal in duration.

The first period (1986-1991) marked his rise and development of his cult of personality.

⁷¹ Serbian politician mid-19th century, writer of the first Serbian national program ("Nacertanije" 1844).

The second period (1991-1996) was the period of armed clashes, destruction and death in former Yugoslavia.

The last period of his rule (1996-2000) were years of self-destruction until his fall on 5 October, 2000.

At the onset of his campaign, Milosevic ruthlessly eliminated his opponents in the Communist Party of Serbia. He did so with help from military circles and hardened Communist fighters, taking advantage of a nationally-sensitive question for a showdown in the Party. Thus Kosovo was not the point in the conflict, but a form in which it was manifested. On the outside, the rift was depicted as a struggle for preserving Serbia's territorial integrity as a state, a struggle against Albanian separatism in Serbia's southern province. Internally, however, a partisan battle was being fought, seen so many times before and so typical of Communists. Milosevic's opponents in the Party were declared traitors of the national interest, while he was hailed as Serbia's historic savior and the rescuer of "all Serbs". The real truth was that two Serb Communist factions were vying for power in the Party.

The fight was short-lived and ended with easy victory of Milosevic's faction. The defeated faction pulled back without resistance, ceding control of the state to the evil-boding winners.

In the next few years, Milosevic became the absolute ruler of Serbia. After establishing his personal authority in Serbia, he turned toward Yugoslavia. The task was to carry out the same coup in the Yugoslav State and Party as he had done in Serbia.

2

Yugoslavia did not break up by the will of foreign factors, but collapsed under the impact of an internal strife among Communist powerbrokers.

Indeed, Western powers had a crucial impact on former Yugoslavia. Since the unification of Yugoslavia in 1918, their influence on events was immensely significant. It was widely believed abroad that the order in Tito's Yugoslavia was lax compared with other governments in Eastern Europe and that it

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would most easily be transformed into a system based on political and economic freedoms.

As the Soviet Union weakened, the West began preparing the ground for fundamental changes in Eastern Europe. Yugoslavia seemed to provide the best example for that and the right place to start from.

However, unexpected changes took place in Yugoslavia in the 1980s. Encouraged from outside, some Communist leaders led by the new Prime Minister⁷², introduced economic reforms that led ultimately to the deconstruction of socialism and the so-called "self-management" and planned economy created in Tito's era. The privatization of socially-owned firms began, market relations were introduced, the stability of the domestic currency was maintained, and imports were liberated. Financial aid from abroad started to pour into the country. The living standard rose sharply, and for a couple of years people lived better than ever before or since. Yugoslavia had taken the course toward the European community, it seemed.

Political changes evolved at a different speed. Small hints that the 50-year-long system was gradually loosening became first visible in Slovenia, and then in other parts of former Yugoslavia, timidly though. Still, this was far from true political reforms required to make the transition from a Communist autocracy to democratic government. Yet, wide-ranging progress was undeniable.

The comparatively comfortable lifestyle distanced people in Yugoslavia from politics. Ordinary folk had long been brainwashed with a simplified Marxist doctrine and Tito's personality cult knowing little about multiparty system and democratic institutions. Accustomed to long-term non-freedom, people focused on the comforts of living. It is fair to say that in the late eighties, people in Yugoslavia lived quite well.

* * *

⁷² Ante Markovic became Prime Minister in March 1989 as a representative of Croatia.

Most people in Yugoslavia were completely unaware that the entire Communist world was seriously shaken.

A spirit of reconciliation was evident among moderate Communists, looking to survive on the political scene in some restructured form. On the other side, hard-line Communists rallied, gravely alarmed by these developments.

One group consisted of so-called Communist-reformists and the other was led by Milosevic, in the capacity of a representative of Party conservatives.

Tito's Yugoslavia broke up and collapsed on this rift.

The wheel of change had to cause conflict. Some saw a chance to politically endure, others a possibility to preserve the *status quo*. It was a question of survival to both. Hence, any compromise was simply impossible.

Seeing that the reforms were well under way and could not be halted, the Serb Bolsheviks did everything to bring the country into danger, hoping that the West would stand in defense of the socialist Yugoslavia just as it had done for 50 years. Aware that the ideological edge of Communism was blunted, they thought they would stir ethnic unrest to have a pretext and support for imposing a state of emergency and a military-party rule.

The 14th Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia⁷³ (the Communist Party) proved to be the decisive moment. It was right then that the hard liners led by Milosevic split with the reformists. They previously issued an ultimatum which the Slovenes and Croats flatly rejected. The Party delegations of the two western republics walked out of the Congress, while Milosevic and his faction continued as if nothing happened. But it did.

The united Communist Party of Yugoslavia was broken. Considering that former Yugoslavia was a Party-State, this was the introduction to the disintegration of the state itself. The leading reformist failed to understand what was really going on:

"The Party can break up, but the state will continue to function unhindered".⁷⁴

⁷³ In Belgrade, January 1990.

⁷⁴ Statement by Markovic after the 14th Party congress.

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In April, 1990, Franjo Tudjman won in Croatian elections and removed one of the reformist factions among the Yugoslav Communists.⁷⁵ Two weeks earlier in Slovenia, the united opposition DEMOS won 55% of Parliament seats.

Belgrade peacefully received both election results. If "retrograde, nationalist and separatist forces" are in power, it is easier to explain the necessity of a state coup before the international community, they believed.

The following circumstance is interesting to note. Multiparty elections were called in Slovenia and Croatia without delay and hindrance in spring of 1990. In Serbia, elections were called in December and a referendum was held in the meantime, a new Constitution (September 1990) was adopted which paved the way for the autocratic government of the Serbian President assuring, at the same time, electoral victory of Communists, now renamed into Socialists⁷⁶.

Along with this, Serbs were being systematically fomented on a very sensitive national basis. Croatian Serbs were subjugated to massive prosecution by the Croatian fascists during WWII (Usta-shi). The task was carried out directly by old Titoist commanders and generals of the Yugoslav Army of Serbian descent. They secretly handed out weapons to the frightened people. No force could stop the stirred nationalist passions in Serbia, starting from the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo⁷⁷ in June 1989.

The experience of the Communist revolution 50 years ago proved most valuable.

* * *

⁷⁵ The Croatian Democratic Union won two thirds of seats in all three houses of the Croatian Assembly.

⁷⁶ In July 1990, the Serbian Communist Party and the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Serbia (the Communist controlled Trade Union) united to form a new party - the Socialist Party of Serbia, electing Milosevic Chairman.

⁷⁷ Battle of Kosovo (1389) between Serbian landlords and the Ottomans, marked the beginning of the end of medieval Serbia. Serbia's defeat subsequently became a national myth.

Everything proceeded as Milosevic planned. The country was on the brink of dissolution and civil war. The Yugoslav crisis was on the agenda of the Western powers in fall of 1991. Milosevic and his *entourage* were waiting for the foreign factor to endorse military action for the preservation of Yugoslavia's integrity. But this is when real problems and misunderstandings arose for Milosevic and his comrades.

The visit of U.S. Secretary of State James Baker III to Belgrade in June 1991, and talks in which he said diplomatically that the United States gave advantage to the survival of the common Yugoslav state and that they would not recognize the unilateral decisions on secession, heartened Milosevic's Communist hardliners. In Baker's statements, they saw what they wanted to see, failing to perceive that the dissolution of the Soviet bloc in Europe eliminated the reasons for the existence of Yugoslavia at all costs.

Milosevic and his patrons were brimming with confidence when they left for a conference in The Hague, hosted by Lord Peter Carrington in October, 1991. They were assured that the European Union would concur with their plans, and were dismayed when this did not happen. The stance of the Western powers whereby Yugoslavia was in a state of disintegration, with each republic entitled to self-determination and the formation of an independent state, came as a shock to Milosevic's Communists in Belgrade. The plan collapsed.

As we have seen, the Arbitration Commission chaired by French lawyer Robert Badinter, delivered the final blow to their hopes. In their first opinion, this commission confirmed the stance that Yugoslavia was in the process of breaking up.⁷⁸

Disappointed, Milosevic had one option left: to cause all-out war in Yugoslavia.

* * *

⁷⁸ Arbitration Commission published its first opinion early in December 1991.

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When the crisis was flaring in Yugoslavia, the world was pre-occupied with the Gulf War against Iraq and the future of the Soviet Union.

Yugoslavia was thus sidelined and overlooked.

Most probably foreign observers still believed the idyllic tale about Tito's socialism. Propaganda that promoted Tito had been disseminated for decades, so it is very likely that the contemporary generation of politicians accepted that image. The confidence in the government of Ante Markovic as the bearer of a pro-reform movement showed how much faith the West had in the internal maturity of the Yugoslav political system.

It was only when the country sunk deep into conflict that the Great Powers arrived to put out the flame. The first time Europe interfered was over the election of Stjepan Mesic, a candidate of the new Croatian regime for the former Yugoslav presidency. At a meeting in Brioni Island in northern Adriatic few days later, the Europeans proposed a settlement: international recognition to Slovenia and Croatia would be postponed for three months, and the JNA should pull out of both republics.⁷⁹

The West harbored the illusion that the Yugoslav Army would be a reliable defender of Yugoslavia and Tito's legacy. It was strange that the West did not realize that Tito's military was nothing more than a Party organization, bureaucratized and hardened after 50 years of Communist politics. After the initial clashes in Slovenia and Croatia, a number of officers joined the newly created armies of the two seceded republics, and other non-Serb officers and soldiers refused to take part in the military operations. Thus most of the manpower and weapons were in the hands of Milosevic's generals. They deceitfully stood in defense of the "unarmed Serbs", while in fact defending the existing Communist regime.

* * *

The West refused to understand what was going on for too long. Milosevic and his advisors were proclaimed tyrants who wanted to create a Greater Serbia to the detriment of the other na-

⁷⁹ July 1991.

tions which were stripped of their rights. In all the years of Milosevic's government, it is hard to find an article or statement in foreign media that described him as a Communist. It was always: Serbian nationalist. Even when Milosevic himself admitted to an American journalist⁸⁰ that he joined the Communist Party when he was 17 and still adhered to his convictions, not even when his Party openly supported the *putsch* in Moscow, or when visiting Russian Communists walked the red carpet in Belgrade, not once did the West give an honest opinion.

At the outset of the Yugoslav crisis, this is how then U.S. Ambassador Warren Zimmerman compared Milosevic and Tudjman, when asked by media:

"Tudjman is a true Croat nationalist whose only goal is to achieve the Croats' 1,000-year-long dream to create a sovereign state. Milosevic is obsessed with power and is using nationalism to consolidate his personal power".

This statement is closer to the truth than any other expressed in the 1990s about the two politicians. Yet, even Zimmerman did not describe Milosevic as a Communist or Stalinist, but only as an egotistic power-holder.

The West, therefore, downgraded the internal problems and contradictions in socialist Yugoslavia. The creation and development of Tito's regime was never examined meticulously enough. As a consequence, the individual and collective historical experiences of South Slavic peoples were easily passed over.

Light-mindedness brought further problems for the Western powers. Since they welcomed the outbreak of the crisis so unprepared, foreign interests could not be immediately coordinated. It is an old historic truth that many influences and aspirations clashed, crossed, and joined in the Balkans as far back as history recalls. Every time the so-called Eastern (Balkan) Question was opened in the last 200 years, it was never resolved to the satisfaction of all parties. As a rule, the Balkans was an object for bargaining, divisions and trading among the Great Powers. Europe's Southeast was often used as a test for new political experiments. Not infrequently Southeastern Europe was a proving ground for

⁸⁰ Interview with Larry King on CNN.

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testing the strength between the Great Powers. This time history repeated itself.

The helplessness of the international community to cut the Yugoslav knot is best seen in the different peace plans. All the drafts were illogical, inconsistent, and disharmonious. They were drafted to coordinate the interests of the Great Powers rather than help bring peace to the former Yugoslavia. This refers to Vance's plan and the Z4 plan for Croatia, as well as the Vance-Owen plan and Contact Group plan for Bosnia-Herzegovina.

* * *

The first conference on Yugoslavia was hosted by The Hague in fall 1991. On behalf of the European Community, veteran British diplomat Lord Carrington presided. The presidents of all the Yugoslav republics arrived and the biggest stumbling block among them was obvious right away.

Slovenia and Croatia expressed their wish to leave the Yugoslav federation and declare independence. They argued that their departure would make the federation defunct; therefore every former republic was to be an equal successor of the former Yugoslavia. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia concurred.

Milosevic persistently defended the principle of continuity. He argued that as long as the two republics wanted to remain in the federation, Yugoslavia continued to exist as an international legal entity with all its rights and obligations. In other words, those who wanted to leave were free to go, but those who remained were bearers of Yugoslavia's statehood. Milosevic was content, reckoning that Montenegro was on his side.

Lord Carrington used all his diplomatic skill and finally persuaded Montenegrin President Momir Bulatovic to join the majority. But Bulatovic changed his mind after returning to Podgorica and supported Milosevic.

The conference on Yugoslavia ended without agreement. All participants were concurrent that an international arbitration commission be set up comprising experts on constitutional law, in order to examine the newly created situation and to provide expert opinion.

Slovenia voted for independence in a referendum in December 1990, which was confirmed in the declaration on independence 25 June 1991. Croatia held a referendum in May 1991 and passed a declaration on independence in parliament on the same day as Slovenia. Both declarations were postponed for three months, until 8 October 1991, based on the Brioni agreement. Parliament passed a resolution on independence in Bosnia-Herzegovina on 14 October 1991, but the Serb delegation contested its legal validity. Macedonia held a referendum in September the same year and declared independence in accordance with the other sovereign Yugoslav states.

Lord Carrington posed two concrete questions to the Arbitration Commission: 1) Is Serbia right in insisting on continuity and the existence of former Yugoslavia, or are the other republics right, citing dissolution of the federation; 2) Could the lines of territorial separation between Serbia and Croatia, and Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, be considered borders in the spirit of international law?⁸¹

The Arbitration Commission published its answer to the first question in an introductory report three weeks later⁸². The key points of its expertise were: 1) Yugoslavia is in a process of dissolution; 2) mutual disputes that arise in the process must be settled by respecting international law, human rights, and the rights of minorities, and 3) the republics that so desire may continue to form new associations with democratic institutions as they choose.

The answer to Carrington's second question came on 15 January 1992, in the Arbitration Commission's third report:

"The lines of territorial demarcation can be considered borders in the sense of international law. This principle is easier to apply among the republics as items 2 and 4 of article 5 of former Yugoslav Constitution say that territorial unity and borders between republics cannot be changed without their consent".

⁸¹ Letter sent on 20 November 1991.

⁸² 10 December 1991.

Milosevic resorted to the most reliable means in the show-down against his opponents: the use of armed force. His thoughts went something like this: if the international community does not support Yugoslavia's survival and continuity, it will be done by violent means, and after the *fait accompli*, everyone will have to accept the *de facto* situation.

Milosevic hit with all the force he could muster. He employed the regular troops of the Yugoslav Army, armed the local Serbs, Serbian police, and his paramilitaries. The time of war, destruction, and killings began in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Croatian town of Vukovar became a ghost city after Milosevic's hordes stormed it. Two hundred Croat prisoners were executed right on the spot. Dubrovnik was bombed for no tactical reason. Sarajevo lived through the worst siege, targeted by Bosnian Serb guns for more than three years. Eastern Bosnia was cleansed of Muslims; Foca and Gorazde suffered terribly. Thousands of Muslims were killed in Srebrenica⁸³ as the Serbs took vengeance. Similar cleansing took place in northern Bosnia. From Bijeljina in the east, to Banja Luka in the west, no non-Serb house was left. The beautiful mosque in Banja Luka was leveled.

Croats and Muslims hit back as hard as they could. The Serbs were systematically killed, displaced, and put in camps. Tito's Yugoslavia, brought up on the socialist slogan "brotherhood and unity" turned into a battlefield of a bloody ethnic conflict where flaming nationalist passion and a heavy psychological burden of the past went on a rampage.

Civilians suffered throughout this horror, as warlords in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo drew new maps and borders, vying with one another in exhibiting their patriotism and carrying on fruitless negotiations. Milosevic, the strongest and most destructive of them all led the way.

The Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were under Milosevic's command in every respect. Armament, money, decision-making were all under the control of the President of Serbia.

⁸³ July 1995.

Everyone else -- generals and politicians -- were mere instruments in the hands of one man. Whoever tried to pull away from his influence was removed from the political stage and replaced by someone willing to obey the Belgrade burier of Serbs.

Men with beards and long hair appeared among the armed Serbs. The red star on their heads was replaced by the emblem of the Kingdom of Serbia. These notorious bandits were called Chetniks, not Tito's partisans, so that they could sully the face of anti-Communist Serbia. That was Milosevic's most perfidious sham against the Serbs. The international community readily accepted the deceit. Chetniks were the worst Serbs, they were killers and criminals. The face of Yugoslav Communism had to be kept pure and unblemished. What a lie, what injustice! After 50 years, Milosevic and his advisors would not leave the dead in peace. As if once was not enough. As if betraying the army of Gen. Mihailovic once before, disgracing and stigmatizing it, was not enough. As if the Chetniks were to blame for everything.

Then and now.

* * *

Why did the Serbs across Drina River fall for this Communist falsehood?

First, most Serbs were not educated enough to understand what was going on. Their knowledge of their own history was veiled by layers of Communist lies and romantic nationalist legends.

The Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia joined Milosevic and served him staunchly. The clergy of the Serbian Orthodox Church played an infamous role, acting hand in hand with local Communist leaders.

The adoption of the new Croatian Constitution was a trigger for the Serbian rebellion. Apart from renouncing Tito's legacy, the document officially eliminated the Serbs as a constituent element of Croatian statehood, as defined in the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Croatia from 1974. That year, the Constitutions of all the Yugoslav republics and provinces were adopted, as well as the Constitution of the SFRY (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia).

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Milosevic harshly attacked the Serbian Constitution from 1974, arguing that it made Serbia unequal with regard to Vojvodina and Kosovo. The Milosevic-led Parliament adopted amendments to the 1974 Constitution, stripping the provinces of their statehood in 1989.

Thus Milosevic's policy reduced the Serbs to a senseless position. The 1974 Constitution was rejected in Serbia as contradictory to the interests of Serbia, and in Croatia it was defended as a pillar for the equal position of the Serbs.

For Belgrade regime, however, logic and consistency had little meaning, as did true Serbian interests. The only important thing for him was to preserve the political structure in which the Party would hold all power, as it had held since 1944 when the Communists ruled the country.

Tudjman and his Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) were in Milosevic's way only because they undermined the unity of the Party and State. Milosevic rejected their anti-Communism as much as he rejected their anti-Serbism.

Under Milosevic's command, the Serbs descended deeper into war and destruction. The hostility between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, once unleashed, had to end in terror and crime. Forced into disaster, they could not stop. Evil on one side bred evil on another. Innocent people died, villages and towns were scorched, civilians driven away from their homes.

The devil came to collect.

* * *

Peace in former Yugoslavia was the supreme goal of the international community for at least two reasons. First, for human reasons: it was becoming increasingly unacceptable to have dirty, bloody war raging in Europe. Second, for political reasons: whoever restrained the savage Balkans and found a lasting solution would reap the laurels of a great peacemaker.

U.S. diplomat Richard Holbrooke came to the forefront owing to some unfortunate circumstances. His predecessor Robert Frasier, the U.S. Balkans coordinator, was killed in a car accident somewhere in Bosnian Mountains. Holbrooke succeeded him. Unpopular in the State Department and Washington because of

his overbearing ways and aptness for intrigue, Holbrooke did not flinch from anything to take advantage of an unexpected chance. He shuttled across the Balkans and the world in search of a magic formula for peace in Yugoslavia.

Unlike others, Holbrooke had few moral scruples. A person of his frame of mind would quickly grasp that success depended on the two nationalist leaders in Belgrade and Zagreb, so Holbrooke focused on direct contacts with Milosevic and Tudjman. The elimination of the Serb Republic of Krajina was vital for Croatia, to establish control over its entire territory. And that was precisely what Holbrooke offered. He told Milosevic something like this: If you want a significant part of Bosnia-Herzegovina, you have to give up the Serbs in Croatia. A deal was in the offing. Tudjman gained all of Croatia and influence in Bosnia-Herzegovina, though indirectly, sharing an entity with the Muslims. Milosevic lost parts of Croatia held by the Serbs, but preserve half of Bosnia-Herzegovina through the Serb entity. Alija Izetbegovic had to be content with international recognition of the Bosnian independent state, yet divided into two territorial units: Muslim-Croat and Serb (51%-49%).

Yugoslavia's warlords were brought to a U.S. air force base in Dayton, Ohio⁸⁴. After three weeks of talks behind closed doors, a deal was struck, followed by unprecedented media propaganda. The signing ceremony before cameras from every world television station was attended by the leaders of the Great Powers. Standing proudly behind the signatories were Bill Clinton, John Major, and Jacques Chirac. Holbrooke was celebrated as the world's number one diplomat. All the participants of this historic conference were visibly pleased. Meanwhile, the helpless Balkan peoples waited for an end to the suffering caused by the very same people who forced them into the war.

Prior to the Dayton performance, Milosevic had two tasks to complete. To put Croatian Serbs at Tudjman's mercy and to make sure that the Bosnian Serbs approved of Holbrooke's peace plan.

He did both in his own style. In summer 1995, he pulled out the Yugoslav Army and its paramilitaries from Croatia and let

⁸⁴ Conference in Dayton lasted from 1-21 November 1995.

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Croatia trample Krajina region. A miserable convoy of Serb refugees fled from Croat retaliation, seeking refuge in Serbia.

Then he summoned the Bosnian Serb leaders to Belgrade proposing -- and his proposal had better not be opposed -- that the Serbian delegation in Dayton consist of six representatives, three from Serbia and three from the Serb Republic in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In case of a split vote in the Serbian delegation, it was Milosevic's vote that had to be decisive. The Serbian Patriarch, head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, confirmed the vow in writing. Thus Milosevic had a free hand to conduct and conclude the talks as he saw fit.

The Dayton peace accord⁸⁵ implied the deployment of U.N. troops⁸⁶ to guarantee free and consistent implementation of the accord.

The world then hailed Milosevic as a "factor of peace and stability in the Balkans". He was no longer the instigator of the war, a tyrant and evildoer. Now, he was labeled a responsible politician and statesman, credited for making peace in former Yugoslavia.

* * *

A special bond developed between Milosevic and Holbrooke.

The two of them were quite similar in character and fostered a kind of conspiratorial relationship. Holbrooke could handle Milosevic better than any other foreigner. He would support Milosevic in internal affairs when it was necessary to do so. The American demonstrated no interest for the opposition parties in Serbia and openly exhibited sympathy for Milosevic. The Dayton accord represented the peak of this approach.

Intimately, Holbrooke did not like Milosevic nor had much respect for him. He was just a pragmatist who feigned admiration for the powerbroker in Belgrade. The simple fact is that Holbrooke knew Milosevic was his ticket to a great career. Disputed in Washington Holbrooke wanted to climb to the very top

⁸⁵ Official name of Dayton document was General Framework for Peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

⁸⁶ First called UNPROFOR, then SFOR.

using the Bosnian crisis and Milosevic. Armed with the triumph at Dayton, he came quite close to realizing his dream. Clinton appointed him U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, which secured him membership of the President's cabinet. He already saw himself as the next Secretary of State. Holbrooke rapidly raced up the ladder of power.

If there was anyone Milosevic trusted in the international community, it was Richard Holbrooke. In politics, Milosevic was ready to accept only two things: force and haggling. Holbrooke offered both. Unscrupulous and presumptuous, Holbrooke offered Milosevic what the latter most readily received. Holbrooke's threats, direct and terrifyingly realistic, always implied concessions, something Milosevic liked the best. Holbrooke gave Milosevic the impression of a foreigner who esteemed his persona and policy. That was the reason why he accepted Holbrooke's offers. If anyone else made the same proposals, Milosevic would have flatly refused.

The two men got together and found something in common, even though their interests were wide apart. Holbrooke helped Milosevic play a notable game in the world; Milosevic helped Holbrooke become a star in Washington.

* * *

The Dayton settlement was a historical turning point for Milosevic.

He was confident that he had fulfilled a major mission. Peace was signed; the interests of Serbs formally safeguarded, differences with the international community ironed out and the money arrived. He was invincible in his own eyes believing he obtained the license to do what he pleased in Serbia and that none of the Great Powers would interfere in Serbian internal affairs any more.

Not long after Dayton, however, the situation in Kosovo dramatically deteriorated. Milosevic's iron fist over the Albanians could not prevent the crisis. A dangerous terrorist organization known as the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was set up, with outside assistance no doubt. It launched its first armed operation

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against the Serbian police as early as 1996. After that, the conflict in Kosovo gradually flared up into a local war.

By 1998, Belgrade's patience ran out. Milosevic decided to launch an all-out military and police operation to eradicate the KLA, with no regard for civilian victims.

He was again drawn into an armed conflict with an unforeseen outcome. Instead of a speedy and expedient operation, the fight against the insurgent Albanians developed into a long-term conflict in which Milosevic's troops crushed everything before them. The same pattern was used as in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Foreign media were only too eager to report on Milosevic's new aggression against innocent civilians. Scenes of horror were depicted, with burned villages and frightened faces of children and elders left without homes. The world watched shooting, fire, and persecution day and night. Milosevic was once again accused of horrendous crimes against peaceful citizens and of ethnic cleansing.

Late in 1998 Richard Holbrooke returned to the scene. When things get tough, there is no one else to rein in Milosevic on the rampage. In order to leave a more convincing impression on Serbia's Demon and his entourage, Holbrooke brought with him NATO's commander in chief and some other senior U.S. and NATO officers.

Negotiations were conducted in Belgrade in a very tense atmosphere, behind doors tightly shut. This time Holbrooke was in earnest. He threatened to bomb Serbia unless Milosevic accepted his peace package. This package contained the following: immediate cessation of hostilities, urgent conference on Kosovo and the deployment of the so-called Verification Mission in Pristina. Milosevic had no choice but to accept Holbrooke's plan. It was October 1998.

After few days an international mission did arrive headed by a U.S. diplomat with broad experience. The career of Ambassador William Walker was on the decline after 38 years of service in the State Department. The Verification Mission operated under the auspices of the OSCE. It had 1,500 foreign verifiers and a local staff of that size as well.

One event made an about-turn in the international public on the situation in Kosovo. Media reported on 15 January, 1999, that strong Serbian security forces attacked Kosovo village of Racak and shot 45 Albanian civilians in cold blood. Walker confirmed the report the following day. Milosevic's media reported the opposite: That armed terrorists were killed in the firing jump the queue; the rest was untrue, a canard.

Two facts are certain, though. The village had been a hotbed of Albanian extremists since World War Two. The findings of an international commission set up to establish the truth about Racak incident were never published.

But it helped bring the international public on the side of Kosovo Albanians. No doubt about that.

* * *

On the model of Dayton, a conference on Kosovo took place in Rambouillet, a beautiful castle near Paris.⁸⁷ Negotiations were conducted separately between Belgrade and Pristina. The key difference was that two major players from Dayton remained in the background this time. Milosevic appointed Milan Milutinovic, then formal President of Serbia, to head the Serbian delegation, while Holbrooke's role was taken over by his long-time assistant Christopher Hill.

The first news from the French palace presaged agreement. A text was put together on which both sides concurred in principle. Representatives from Belgrade, Pristina, and the international community were to meet two weeks later in Paris to sign the document.

In the meantime, Hill came to Belgrade. Zoran Djindjic, Nebojsa Covic, and Milan St. Protic⁸⁸, the three opposition leaders, were invited to meet with him at the American Embassy. They had no idea what the meeting was about, but they soon found out. Hill was absolutely convinced that everything had been arranged and that Milosevic was ready to accept the agreement. He asked the Serbian opposition to back Milosevic on this.

⁸⁷ Conference in Rambouillet, 6-23 February 1999.

⁸⁸ The author of this book.

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Milosevic then made a suicidal move. He changed his mind, refusing to sign and rejecting the document all together.

The question is what made him change his mind. The following could be the probable explanation.

First, he lost faith in the Americans. He thought they had betrayed him after Dayton and that the crisis in Kosovo was their doing.

Second, he was anxious about an article in the text that proposed the deployment of NATO troops throughout Serbia.

Third, he probably reckoned that the offer from Rambouillet was not the last one. He could have been waiting for another opportunity that never came.

It is evident today that the difference between Milosevic in 1995 and 1999 was enormous. Those were two completely different men. In Dayton, his actions were rational and well thought-out, and he accurately estimated his interests and the limits of compromise. In Rambouillet, he was completely lost, unable to recognize reality and assess his options. Least of all to find a way out.

By agreeing to the document proposed in Rambouillet, Milosevic would have won golden guarantees for unlimited power in Serbia. He would have become an unavoidable factor of peace and stability in the Balkans. He was already the guarantor of the Dayton peace, on one side, and on the other he could have become the signatory to the Rambouillet accord. Kosovo would have remained formally a part of Serbia and NATO troops would have become a safeguard rather than a threat to his personal power. He would have avoided future military and political trials and been protected against the long arm of justice of The Hague Tribunal. Under the auspices of the United States, his status of power-holder in Serbia would have been practically inviolable.

But dazed and paranoid, under disturbing influence from his wife, Milosevic chose the path of no return.

Luckily, this helped Serbia get rid of him and his fatal policy forever.

* * *

Ambassador Walker and his Verification Mission were declared unwelcome in Serbia. They were forced to leave Kosovo, and did so promptly⁸⁹.

The United States and NATO threatened to bomb Serbia without delay. Holbrooke flew into Belgrade at the last moment to attempt the impossible and persuade Milosevic to bow and accept Rambouillet. But his magic influence had no impact on Milosevic any more.

NATO attacked Serbia on 24 March, 1999. The vicious air strikes on a suffering country continued for 78 days, but the Serbia's Demon would not relent. Civilians were killed, buildings, bridges, and roads destroyed. Belgrade was bombed for the fifth time in less than 100 years⁹⁰.

Milosevic capitulated at last. The terms of the ceasefire were rigorous: withdrawal of all Serbian military, police, and civilian authorities from Kosovo, deployment of NATO troops into Serbia's southern province and establishment of a U.N. administration.

More than 200,000 Serbs left their centuries-old homeland. Kosovo was no longer Serbian.

* * *

After 15 years, Milosevic's campaign ended in Serbia's utter defeat. There were no Serbs in Croatia nor Kosovo. Serbia was surrounded by foreign armies. The state was in conflict with almost all its neighbors. Most shameful of all, Serbia and its people were accused of heinous crimes against humanity.

The burier of Serbia continued to govern peacefully from his mansion in Belgrade, in spite of the evil he inflicted on others.

Fortunately, not for long.

⁸⁹ Verification Mission left Serbia 20 March 1999.

⁹⁰ 1914 by Austrians, 1915 by Germans, 1941 again by Germans, 1944 by Allies, 1999 by NATO.

Since the Serbs submitted to the victory of Communism, they cherished hopes that a "brave enough" Communist Serb would emerge eventually to stand in "defense of Serbdom". Milosevic appeared as the last of a number of fake Serbian prophets. And the Serbs trusted him.

A myth about Milosevic was spun almost overnight. What took decades for Tito, Milosevic managed in only a few years. His effigy inundated Serbia. Finally a "savior" had come to raise the faltering nation and lead it to a "bright future".

Nothing happened by chance. With help from his advisors, Milosevic evoked among Serbs a "sense of value and dignity that had long been buried and suppressed".

Milosevic's popularity peaked on St. Vitus' Day in 1989, at the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo⁹¹. It was the first major performance of Serbian Communism. On the day of Serbia's deepest sorrow, when Serbia's nobility was decimated and its medieval state began its downfall, Milosevic celebrated. Nearly one million people rallied on Gazi Mestan field to hail the new leader. In the company of Church dignitaries, fellow Communists, and representatives of the intelligentsia, Milosevic paraded about on a platform that had no national insignia. Flags with the red star were raised, photographs of Milosevic waved about, Communist songs chanted. Then the leader made a speech typical of him: dry, ideological, empty. The dull words of his address to the nation resound today: "Fellow comrades".

Instead of a prayer and service for the heroes of Kosovo -- as the 500th anniversary was marked long ago -- the Serbs now cheered and applauded. Milosevic and his politics became the measure of absolute Serbdom.

Everything that was holy to the Serbs was trampled, even Serbian history. In the state of bemusement, the crowd forgot the little it knew of itself and its past. He, who stood high and lit the

⁹¹ The date of the mythical defeat of medieval Serbia against the Ottomans in 1389.

deadly fires, enjoyed his depravity: "The Serbian people are behind me".

That day, Serbs took the road to hell. It was only hell they could expect.

* * *

Milosevic relied on four main levers of government: his party, media under his control, monopoly of force under his command, and financial power in his hands.

When he took over the Communist Party of Serbia, he became master of the entire network of Party chapters, its property and influence in all state and social areas. The autocratic character of the Communist Party and the subordinate mentality of its members enabled Milosevic to grasp control over the party apparatus almost without any obstacle. The developed organization, which held firmly onto power in Serbia during the past 50 years, allowed its Chairman to become the most powerful man in the country. Thus it was with Tito, thus it was with Milosevic.

Bred as a Communist, Milosevic had excellent knowledge of the Party structure and its internal rules. He selected cronies and servants who were devoted to him, so he easily took absolute command of the Communist Party of Serbia.

Communists always much-admired an iron fist. Leader idolization was at the core of their understanding of life and politics. With Milosevic's advent, Serbian Communists gained precisely the kind of leader they coveted. That is why Milosevic managed to impose himself on the party and remove his rivals so speedily.

He understood the state as a mere tool of the party. State power derived from party power alone. Until the end, he remained an obstinate enemy of democratic freedoms and political pluralism.

The Socialist Party, like its predecessor the Communist Party, was no ordinary political movement. It was much more; it personified the ultimate political organization, that is, the sheer power itself. Nothing could happen or be decided beyond the party circle in which Milosevic held the central position. The Party entered into people's lives in depth and width, leaving no room for free spirit.

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Milosevic was a Party disciple all his life. As he ascended the rungs of power, thus he changed Party ranks, in order to arrive at supreme commander. He achieved both political and personal goals entirely through party hierarchy. At the beginning he listened and executed directives of higher Party bodies with full conviction and discipline. Now, in the capacity of the unconditional Party leader, he sought from others the same degree of party obedience.

He was notorious for giving up on his close aides without dithering. An unwritten rule in Communism says people are expendable, only the Party is forever. Arrogant and brutal in show-downs when confronted with different opinions, Milosevic would wipe out their earlier merits and end his personal relationship with them. He would remove people heartlessly, as his ideological teachers had done. In the last stage of his rule, he did not flinch from physical liquidation of potential rivals. He was generally crueller with former fellow Party members than with political opponents.

He considered the state and party his private property. A dictator at heart, he had no true feelings for the people, but saw them as his subjects whose role was to carry out his designs and plans. If anyone dared to confront him, draconian punishment followed. He was as impatient with rebel Serbs as with his rivals among other nations. There could exist no truth beyond his truth. He saw himself as an unflawed man who did the best, and those who failed to see it were either evil or deluded. He used force to fight both.

Milosevic belonged to the kind of Communist leaders referred to as Bolsheviks. Any desire for debate or exchange of opinion was an expression of ideological or human weakness. The first and final word had to be his.

The formation of a political party by Milosevic's wife Mirjana Markovic is another story. The Yugoslav Left (JUL) was formed in 1995, with a program that was overtly Communist and pro-Yugoslav.

Milosevic let his wife do what no one else was allowed to do. The formation of JUL violated the monopoly of the Milosevic's Socialist Party. The JUL soon took over whole segments of the

ruling party, gradually becoming the key influence in politics, security, and finance.

As time passed, JUL and Mrs. Markovic earned the image of the most dangerous force in the country. Milosevic, who shared power with no one, agreed to share the throne with his spouse.

It was only natural that Milosevic's Socialists became disgruntled. They had to bear a scrounger who was seizing all the privileges of power, while they were left to ensure that government was preserved.

To placate his wife, Milosevic undermined monolithic party unity unawares. The one-headed dragon of Milosevic's government now had the second head. It was hard to tell which of the two was uglier and more disfigured.

Milosevic's other support was the media. In the tradition of the former AGITPROP⁹², he established full control over public information, with full power on the most wide disseminated media. The State Television (RTS) and *Politika*⁹³ daily were the centers of Milosevic's pressure. Milosevic established total discipline in those two institutions, turning them into a service of his party. He had dominant influence in other papers and televisions, but the RTS and *Politika* remained a powerful force throughout his rule. Both houses became laboratories for brainwashing the nation, poisoning the public climate for the drive to war, ethnic intolerance, anti-Western propaganda, raising the myth of Milosevic and his party.

Politika never fell so low in its 100-year history, than during the Milosevic reign. It is doubtful whether it will ever emerge from it entirely. The truth is that RTS never was a symbol of free journalism. Since it was founded in the late fifties, it served more or less as an official mouthpiece for the Communist government. Thus its downfall during Milosevic's government was not as shocking as *Politika*'s.

⁹² Communist Party section for "agitation and propaganda".

⁹³ The oldest independent daily in all Balkan countries. It was started in Belgrade as early as 1904.

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Thousands of journalists and employees of state-owned media were sacked or otherwise driven out of newsrooms for refusing to serve Milosevic's madness. Only the staunchest remained.

One thing is certain. Milosevic trampled on one of the most sacred of democratic freedoms, freedom of the press. Without a free press, as the fathers of democracy taught us, there is no other freedom.

The third cornerstone of Milosevic's rule were the army and police. Sheer force was the most reliable vehicle in dealing with disputes, inside and out. Following the model of Communism which justifies violence against opponents, Milosevic easily drew a weapon.

But Milosevic was not satisfied with the regular army and police. Cumbersome military organization and its general sluggishness convinced Milosevic that he could not rely on the army entirely. Even the police, though considerably reinforced during his government, could not fulfill all his requests. Thus he had special paramilitary units formed. They were composed of hardened criminals and convicts and placed under the command of the State Security Service and were employed for foul operations during the war and for fighting opposition in Serbia. Members of this force, who were familiar with all sorts of bestialities, were engaged to occupy villages and towns, as well as for ethnic cleansing. These forces are culpable for most of the crimes against non-Serbian civilians in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.

Gangsters and murderers under Milosevic's protection used their position for organized crime. They developed powerful criminal gangs during Milosevic's government, and collected millions from narcotics, ransoms from kidnapping wealthy people, racketeering, car thefts, and other crimes. In addition to all this, the paramilitaries acted as Milosevic's Praetorian Guard.

Naturally, Milosevic's regime would not have been so powerful without a solid financial basis. Through various forms of abuse, Milosevic secured huge funds for his criminal deeds.

He had no limits and was unmatched in that. He broke into the treasury system of former Yugoslavia at the very beginning of his rule stealing approximately 2 billion dollars, and then he

organized the so-called "loan for Serbia's recovery" through which he took some 250 million from ordinary people. Later, he deliberately provoked unprecedented hyperinflation, while transferring huge sums of foreign exchange from domestic banks to private accounts abroad. He also misused funds from customs, money collected through heavy taxation on commodities during the sanctions, pyramidal bank schemes, and so on.

These were but a few ways how Milosevic and his government systematically robbed the people and the State.

A class of *nouveaux riches* developed with Milosevic, who acquired possessions due to their connections with the ruling party. Their obligation was to hand over a considerable part of their income to finance the elite of powerbrokers and their foul deeds.

All these manifold machinations were funded by ordinary people. They paid for the mad adventures of their president out of their impoverished pockets. Milosevic crippled the whole nation and ruined a large part of the national industry to satisfy his sick ambitions.

The object of this discourse is not to detail the financial and economic schemes of Milosevic's government. The important thing here is that Milosevic left the country and people penniless, while acquiring great wealth for himself and his close collaborators.

* * *

The structure of Milosevic's personality was such that he did not allow anyone to become close to him. He had no intimate friends in or out of politics. He was pathologically tied to his wife and it was hard to recognize any trait showing he was human. He was callous and indifferent to his associates and subordinates. Milosevic was of the kind that was not affected by other people's misery, convinced that his higher interests justified popular despair. He was unable to express compassion that was expected from a public figure even in most tragic situations. Apart from his immediate family, he was emotionless, ignoring with selfish ease all the horrors around him.

Milosevic had two characteristics that qualified him as a genuine Communist dictator. First, he identified the ideology with

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the nation, that is he subjected the nation to the ideology. Second, he saw himself as a historical individual with a sacred mission. The sacred mission was to preserve the idea to which he was loyal throughout his life - Communism.

As every petty tyrant, Milosevic overestimated his importance on the international level. He truly believed that his policy would raise a new wave of rebellion of the remaining Communist world against Western imperialism. Deep down, Milosevic would never accept the fact that the Soviet Union was defunct and would not be revived. He dreamed in vain about the renewal of the biggest Communist empire. In the meantime, he roamed distant lands in quest of allies fantasizing of reunification of the Communist world. He was immensely pleased when NATO bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade by mistake, wishing more than anything for the United States and China to come into conflict over the question of Serbia. It would have proved the rightness of his policy and international *prestige*. In that case, he would have been the spark that ignited a global fire between blocs, one of them the rotten capitalist West, and the other the community of Communist regimes. Fortunately, his sick deception was miles away from the true state of things. When the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade was bombed, the Prime Minister of China was visiting the United States, so the unpleasant episode was quickly ironed out.

Milosevic paid the price for another unrealistic assessment. At one moment he thought he could take advantage of certain political differences between the United States and Europe. He did not realize that Western powers never differed in their opinions about Southeastern Europe that could cause a rift between them. Quite the contrary; in more recent history, the Balkans was invariably a point of agreement between the Great Powers, regardless of the intensity of the Cold War. An ignoramus as Milosevic could never actually grasp what it was all about.

For Milosevic, Serbia was nothing more than a hostage of his political ideas. In his system of values, the nation's accomplishments, deserving personalities, efforts by the people, lessons from the past, moral principles were all simply nonexistent. The welfare of the country and people were not a value in themselves.

On the contrary. In Milosevic's opinion, Serbs were destined to fight the ideological battle in defense of global Communism. Their suffering had deeper meaning only if the destiny of the global community depended on them.

The atheistic and blasphemous Milosevic did not suffer from Christian "prejudices". Everything that led to success and victory was allowed. His nature as such, strangely, did not stop some dignitaries of the Serbian Orthodox Church to support him without reservations and elevate him to divinity.

Whatever opinion the great master gave was the quintessence of truth until he changed it himself. After he changed his mind, the same principle was applied. The new stance would again have the status of an absolute truth. This was another trait that linked him to his Communist role models. Stubborn and intransigent, Milosevic rejected any view that was different from his own. He alone enjoyed the privilege to always be right.

Milosevic was not gifted with the lethal instinct that made Stalin the biggest dictator of the 20th century. Neither had he the political skill that kept Tito in power till his death. Milosevic was a one-way autocrat who lacked the boldness for true despotism and the talent for political manipulation. Of a simplified mind, he stumbled from one defeat to another during all the years of his rule.

Milosevic adopted a Communist view of the world in early youth. There was nothing else in his perception of reality. He was not capable of understanding his world in any other reality but in Communism. Thus his policy was not a simple expression of certain plans and designs. For him, it was a matter of survival, of life.

Milosevic's mental state was no doubt affected by his tragic family legacy. Both his parents committed suicide. Psychiatrists rarely come across such instances of double suicide. It was never precisely ascertained how deeply these painful incidents affected Milosevic's state of mind. There were many theories and much speculation, but nothing was established with certainty. Some experts of repute claim that he transferred the suicidal instinct that was doubtless part of him onto the entire nation.

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But one must not make a faulty judgment about Milosevic. Everything he did, he did on his own accord, completely aware of the consequences of his actions. Milosevic was definitely not an obsessed maniac, but a self-centered power-holder. He operated out of deep ideological persuasion. He inflicted evil because he wanted to, not because he had to. There is no doubt about that.

Milosevic's inability to cope with reality is best observed in two cases. First in 1996-97 when he refused for 88 days to recognize the results of the local elections and victory of the democratic opposition, though it was evident that he would have to yield eventually. The second time in 1999, when he let Serbia be bombed for 78 days before he accepted conditions for a ceasefire that were much more unfavorable than the terms offered at the start in Rambouillet.

5

Milosevic did not change in the prison cell of The Hague Tribunal. He became no wiser either.

He understood his defense as another battle against the whole Western world. He was under the false impression that his trial attracted the attention of the international public, as it had been while he was in power.

Milosevic refused to acknowledge the real situation. The moment he was handed over to the Tribunal's prosecutors on June 28, 2001, the international community as well as international media lost interest in him.

His disgraceful story came to an end forever.

* * *

Milosevic died of natural causes in his prison cell in March 2006. He was buried in the courtyard of his house in his hometown, without a religious ceremony, as a nonbeliever.

It is only above Serbia that his evil spirit hovers still.

Vuk Draskovic

The life of Vuk Draskovic was one of extreme ups and downs. He reached dizzy heights only to fall to the bottom rung. Nothing was ever ordinary or evenly balanced about him. But all the same, Draskovic left his personal stamp on events in Serbia in the last decade of the 20th century.

When many people felt he was finished and ousted from political life after the elections in 2000, Draskovic gave them another surprise. Three years after that he was back on the stage, albeit with a less convincing comeback. He proved nevertheless that he would not surrender easily and that, in spite of everything, a segment of the population still supported Draskovic and his party.

1

Vuk Draskovic was born in a village in Vojvodina (northern Serbia) late in 1946, but grew up in Herzegovina. He spent his childhood in desolate rocky country and was unfamiliar with city life until he became a young man. A cheerful village kid from the craggy hills, Draskovic had the sap of life from a wild country that drives on and never yields. Hence he was instinctively doubtful and distrustful toward the city. With his peasant background and mentality, Draskovic never quite adopted the customs and habits of a city resident.

The untamed and rebellious population of Herzegovina invariably went from one extreme to another. If they supported the King and the Kingdom, they were most bitter foes of Communists and Communism. If they turned red, they were vicious in persecuting the class enemy, going after their own brother or nearest neighbor.

In World War Two, everyone in Herzegovina was committed. Herzegovinians were divided between anti-Communist Chetniks

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and Communist partisans and went after each other to extermination. Draskovic was born into a Communist family in eastern Herzegovina and was bred in the partisan tradition.

The atrocities against Serbs in Herzegovina by Ustashi in 1941 and 1942 knew no bounds or limits. The Croats' inherent hatred which is incomprehensible to normal humankind made the Serbs victims as well as haters. Serbs waited 50 years for their revenge, to pay back in kind for the spilt blood of their ancestors. That was Draskovic's early milieu.

Perhaps he heard a few stories from the defeated side, or saw a faded photograph of one of the Karadjordjevic dynasty or of Gen. Mihailovic. Perhaps as a clever and inquisitive boy he posed a few awkward questions to elders.

Draskovic lived in a village during his boyhood and early manhood. He came to Belgrade to study law. Vuk admitted himself that he saw a railroad for the first time when he was 16 and was frightened to death. He often related the memories of a young shepherd on the rare and barren pastures of his home. Draskovic spoke with pride and lament about his long walks to school and talks with his grandfather, proud of his hilly background and homeland in Herzegovina.

Vuk Draskovic came to Belgrade University a couple of years before the student demonstrations in 1968. He was in his junior year when an unruffled Communist student youth rose in the capital city. Unbridled as he was, more a highlander than a citizen, Draskovic joined the protests at once.

Teachers and students were disappointed because Tito and his Party had distanced themselves from the earliest principles of "dictatorship by the proletariat" and because they had ceased to be an "*avant-garde* of the working class" in their aspiration toward an ideal classless society based on equality and welfare for all. Looking up to their left-wing colleagues in France and Germany, they wanted changes that would put Yugoslav socialism on the track of orthodox Communism. Intoxicated by the myth of Che Guevara and excited about Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution, the Communism at home was not enough. They wanted more. The Belgrade students railed against so-called "social inequalities" and the extravagance of the Party officials. It

seemed to them that "capitalism was penetrating the pores of socialism", as Lenin once wrote.

But if orthodoxy was in the minds of the protest leaders, many of the rebellious students joined in without knowing why. The hopelessness of Titoism forced them to oppose the regime. Some of them paid dearly for the illusion that they could oppose Communist authority. Some were brutally beaten up and prosecuted for years to come.

Seeing only red color and infatuated with the global revolution and universal triumph of Communism, Tito's youth self-adored and convinced it was on a historic mission.

The event lasted six days and nights only. One word by Tito was enough for the energy of revolution to flag and for the students to join in a reel in honor of the great leader. Draskovic was in that reel.

At university he met Danica Boskovic, a girl from Montenegro also studying law and of the same age. She came from a family loyal to the King; her people were Chetniks and non-Communists, making her Vuk's ideological opposite. Tall and stunning, with sharp features and an accent that gave away her background, Danica caught the eye of the young Draskovic.

Eternal love was born, the kind that connects the unconnected, creating interdependence for life. Danica and Vuk became more than spouses.

* * *

Vuk Draskovic began his career as a reporter. He had a talent for writing and, like many people from his homeland, chose the journalist profession.

He was a correspondent of the Yugoslav national news agency in Africa. Vuk was selected as a young and educated cadre from the interior, a good Communist and a man of letters.

For a while, he was a press officer for a senior Party official⁹⁴.

At the outset of his career, infused with Communist lies about the civil war, he wrote an article about Gen. Mihailovic. It was published in several installments in *Politika Ekspres* daily. In the

⁹⁴ Some claim he was chief of his staff, not only press officer.

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spirit of the official version, Draskovic portrayed the commander of the "Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland"⁹⁵ as a collaborator of the occupier, a traitor of the nation and a criminal. The article, which was commissioned and written for a fee, was a stain that Draskovic had never been able to remove entirely. His subsequent opponents would invariably refer to the article whenever they needed corroboration for his political inconsistency.

In the 1980s, Draskovic left journalism to become a writer. His first novel "The Judge" stirred up a ruffle and drew unfavorable criticism from pro-regime censors. Draskovic's story about the Serbian tragedy during World War Two and the years of Communism did not fit into the official interpretation of our later history. As he matured as an individual and writer, Draskovic shed his left-wing youth in search for truths and answers to questions on morals, ideology, and history. By now an open adversary of Tito and the Party, Draskovic was widely censured even as a writer.

On the other hand, the public embraced his first book. The novel was a sell-out and reprinted several times, earning Draskovic a reputation and popularity. Over the next few years, he wrote a few other notable books with similar plots and views.⁹⁶

Intellectual circles in Belgrade engaged in heated discussions about the novels and Draskovic himself. Widely read, Draskovic earned a place in the heart of Serbian popular prose.

The best part of his works are depictions of fear and horror. Draskovic appears to enjoy giving long and horrendous descriptions of criminals on a rampage and mad with hatred. Terrifying images of slaughter, rape, and murder emerge from his subconscious out onto the surface. Obsessed by violence and evil which he did not experience, learning about it through accounts of others, Draskovic failed to rise to universal truths. Though his writing is vivid and graphic, and has a rhythm, it fails to extend beyond the image. The image of the atrocity and tragedy seems

⁹⁵ Official name of the non-Communist resistance movement during WWII that remained loyal to the Yugoslav King and the prewar government.

⁹⁶ "The Knife", "Prayer" 1 and 2, and "The Russian Consul".

meaningful enough to him. His heroes, somewhat fantastic and unrealistic, obviously have some autobiographical traits. Thus Draskovic's narration contains no profound moral dilemma that raises an ordinary writer to the uniqueness of a veritable artist and thinker.

Even so, it would be unjust to give preference to any contemporary writer in view of literary achievement. Draskovic is not at the top as a novelist, but then, no Serbian writer of his generation is.

Draskovic was not patient to mature as a writer. He replaced his literary career with politics and halted his literary development. He turned from a promising author to a disputed politician.

2

The core of a political party, the Serbian National Renewal, was formed in 1989. The founders were then close friends Vojislav Seselj and Vuk Draskovic. Both were former Communists and presented to the public a program of prominent Serbian nationalism.

They put restoration of the monarchy and political rehabilitation of the movement of Gen. Mihailovic as their primary goals.

After a short while, the friends fell out and went their separate ways. Both pursued politics, each on his own course, becoming soon most bitter enemies (Seselj as a pro-Milosevic nationalist extremist and Draskovic as a champion of democracy and anti-Milosevic movement).

The following year, 1990, Draskovic founded a new party with a similar name, the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO). Its program was basically the same, except that the foremost goal was the fight against Milosevic, his party and government. Draskovic managed to summon a large party army. In the latter part of 1990, the SPO was the largest opposition party that rallied many anti-Communists, monarchists, nationalists, erstwhile Chetniks, their descendents and an occasional disgruntled Communist.

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At the time, Serbia was still a one-party system under the regime of the Communist Party. Milosevic was at the height of his popularity and enjoyed wide national support.

* * *

The first multi-party elections in Serbia were held in December 1990. The SPO and Draskovic were the opposition's mainstay. However, the results were disastrous. Milosevic won the presidential election vote with a landslide victory against Draskovic⁹⁷, whose party garnered only 19 seats in the Serbian Parliament.

Early in 1991, Draskovic tried several times to stir protests against the regime. He had little success, with an invariably low turnout that never went beyond one or two thousand people. The rallies were loud and Draskovic's speeches fiery, but everything ended peacefully after an hour or less. And everything remained the same.

Then came 9 March 1991. Vuk invited Belgraders to rally insisting on the resignation of the State Television editorial board. The television was completely under Milosevic's control and had for months broadcast untruths and slandered Draskovic and other members of the opposition.

The meeting place was the square before the monument to Prince Mihailo Obrenovic⁹⁸ in the very heart of Belgrade. The interior ministry banned the rally, so protesters were greeted with iron fences, the police squads, and water cannons.

They clashed for the first time around 10 am. The skirmish between the people and police ended with the latter's withdrawal, and protesters occupied the square and stopped the traffic. The news soon spread throughout the city. By noon tens of thousands

⁹⁷ Draskovic came second, but the difference in the number of votes between Milosevic and him was substantial. This election, as every election that followed during Milosevic's rule, was neither fair nor democratic. The advantage that Milosevic and his party had in the media did not suffice, so a blatant electoral fraud took place every time.

⁹⁸ The square was first named the Theater Square. Under Tito it became the Republic Square. Draskovic gave it a new name: Liberation Square. He also came up with the derogatory term for the State Television: *La Bastille* TV.

of people turned out, more than ever before. The Serbian flag was raised and the crowd booed "Slobo-Saddam" and "Red Gang".

After noon, Draskovic appeared on the balcony of the National Theater, with a few other opposition leaders⁹⁹.

Suddenly, heavy police forces stormed from the opposite side. Tear gas wafted over the square and war broke out between the demonstrators and police. Stones were pelted, batons whirled; a police car caught fire, shots were fired and water cannon thundered. Downtown Belgrade was a battleground, with Draskovic commanding from the balcony: "Charge!" but was not bold enough to join the crowd.

The rebels claimed their first victory. One of them got up on a water cannon vehicle and thrashed members of the "law and order" with it. The police pulled back again, and the raging crowd took control of the square.

A second attack with teargas and batons sent the crowd fleeing. The police hit hard and eventually dispersed the crowd. The leaders went over to the Serbian National Assembly edifice to discuss the next steps. Many of the protestors moved with them¹⁰⁰.

Disturbed and intimidated by developments, Draskovic no longer resembled the invincible rebel and speaker of that morning. He was lost in time and space, while in fact he did not know what he wanted. He negotiated with the authorities, with no plan or idea. Vuk was arrested that evening.

Army tanks and military armored vehicles thundered on the streets of Belgrade that evening. Milosevic asked for the Yugoslav Army to intervene. The capital was under siege.

The force of the Belgrade rebellion of 9 March 1991 was clearly as much a surprise for Milosevic as for Draskovic. Neither was able to anticipate what an ordinary rally would develop into. Vuk had not planned a violent revolution and was not prepared for a forceful takeover. But the insurgents were. Without

⁹⁹ The Democratic Party did not join the organizers. However, their leaders were there, among the public.

¹⁰⁰ The 9 March rally claimed two lives, an 18-year-old lad and a police officer.

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leadership, the uprising was doomed to failure. Yet, 9 March 1991 marked the beginning of the long struggle against Milosevic regime.

The only political benefit from the event was the resignation of the editorship of the State Television and hateful Interior Minister.

The student protest which took place a few days after 9 March was rather a youth party under the sun than an actual threat to Milosevic and his regime.

Draskovic was soon released, and the situation calmed.

* * *

The Democratic Movement of Serbia (DEPOS)¹⁰¹ was Vuk Draskovic's idea. He and his party were the heart and sole of that coalition. The only general with an army among opposition leaders, Draskovic was naturally the central figure of the gatherings of Milosevic's opponents. He was always ready for action, he was the one who proposed, prepared, and organized the gathering on St. Vitus' Day (28 June 1992) in Belgrade.

The SPO called on its supporters from all of Serbia to meet in the capital. This is when the first street walks began, when keys were rattled in protest. Various speakers followed one another on the rostrum. Apart from party leaders, many others addressed the crowd, priests, farmers, academicians, and elderly anti-Communists. Crown Prince Aleksandar, the only son of King Petar II Karadjordjevic, spoke publicly for the first time.

Though the gathering continued for days and produced a convincing impression, it became apparent that neither Draskovic nor DEPOS had the strength to endure in their demands to the regime. The rally ended without anything tangible, as the rally on 9 March the previous year. Draskovic was able to bring together people, but not to use that force against Milosevic.

¹⁰¹ Spring 1992.

An important consequence of the elections in December 1992 was the victory of DEPOS in several municipalities in Belgrade and the interior.¹⁰²

In each of these municipalities, the SPO had the largest influence, but shared power with the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) and in many municipalities with the Democratic Party (DS). Regardless of the policy in principle against Communism and Milosevic, the representatives of the democratic forces in the local governments easily adjusted to the existing order. They made little effort to resist the opportunity to use the power they had to their own advantage. On the model of their political opponents, they were settled with the privileges that power provided.

Apartments and commercial premises were allocated to party officials. Buildings that were once nationalized by Communists were reconstructed rather than restored to former owners. Permits were issued to party officials and their business partners. Private kiosks mushroomed in the city, providing the party with generous income. The opposition municipalities became a heaven for illegal building and petty forms of abuse.

Nothing materialized of Draskovic's grand promises of a democratic and ordered state, stories about equal rights to all and respect of the law. The SPO in power left a poor impression.

The situation went from bad to worse. Squabbles between opposition parties became frequent, so the SPO formed a tacit alliance with Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) in 1994. This happened for the first time in the Belgrade municipality of Stari Grad, which was fiercely opposed to the regime.¹⁰³

SPO officials appointed in high up positions in cities and towns came short of people's expectations. Most of them had no biography or reputation, so they left an impression of officials of low personal and political morals.

¹⁰² DEPOS won in five central Belgrade municipalities: Stari Grad, Vracar, Savski Venac, Zvezdara, and Vozdovac. Four out of five municipality presidents were from SPO. Only Vracar was led by a member of Kostunica's DSS.

¹⁰³ In local elections 1992, only one representative from the SPS was elected in the Stari Grad municipality, in Vracar municipality - none.

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* * *

In mid-1993, the time had come for Milosevic to unseat FRY President Dobrica Cosic¹⁰⁴.

The Federal Assembly was set to convene on 1 June and Milosevic chose Seselj to carry out the task, as he had proved himself in such ignoble deeds. Seselj swooped down on Cosic with all the savage force in him, reviling, denouncing and lying. Cosic looked on calmly as if this concerned someone else. He let himself become Milosevic's puppet and could expect nothing better. In the twilight of his life, he let political clerk mudsling him with delight, publicly, before all of Serbia. Cosic, who was under the illusion that he was the father of the nation, its foremost mind and conscience, saw his own inglorious end. He was buried by a monster that he, Cosic, had created breathing life and ideas into him. Milosevic, Seselj and Serbian Communism were all freaks that came from Cosic's mind.

Surprisingly, the SPO defended Cosic. During a fiery debate in which Draskovic's people waged war for someone else, one deputy attacked Seselj by citing his earlier works in which he praised Marx, Lenin, and Tito. Milosevic's favorite assailant retaliated. In the halls of Parliament, one of Seselj's goons assaulted the brave deputy and knocked him out. Blows were exchanged in the commotion that broke out.

Draskovic appeared attempting to invade the Parliament building with a few of his people. Security forces brutally restored order. Draskovic and his wife were arrested and mercilessly beaten. Both ended up in hospital with apparently serious injuries. Criminal charges were filed against them both for allegedly trying to take over power and for threatening the constitutional order.

The entire public took the side of the Draskovic couple. Lying in bed in hospital, his head bandaged, a haggard face and weary

¹⁰⁴ Old Communist and novelist, who publicly criticized Tito for anti-Serbian policies. Later became the leading ideologist of Serbo-Communism. He was appointed the first President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

voice, Draskovic saw himself as the embodiment of a modern Serbian Saint.

Some important people abroad stood in defense of the couple. Danielle Mitterrand, the wife of then French President, called for their release. The Greek Prime Minister at the time, Mitsotakis, tried to persuade Milosevic to free Serbia's first opposition leader.

But Milosevic was not touched.

Eventually, Draskovic wrote a personal letter to Milosevic. He beseeched Serbia's Demon to have mercy and understanding, in a humiliating and remorseful tone. Vuk wailed over his misery and the misery of his wife, appealing to Milosevic for kindness and understanding. He swore he would give up politics.

In his triumphant celebration, seeing a broken and humiliated opponent, Milosevic yielded. He put his signature to an act pardoning Draskovic and Danica. Both were released, grateful that the supreme ruler of Serbia offered his hand and forgave their sins.

The great hero of 9 March 1991 revealed that courage and resistance were not his strong points.

Everything ended quite peacefully. The Draskovic couple spent the summer on a yacht, courtesy of the Greek Prime Minister, cruising the Aegean, healing wounds and preparing for new political adventures.

* * *

When the coalition "Zajedno"¹⁰⁵ was formed in 1996, it did not appear that this opposition enterprise would have greater success than the previous one.

Victory in most Serbian towns in November not only overshadowed the defeat in the federal elections, but gave fresh impetus to the overall democratic movement.

¹⁰⁵ The "Zajedno" ("Together") coalition consisted of three member parties: Draskovic's Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO), Djindjic's Democratic Party (DS) and Vesna Pesic's Civic Alliance of Serbia (GSS).

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Milosevic's reaction was quite unexpected: He ordered local courts to annul election results in all those municipalities where "Zajedno" came out victoriously.

Vuk was in his element again. Rallies and protests throughout the country were an ideal opportunity to do what he knew best and what he loved most. He went from one speech to another, every evening a different town, speaking with the same passion. He spoke with the inspiration typical of him, the kind that captivates masses and urges perseverance.

Coalition partners Zoran Djindjic and Vesna Pesic, who also participated of the rallies, stood in the shadow of Draskovic. As front players, their task was to warm up the public before Draskovic, the star, came out. He was indeed the uncrowned king of streets and squares as his supporters hailed him.

In the white nights of the winter of 1996-97, only Draskovic's voice echoed. The public responded, turning out in thousands to hear his cry. Draskovic soared over Serbia on a gust of popular energy.

After everything, Vuk was quite content when Milosevic, in the manner of a sovereign, allowed him, his party and the coalition, to assume power at the local level.

He begrudgingly consented to Djindjic becoming Mayor of Belgrade. Vuk found it hard to watch Djindjic use the position for his own political promotion.

It did not take him long to team up with Milosevic's party against Djindjic and his Democrats. Seven months after the elections, Djindjic was removed by the united vote of Draskovic's SPO and Milosevic's SPS in the Belgrade City Hall. Draskovic finally became the ruler of Belgrade with help from his enemies.

Again, money, privileges and abuse were the main traits of the SPO government. What Draskovic's people did in some of Belgrade's municipalities since 1992, they continued doing throughout the capital after 1997.

Vuk and his party were engaged solely in local affairs until 1999. They distanced themselves from other democratic parties and leaders, sinking deeper into collaboration with the Milosevic regime. Early in 1999, they took one more step closer to the Demon of Serbia when they agreed to join the federal government.

Draskovic was appointed Deputy Prime Minister to Milosevic's favorite Montenegrin, Momir Bulatovic.

The freaky coalition lasted until April 1999. The Demon of Serbia then dismissed Draskovic, accusing him of lack of patriotism during the NATO air strikes.

* * *

The first assassination attempt on Draskovic was carried out 4 October 1999. On that day, a truck loaded with sand was driving on the highway near Belgrade. As it approached the car carrying Vuk at the co-driver's seat, the truck steered off course, hitting the right side of the car driven by Danica's brother. Another car was behind them with Draskovic's bodyguards, and moving at high speed. It crashed into the truck and exploded. Draskovic's brother-in-law and three bodyguards were killed on the spot.

A miracle saved Vuk Draskovic. He climbed out of the crushed vehicle unharmed, being the only one who survived the tragic collision.

The investigation that ensued made little progress, though the public suspected the background of the accident. It was an assassination attempt on Draskovic, plotted and carried out by Milosevic's State Security Service. It was established that the head of the service was directly involved. The names of State Security Chief Radomir Markovic and commander of Special Operations Unit, Milorad Ulemek Legija, were mentioned.

The second attempt on Draskovic's life was carried out in Montenegro in June of 2000. Draskovic was in his house in the Montenegrin sea resort of Budva when an unknown assailant fired through the window, aiming at his head. Draskovic miraculously survived again. One bullet grazed his temple; the other grazed the other side of his face. Luckily, his injuries were very slight.

The assailant and his accomplices got away. The investigation yielded no result, but soon it became clear that Milosevic's assassins were responsible for this attempt as well. It was subsequently established that the army aided and abetted the felons. Chief of the General Staff Gen. Nebojsa Pavkovic approved the use of a

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military helicopter which transported the culprits to Serbia a few days after sheltering them in a military facility in Montenegro.

Apparently, the same people who killed Djindjic tried to kill Draskovic on two occasions before. Their motives were probably the same. Providence was on Draskovic's side, but sadly not on Djindjic's.

Draskovic and his wife did everything they could to discover the assassins and tell the public the real truth about the crime, but were only partly successful. Segments of their own investigation reached wider audiences, some indictments were issued, but the crime has not been fully clarified to this day.

It seems that even under the government of DOS (Democratic Opposition of Serbia), the authorities were not resolved to fully clarify the case. Oddly enough, even after Draskovic's SPO joined the ruling coalition, the case made little progress. The trial is still in process.

* * *

It could easily be that after two assassination attempts, Draskovic was unable to reason soberly. Perhaps that was why he declined the last offer from DOS to contest the elections in 2000 on a joint ticket.

Vojislav Kostunica insisted most strongly that no concessions be made to Draskovic. As the designated candidate, Kostunica had the main say in the matter. He then said that "it is going to be all or nothing", which ended the long-term debate in the DOS Presidency on a possible deal with Draskovic. Djindjic was far more patient. He worked on a compromise until the very last, in spite of years of misunderstanding with Draskovic. His efforts were in vain.

Thus the SPO and its presidential candidate contested the elections alone and the result was an utter debacle. They won a single seat in the federal Parliament, no seats in the Belgrade City Hall -- where they held power until then. They had little success in other towns and municipalities where they had been the largest political force since 1997.

After the election fiasco, they could not take part in bringing down Milosevic and his regime on 5 October 2000, remaining

outside of subsequent political events. Grieved and almost forgotten, Vuk and the SPO were on the fringes of Serbia's public scene.

The fact is that most of his supporters cast their ballots for Kostunica and DOS, without which the victory over Milosevic would have been highly doubtful. It is also a fact that among the hundreds of thousands of people on 5 October, many had been supporters of Draskovic and his party. But, regrettably, Draskovic was nowhere about.

It took three years for Draskovic to climb on the political stage again. In spring of 2004, his old dream came true. He was elected Minister of Foreign Affairs of the of Serbia and Montenegro.

* * *

Indeed, Draskovic and his party moved along a winding path.

They were sworn enemies of Milosevic, but also his subordinate collaborators. They were invincible fighters for democracy, but abettors of the regime as well. They suffered blows from the Demon of Serbia, but were also instruments in his hands. Milosevic both used and hounded them. He put Draskovic in the government and then plotted to kill him.

Draskovic's public look had two faces. One was the insurgent, leader and inspirer. The other was a yes-man, a coward, and a loser. Inconsistent and unpredictable, Draskovic never enjoyed the reputation that was necessary for a major victory. That is why he was not at the head of the movement that toppled Milosevic. He stood aside at the key moment, out of fear or because of his vanity, whichever.

His absence paved the way to others. Kostunica and Djindjic came to the foreground because Draskovic pulled out. He was the one who began the fight against Milosevic, but he was not the one to end it. Vuk was absent when his presence was called for. He missed 5 October, and he must have been there. Thus the laurels of victory and benefits of power went to his followers and disciples, not to him.

Draskovic is not the type of scholarly politician, which is not to say that he does not have a formal education. By today's standards in Serbia, he belongs to the category of educated men.

He is not a man of ideas, however, but a man of passion. With him, convictions have flame and color, just like emotions.

He is not a thinker, he is a believer.

His faith, then again, is not firm and constant. When tempted, he falls, then repents as an anchorite and makes excuses for himself and others, only to do the same again.

In all these years, Draskovic was torn between two personal aspirations. He aspired to become the nation's prophet, an interpreter of the people's wishes who would foretell the nation's future. Along with that, he wanted power, authority and recognition.

Vuk saw himself as a contemporary prince-bishop, a man-saint, from whose golden lips pure wisdom and truth were spoken. He fantasized he was a Serbian messiah followed obediently by the masses, intoxicated by the might of thoughts he expressed.

In contrast to this fantasy, Draskovic could not resist the ambition for real power. Right down to the benefits and subordination, Draskovic succumbed to the perks of life as a power-holder. Whenever he was successful, even when climbing only the first rung of power, he unveiled himself as a petty and self-seeking leader with no restraint or taste. All his grand words and oaths melted before the challenges of political temptations. The comfort and arrogance that power brings suppressed and eventually put out his dreams of becoming the father of the nation.

Probably the best way to describe Vuk Draskovic would be that he is a "good servant, but bad master". To be true, while in opposition he reached the climax of popularity. While in government, he sunk to a common state official prone to corruption.

Just as Draskovic was not ashamed of his virtues, he did not conceal his faults. The public knew everything about him. His abuse of power was not sophisticated or shrouded. He seized

overtly, almost boastfully, showing everyone that he had finally come to power.

But when Draskovic led the democratic movement against Milosevic, his appearance was more radical than of any other opposition leader. He spoke of issues that others dared not. He uncovered dark secrets from the Communist past when it was dangerous and unforgivable to do so. He stormed the walls of Communism when they were still solid and unbroken.

When in power, he forgot everything he said and did the contrary. He was ready to forgive and forget everything for crumbs from the master's rich table.

The unfair truth of life is that people remember falls and flaws much longer than successes and sacrifices.

* * *

Vuk Draskovic deserves credit for broaching topics that were muted for long in Serbia.

He was the first to attack Communism and the first to mention the monarchy and the King. He was the first to raise the flag of Gen. Mihailovic. He was among the first to oppose Milosevic's wars. He was the first to speak favorably of the European Union and the United States.

Vuk Draskovic was indeed a messenger of the new times.

He did it casually, almost nonchalantly. His views were captivating and brave, but he himself did not act as a figure capable of implementing them.

In fact, Draskovic was the star of a theater play. One of those actors who become so involved in their character and the atmosphere that they start believing that it all existed in real life. He himself created a dramatic plot and gave himself the leading role. He loved to act and be unaware he was acting. He tried to emulate a hero from his imagination believing he was real. The figure of a dauntless and honorable knight with something of a Shakespeare's Hamlet in him as well as the Serbian epic giant-hero. Yet, his nature never allowed him to turn into someone or something that he was not. This of course did not prevent him from continuing to act.

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His every public appearance, every speech and movement he made were prepared in advance and acted throughout. He was perfect on stage. That was always the environment where he felt best. He adored his audience as much as his own image on scene.

There is one exception, however, when he lost his magic as a great actor.

It happened at a huge rally in Belgrade in mid-August 1999. This was the first time that he saw his faithful audience jeer and protest, disappointed that their favorite was no more the invincible and upright fairy-tale prince he had been for years.

Draskovic was sweating from anxiety, his makeup was running down his face, his voice quivered and his step trembled. Simply, he was not himself. The person moving on the stage was a man whose mask had broken into bits, and with it his personality too. A skirmish between his and Djindjic's bodyguards backstage completed the picture of the fall of the crowd's unparalleled illusionist -- Vuk Draskovic.

He never recovered from this breakdown. The actor's magic once lost was lost forever.

* * *

Draskovic is a supreme speaker, gifted with a perfect ear for his mother tongue, his wording beautifully carved. His public speaking resembles narration. Vuk narrates rather than speaks, his sentences rolling in hues of all color, moving one after another without unnecessary interruptions or stumbling.

Vuk's every speech is a work of art, distinct and different every time. The Serbian he speaks sometimes sounds archaic and recalls the decasyllabic verse of epic poetry. At times it reached perfection in contemporary expression, gaining speed and drive recognized in Belgrade vernacular. Draskovic is a master in linguistic painting, probably a more powerful speaker than writer.

Draskovic replaced his own dialect with the Belgrade lingo, as many of his famous predecessors from Herzegovina had done. He thus acquired the rhythm of modern Serbian form. However, he preserved the sound of his homeland, strictly respecting the melody of the phrase and every accent.

Draskovic's vocabulary was carefully selected, pure Serbian, free from the foreign "erudition" of which so many contemporary self-styled intellectuals are obsessed.

His speaking has magical impact on the audience. He can rule crowds with his words, uplift and bring down, enrage and soothe. The suggestiveness that captivates listeners, turning them into followers, is definitely Draskovic's strongest political weapon.

The content of his speeches, still, was not in line with the elegance of his speaking. Vuk "was dying in beauty", but his political messages were quite trivial. He mesmerized by impressing, not convincing. He was not a speaker who explained and led, he was an artist who carved his work on the spot, before the audience, and enjoyed every minute of it.

Sometimes, Draskovic would slide into sentimentality much like a self-styled pastor would while practicing his sermon for the church service. At times he would sink into empty moralizing. Lucky for him this did not happen very often.

Draskovic's appearance in media gave a far weaker impression, particularly on TV. In his case, the camera is an impediment that prevents him from expanding and developing his sentence. Much too slow, archaically verbose, he comes nowhere near to producing the impact he has in public speaking. Constrained, Draskovic on television seems imprisoned and put in a cage.

* * *

When he was first seen, Vuk looked like a Serbian Father Rasputin from the end of the 20th century. Long curls and a thick beard, a tanned face and a strong frame, he also reminded of a hippy from the late 1960s. Tall and slender, with long arms and legs, Vuk Draskovic was not in the category of handsome people, but his physique was definitely striking.

For years he appeared on the stage in a white shirt with the collar unbuttoned. Everyone remembered him from the 9 March 1991 rally, when he wore a Burberry raincoat with the upturned lapel. On the rare occasions he donned a jacket, but never wore a tie. In appearance, he was suitable for the role of a popular tribune. Vuk was definitely different from others in everything, par-

ticularly from people close to Milosevic. He remained a living symbol of resistance to the regime and its formal rules.

And then, overnight, he changed his look and deportment. He put on a suit with a tie, cut his hair to a respectable length, adopting the posture of civility subsequently acquired. The disheveled Draskovic became an off-the-rack politician. Acting on advice from experts for political marketing, the new Vuk Draskovic emerged. He gave up his original image and slipped into the same shoes as the other nameless and anonymous officials in Serbia and the world.

The new attire did not suit him at all. In an effort to become acceptable, Draskovic shed what was most valuable: His style and his originality.

4

Draskovic's attitude toward Gen. Mihailovic and his movement deserves special mention.

Indeed, Vuk deserves credit for the turn around of the assessment of the Chetniks around in Serbian public opinion.

Early in the 1990s, Draskovic went to Ravna Gora mountain¹⁰⁶, and invited the people to join him. The authorities tried to stop him the first time, but he went on. Since then, members of the SPO and many other people have visited the place every year on 13 May, to pay respects to victims of World War Two who died there, disgraced. Draskovic's last novel is devoted to the undying Chetnik commander. "The General's Night" gave an account of Mihailovic's last night before the execution. The book was more a personal compunction than pure literature, an apology for his earlier writings in *Politika Ekspres*.

Many times Draskovic reiterated the need for so-called "national reconciliation", meaning the end to the civil war in Serbia and "peace between the two Serbian resistance movements, that of the Communist partisans and that of that of anti-Communist

¹⁰⁶ Mountain in Western Serbia, the site of the headquarters of the Chetnik anti-Communist resistance movement in WWII.

Chetniks". Equating the two sides of which one, the Communist side, fought for the benefit of Stalin and the Soviet Union, and the other instigated the uprising against the occupier, Draskovic was doing another injustice, by chance or design.

* * *

The second point that reflects Draskovic's policy was the idea of restoring monarchy. He was the first and only true monarchist in Serbian politics. He is to be credited for the arrival of an heir to the throne, in 1991 and 1992. On both occasions, Draskovic and his party played host to Crown Prince Aleksandar Karadjordjevic on his travels around Serbia.

Though he ran for President, Vuk Draskovic never abandoned the idea to reestablish monarchy. Unfortunately, he never succeeded in imposing the question as a serious topic for political debate. Partly because the Crown Prince was too much a foreigner for present-day Serbs, and partly because Draskovic was alone in his wish.

Draskovic and Prince Aleksandar did not get along. Their personal relationship was always somewhat controversial. At times, their differences evolved into mutual intolerance, blocking any joint effort and cooperation. Whether this hostility developed from inside, or was provoked from outside is hard to establish.

In any case, the first monarchist and the first Karadjordjevic have been on different wavelengths for years.

* * *

Vuk Draskovic is considered a pro-Western politician. Basically, this is a true statement. He never concealed his stance that Serbia's foremost interest was to establish as closer relations with the West as possible, the United States in particular.

Every so often, when the international community sought to implement a certain policy, Draskovic was the first to share their view. Thus it was over any peace plan, whether for Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, or Kosovo.

Because of that, the pro-Milosevic public would invariably accuse him of betraying national interests and serving the foreigners. Draskovic simply ignored the attacks. His beliefs in that

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respect remained unchanged: Serbia's place was in the West among European countries and good relations with the United States were of foremost importance for its international position.

It would be wrong, however, to infer from this that Draskovic's intellectual framework and views of the world were Western. His knowledge of the West was of the kind that did not allow him to act and think as a European. His education did not aspire toward Western ideals, but went in some other direction. He was able to understand the place and role of Serbia and its people in the contemporary age, but he was not familiar enough with Western culture to hold that milieu as his own. He was aware of the power and might of the West; he could recognize its grandeur and was often overwhelmed by it. Still, Vuk Draskovic intimately never belonged to the Western world in any respect.

The clash with cold rationalism of the Western civilization sometimes disappoints him. He is woven with emotions and awaits the same outpour of warmth from the other side. When it fails to show, he falls into the kind of despair that overcomes the weaker when faced with the stronger. This feeling does not inspire resistance and intolerance. On the contrary, it makes him try even harder to be liked by foreigners and accepted in their society.

Draskovic is a person of local perspective and mentality. Regardless of how hard he tried to make up for this deficiency and present himself as a Westerner, he is unable to break the cognitive bounds developed in his youth. His poor knowledge of foreign languages, regardless of the effort he put in to learn English, is another aggravating circumstance. This unbridgeable gap reminds him every time of the crucial dissimilarity between himself and the Westerners.

Draskovic's thought and speech in Serbia can provoke a stormy response. Outside, his approach has no impact at all. Neither good nor bad. Draskovic's appearance baffles Westerners as much as they baffle him. They belong to different worlds. As if they inhabit two different dimensions, two different epochs and spaces; they can acknowledge each other's existence, at best. Any understanding beyond a superficial relationship proved unfeasible.

Yet, the Great Powers saw Vuk Draskovic as the only political leader in Serbia capable of stirring the people against Milosevic. That was the main reason why they supported him heartily for so long. In their view, Draskovic was important because of his influence on the political opinion of masses, nothing else.

Even Draskovic's entry into the government in 1999 might have been agreed with the West. If their plan was to strengthen Milosevic's position at home to pave the way for his consent to the Rambouillet agreement, then Draskovic was the perfect man for the job. It would have given the impression that the major political factors in Serbia were united on the status of Kosovo.

* * *

Once a Yugoslav, Vuk Draskovic never ceased being a Yugoslav.

His Yugoslavism was not the consequence of thinking in real categories (nor were his other convictions for that matter), but the fruit of his flourishing emotions. Though a Serbian nationalist, he grieved for the community of South Slavs. Vuk preferred a Yugoslavia of any kind, whether an alliance of sovereign states or a weak federation, to a breakup. For a long time he firmly believed, and perhaps believes today, that Yugoslavia could have been saved. Draskovic intimately thinks that former Yugoslavia did not break up because of deep internal contradictions. He considers that their political leaders are to blame for the tragic destiny of the Yugoslav peoples. Vuk still believes that the common state had a good chance of surviving with the introduction of democracy and the rejection of socialism.

Vuk Draskovic is the representative of the kind of Serb nationalist who did not understand that national aspirations of the South Slavs inevitably aspire toward independence, not national association. He refused to accept the fact that Yugoslavia was wrong since inception and that its historical line deteriorated, from the idea of integral Yugoslavism before World War Two to the ideal of national particularisms after World War Two.

Therefore, his Serbdom had always been mixed with his Yugoslavism. Being a romantic, his perception of both could only be romantic.

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Draskovic does not respond well to stress. His heroism fades once he is confronted with a real threat. Steadfastness and endurance are not part of his nature. Under pressure, Vuk becomes discouraged and despondent. He no longer adheres to his character or principles. He seeks only to emerge from the painful situation he fell into. Ready to give up on everything, he is no longer people's tribune capable of moving masses to action.

Draskovic, on the other hand, has an innate resilience that lifts him each time he tumbles. This southerner's trait is more pronounced in Draskovic than any of his contemporaries. Vuk possesses a special kind of energy that brings him back on his feet again, in spite of the pain and fear he experienced. Throughout his bumpy career, Draskovic never gave up and laid down his arms.

The main pillar for support has been his wife Danica. She was bred in Montenegro, where women sooner become vanquisher than men become heroes. Indomitable and arrogant, she is the hidden force behind Draskovic. He might have submitted, but it was she who would never let him.

She is vengeful and fierce, dissolute and power-loving. It is virtually impossible to break or harness her.

The two of them add-on one another in a bizarre way. His talent and imagination and her indomitable nature. Both with southern roots, Danica and Vuk seem to have changed roles.

Though Draskovic suffers from pride, he is incapable of hate. He might be spiteful, but never evil. Sometimes he could be a slave to his temper or prejudice. Yet, he does not possess the viciousness that many political leaders do.

* * *

Early in 2004, the SPO joined a coalition of four parties and took power again¹⁰⁷.

This time Vuk Draskovic had to accept the company of people who were far behind him, but now stood shoulder to shoulder with him, or even in front of him.

The new balance of forces where Draskovic is neither the first nor the second is evidently a possible reason for displeasure. His pride bears with pain the position in the background, which he and his party currently hold.

In other words, Draskovic's political return was an unexpected triumph for himself and the SPO, but it failed to restore the superior position and authority they once enjoyed.

5

It is extremely precarious to predict what the fate has in store for Vuk Draskovic and his political future. He is highly capable of staging surprises so that anything can be expected of him.

If one says that he is the kind of person that will never rise to the top because his inconstant nature will not allow him, then one would be closest to the truth.

Indeed, one never really knows with Vuk Draskovic. Most probably he doesn't either.

¹⁰⁷ After elections in December 2003, a coalition was formed between the Democratic Party of Serbia, G17 Plus, Serbian Renewal Movement, and New Serbia -- a minority government supported by Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia.

Zoran Djindjic

It seemed that the biography of Zoran Djindjic¹⁰⁸ would be written much later and in chronological order.

Destiny wanted it otherwise. His life story ended abruptly and violently. Thus we must start from the end, not the beginning.

1

Djindjic died on 12 March 2003.

He was shot at exactly 12:31 at the entrance into the Serbian government building in Belgrade by a sniper bullet. The investigation established that a member of the Special Operations Unit¹⁰⁹ of the Interior Ministry fired at him. The assassination was organized by Milorad Ulemek aka Legija (also known by the surname Lukovic), former commander of the unit. Ulemek was associated with a powerful crime gang, the so-called "Zemun" gang. The motive for the assassination was objection to the extradition of inductees to the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague.

Djindjic's foes alleged something else. Supposedly, he and Ulemek established personal ties just before 5 October 2000 and began associating. According to this story, Ulemek helped ensure that the revolution proceeded without bloodshed because he prevented the Special Operations Unit to intervene. In return, Djindjic let him and the Zemun gang develop their criminal activities in the country. When they fell out, Djindjic had to be killed.

¹⁰⁸ Zoran Djindjic (1952-2003).

¹⁰⁹ Milosevic set up the Special Operations Unit as an anonymous fighting squad in order to engage in the most dreadful actions during the wars in former Yugoslavia. This unit was set up being the section of the State Security Service.

Ulemek disappeared on the day of the murder. He surrendered after more than a year. Other prime suspects are still at large.

The then Interior Minister repeated several times during the investigation that Djindjic's murder had a political background. But, the public never heard more details.

That is why the essential question arises over Djindjic's murder. The question is not who, when, or how, but why.

* * *

It is more likely that the real truth about the death of the first non-Communist Prime Minister in Serbia will never be revealed.

It seems that any attempt to shed light on the dark side of Djindjic's death is tantamount to presumptions and conjectures.

However, some of the facts are indisputable.

Djindjic was shot in broad daylight in a very busy part of Belgrade. He was hit from a distance of nearly 200 meters. The shot was instantly fatal. Evidently it was the doing of a professional marksman. The assassin fired from a public building directly across the backyard of the government edifice with a perfectly clear view of the crime scene.

The video surveillance system at the entrance was removed the day before for indefinite reasons.

The assassin and his accomplices left the crime scene unobserved. The police caught the alleged gunman¹¹⁰ only later. During interrogation he first confessed the crime, only to deny any connection with it. After three and a half years the trial is still in process.

Two or three weeks before the fateful day, Djindjic was on Mount Kopaonik. He badly injured his foot playing soccer with a police team. Zoran was transferred to Belgrade, underwent urgent surgery¹¹¹. As a result, Djindjic walked with crutches, which made his movements much more difficult and slower.

To heighten the mystery, another assassination attempt on Djindjic took place few days prior to his murder. A big truck

¹¹⁰ He was a veteran member of the Special Operations Unit.

¹¹¹ It was later revealed that the first aborted assassination attempt took place on his return from Mount Kopaonik on 16 February 2003.

tried to crash into a vehicle Djindjic's car on his way to the airport. Due to swift reaction of the driver the collision was avoided. The perpetrator was detained. The initial response denied the incident was an assassination attempt, claiming it was an ordinary traffic accident. The truck driver was released the following day. It was revealed only later that the truck driver had a police record, that he was a hardened criminal and notorious member of the "Zemun" criminal gang¹¹². But the police lost his trail.

No wonder that the incident incited passionate responses. The Chairwoman of the Serbian Supreme Court defended the acting judge who let the driver go, insisting that the judge acted in accordance with the law, that the police file referred only to a traffic offense and the possession of forged documents. In the heat of accusations and counteraccusations about the incident and media speculation on whether it was an assassination attempt or not, Djindjic was slain.

The investigation began ambitiously and comprehensively, only to subside as time went by. In the midst of the investigation, the perpetrators of the murder of Ivan Stambolic (in 2000) were uncovered. Stambolic was a former Communist official; a close friend of Milosevic's whom the later unseated in 1987. It was believed for a long time that Milosevic was responsible for the crime. The most important thing here is that public attention was diverted from the Djindjic assassination to another murder of three years before, no matter how heinous it was.

These facts lead to a few important conclusions. First, the assassination was carried out with high accuracy and precision. Second, it required a large-scale and perfectly coordinated operation involving more people. Third, plotters were informed of every detail, precisely and timely. Fourth, the ease and casualty with which the first attempt was received in public is incredible and that includes Djindjic himself. Fifth, the assassins evidently enjoyed strong and diversified support and protection, as none of the participants was caught, though arrest warrants were issued in the country and abroad. Finally, why did the government's efforts

¹¹² 21 February 2003.

to shed light on the crime and catch the perpetrators subside so quickly?

The main question remains:

What was the real reason for Djindjic's execution?

One thing is certain.

The immediate perpetrators of the murder were not competent enough or bold enough to execute the assassination. They were only capable of being the trigger for someone else. A political force was definitely behind them. A force whose interests were threatened to the point that Djindjic had to be eliminated.

* * *

There is an answer that probes Djindjic's mental state after becoming Prime Minister.

He was unable to realize the danger he encountered when he first saw Ulemek. Zoran could not imagine that the roots of organized crime were that deep. He was unaware that the link between the state and criminals had grown strong to the point that it posed a direct threat to his security.

When he faced that reality, there was no return. He realized that he did not have the necessary means to curb Ulemek's power and that of his gang. Intimidated, he attempted to appease and mollify the savage horde whose hostage he had become. Zoran yielded and made concessions believing that Ulemek could be curtailed¹¹³. Fearing for his own safety and the safety of his family, Djindjic unawares revealed his weakness and vulnerability.

That was the introduction into his murder.

The criminals' mind works pretty much this way: They fear only a force greater than their own. The only language they understand is their own. Violence, torture, and death are their way

¹¹³ His fear grew particularly after the Special Operations Unit rebellion in November 2001. Instead of responding with the full force of his authority, he bowed to Ulemek's blackmail.

In response to a remark by a close associate about the wild behavior of Milorad Ulemek and members of the Special Operations Unit, Djindjic said: "Listen, do you know that we have no way of defending ourselves against those people. They can barge in at any moment and kill us all, as there is no one to defend us."

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of life. When they feel that someone is intimidated and insecure, they leap with the murderous instinct with which a beast tears apart its prey. They are emboldened by other people's fear and fear courage in others.

Djindjic was not strong enough and firm enough to be a resolved leader. He flinched before Ulemek, which was unforgivable. His own fear blocked him.

That could explain his behavior. Afraid for his life, he deceived himself that the criminals were not set on killing him, only warning him. Djindjic calmed himself by soothing reality. Their messages became so blatantly obvious, yet Djindjic was unprepared to admit it.

Zoran's position was further hampered because he had to rely precisely on Ulemek and his men in crucial times.

Paradoxically, but it seems that his recklessness was the consequence of his fear, not his boldness.

* * *

As leader of DOS (Democratic Opposition of Serbia), Zoran Djindjic ousted Milosevic and his regime on 5 October 2000. This success would not have been possible had the West, headed by the United States, not finally rejected Milosevic and offered broad support and help to the democratic opposition.

All Serbian international obligations began and ended with the question of cooperation with The Hague Tribunal. Demands for the extradition of inductees were made directly and immediately. The United States did not wish to wait for the new government to stabilize, making it clear that it expected a positive response from DOS, that is, speedy arrest and extradition of all war crimes inductees without delay. This referred to Milosevic above all. It was said and repeated that every financial aid from abroad solely depended on the readiness of the democratic Belgrade to fulfill demands pertaining to the Tribunal.

Djindjic was not the type of person able to pretend anything. To him, everything was a matter of balance of forces and possible deals, regardless of political principles.

In March 2001, he tried to come to a settlement with the United States along the following lines: you give some, we give

some. This concerned the U.S. President's certification, replying to Congress on whether a particular country, in this case Serbia, met the conditions for obtaining financial assistance from the United States. Djindjic argued that Serbia met the conditions half-way, with some improvements in human and minority rights, but had not arrested Milosevic; so the United States could respond half-way: Serbia need not obtain promised financial aid, but it could use Washington's support in the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Washington flatly refused Djindjic's offer, explaining that cooperation with the ICTY was not a matter of negotiation.

To make thing even worse for Zoran, the Americans saw a common pragmatist who was ready to cut unclean dealings and would act decisively only if this failed. Djindjic even did not try to come out openly: to explain the precarious situation in Serbia and the dangers that posed a real threat to him and others; to ask for patience and understanding because of the extremely volatile political circumstances in the country; to point to the grave differences on this question between Kostunica and himself. Instead, only two months in power, Djindjic boasted a political power that he really did not have.

The consequences were adverse: it transpired that Milosevic had to be arrested immediately, at the same time leaving the impression of Djindjic as an unreliable partner.

A similar thing happened when Milosevic was turned over The Hague late in June 2001. Again Zoran waited for the last moment. Hearing his apologetic note in his public address after Milosevic's departure was sordid. He was almost begging for forgiveness. Not a word about Milosevic's culpability for war crimes, not a word about the horrors that we and others experienced due to Milosevic's evil policy, not a word about the final break with Communism, not a word about the shame that Milosevic brought on Serbia. Instead, the Serbs heard to a man who was afraid of his own deed. And again, he committed a double error: he failed to convince Serbia of the rightness of his action and he failed to show the world that he had done so out of a true belief and feeling of justice. Thus he deprived himself of a major victory and a moral halo.

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Instead of turning Milosevic's arrest and extradition into a personal success and a pledge for good relations with the international community, it turned out that Djindjic's move was extorted for lack of a better option.

Thus Washington's response was not the kind that Djindjic desired. Help and support did come, but they were quite limited. Djindjic thought he had done everything and yet he obtained very little. Americans thought they gave him as much as he deserved.

In Serbia, Djindjic's authority rapidly increased. He emerged as the undisputed ruler by 2002. It seemed that he had sidelined his rivals, primarily Kostunica, and that there was no one who could pose a threat. He was asked about everything. He interfered everywhere and surrounded himself with yes-men, but he listened only to himself. Djindjic associated only with dubious parvenus and people of shady morals. He distanced himself from the people in his party and in DOS with whom he had toppled Milosevic and assumed power.

A few days before Djindjic's tragic death, Milorad Dodik, former and current Serb Prime Minister in Bosnia-Herzegovina, arrived in Belgrade. He made every effort to find Djindjic and barely succeeded. Dodik wanted to pass on a piece of information from Bosnia which he knew was reliable, about an assassination threat against Djindjic. Zoran was totally indifferent, even uninterested. He saw Dodik off after about 10 minutes, paying no heed to his alarming warning.

After Milosevic was delivered to The Hague Tribunal, Djindjic practically ceased to cooperate with this international institution. He became visibly discourteous toward Chief Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte as well as to other foreign diplomats.

Djindjic's conduct toward foreigners had never been particularly tactful or diplomatically smooth. As time went by, he was less and less restrained. Zoran felt he was equal to the highest heads of state or government. He was increasingly overbearing and arrogant to low-level officials he would dignify with a reception. In the eyes of foreigners, Djindjic turned into a completely different person. They had supported a pro-European democrat, yet before them they saw a Balkan autocrat.

* * *

Rather unexpectedly, Djindjic opened the question of Kosovo in 2003.

He was not known as someone who cared that much about the so called "Serbian national interests". Even less a politician who would oppose the plans of the Great Powers. Thus his public statements were received with dismay and unpleasant surprise. The international community was quite astonished over Djindjic's new statements. It counted on talks with a pro-Westerner and a reasonable collocutor. Overnight it had to deal with a hard Serbian nationalist.

The tone of Djindjic's words about Kosovo sounded inexplicably direct, very similar to the untactful rhetoric he had used for years against Milosevic.

His stance was based on several crucial points: strict respect of Resolution 1244 of the U.N. Security Council; demand for international recognition of Serbia's state interests in Kosovo; speedy solution of the final status; pointing out to the danger of border changes in the Balkans.

Sometimes Djindjic appeared as if his intention was to challenge the international community. Here is an illustration:

"If Albanians obtained independence in spite of warnings from Europe that would have certain consequences... It would be a dangerous precedent for other peoples in the Balkans and would threaten peace in multiethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina, for instance. The solution to the problem of Albanians and Serbs could resemble the Muslim-Croat Federation in B-H... It is hard, however, to expect Albanians to give up their demands for independence. In that case, we must ask for a new Dayton conference. Borders in the region would have to be redrawn".¹¹⁴

On 19 January 2003, Djindjic was even more direct when he spoke to media in Belgrade:

"I do not think it is too early or hasty to warn of the unacceptable situation in Kosovo and ask for resolute action in favor

¹¹⁴ Der Spiegel, 1 January 2003

of Serbia. There is no doubt that today, as in the past three and a half years; Kosovo is *de facto* an independent state. Through all this time, there was no possibility for Serbia to have any impact on any aspect of life in Kosovo... Obviously international organizations plan to hand over power to Kosovo which had been taken away from Serbia... We do not have to be prophets in order to realize that this is a plan for creating an independent state on the territory of Serbia's province... Those are the facts. Those facts are unacceptable for Serbia and contrary to official international documents... Today, no one in the international community mentions the guarantee for the return of the Serbian army and police and the return of expelled Serbian civilians is mentioned largely for the sake of demagoguery".

In December 2002, Djindjic drafted an internal paper entitled "Strategy for Kosovo". Though the document was conceived as a secret plan, presumably all interested international factors received a copy. The paper said:

"The first concrete step on which we must insist is the return of a contingent of the army and police, as envisaged in U.N Security Resolution 1244. We must demand an exact date for their return... The next logical demand would be a revision or at least a redressing of the constitutional framework for Kosovo... What we are seeking in the new constitutional framework is that the Serb community be a constituent nation of Kosovo... The new concept should include Serbia's right to regular relations with the Serb entity... Most probably Albanians, and then large sectors of the international community, will oppose the proposed concept... We must ask for a) territorial partitioning; b) effective international protection for the Serbs who would remain in the Albanian part, and c) special status for Serbian religious sights in Kosovo".

Early in February 2003, Djindjic wrote to the U.N. Security Council asking that a date be set for the return of the Serbian forces in Kosovo.

Belgrade daily *Politika* carried Djindjic's statement on 14 February 2003 during his visit to southern Serbia in which he said that "Serbian state interests will be solved only in Belgrade, not in Washington or Brussels".

In the conclusion of Djindjic's interview with *The London Times*, a reporter of the prestigious British newspaper wrote:

"The latest and exceedingly patriotic position of Prime Minister Djindjic has alarmed Western diplomats".

Belgrade media reported on 2 March that Djindjic had sent a letter to the U.S. and Russian Presidents, asking "help in full implementation of U.N.S.C. Resolution 1244".

Four days later, Djindjic granted an extensive interview to Belgrade daily *Vecernje Novosti*. One stance deserves to be singled out:

"We must try to animate some members of the Security Council so that Kosovo does not become independent. Primarily Russia and China".

In the same interview, Djindjic was unusually open. Asked whether he could become the new Milosevic because of his new policy, Djindjic replied:

"Many lobbies and international organizations are involved in this. They are trying to prove that my stances on Kosovo confirm that Serbia's policy is unchanged. That I was a pro-Europe politician and now I have become a Serbian nationalist... Even some people from Europe whom I regarded as politically close have asked me repeatedly about my motives for broaching the question of Kosovo today".

2

Djindjic was born in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1952. His father was an officer of the Tito's Yugoslav Army originally from southern Serbia. Djindjic went to school wherever his father was deployed, mainly in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He came to Belgrade at the age of 17.

Until his arrival in Belgrade he lived in areas that could remotely satisfy his ambitions. The backward Bosnian towns were far below the intellectual expectations that Djindjic had, even then. His home did not provide the academic climate that would match his character and compensate what he yearned for and yet did not receive at school. He longed for knowledge and enlight-

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enment that would open his horizons and take him away from the drowsiness of provincial life and beyond the intellectual claustrophobia of his home. Soon after, to his greatest delight, he moved to Belgrade.

Zoran excelled as a student in every class and every school he attended. He was bright and hard working, one of those youngsters who prefer to read books or amuse themselves on their own than play with other children.

He surpassed his father in education and wit at an early age. He never accepted his father's simplified world of Tito's Communism and despised the dogma his father was a slave to. He never joined the Communist Party.

Djindjic was so superior and stood apart from his milieu that he almost lost all touch with it. Intellectually, he had nothing in common with his folks at home. It did not take long before other ties with the family faded away, becoming sporadic and occasional.

He took philosophy as his major at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade. As a young student, he excelled as exceptionally intelligent and educated. During his college years, he organized an autonomous student organization that was independent of the then Communist students' alliance. Working with liberal academics at universities in Zagreb and Ljubljana, Djindjic gathered a considerable number of students into a new association. He had caught the attention of the Communist authorities and was chased and menaced by the secret police.

Zoran Djindjic earned his Ph.D. in Germany, at the University of Konstanz on Bodensee Lake. Later, he became an associate of the eminent German philosopher Jurgen Habermas. During his studies there, he learned German fluently and spoke it almost without an accent. Wanting to prove him politically and intellectually, Zoran became excited with ultra-left ideas and for a while actively participated in the movement. Yet, the truth is that he was never very serious about it.

Back then, regardless of his left-wing activities, he displayed a flair for business. He grew apples in the courtyard of the student house he lived in, which he then sold to other students. From the money he earned this way he bought a used BMW.

Then he worked part time for a tourist agency, carrying air tickets issued in Germany to clients in the Netherlands. He would drive all night to get to his destination in the morning. He boasted later how he made a handsome income from that job, which enabled him a far better living than the average student standard allowed.

On his return to Belgrade he began selling goods from Germany, mostly typewriters. He traveled to Germany regularly, bringing quality typewriters that he then vended to his colleagues in Yugoslavia.

At the time, he lived in a small apartment in central Belgrade. Dressed casually, sometimes he seemed even sloppy. No one remembered him wearing a suit and tie. His hair was long, tied up in a ponytail with John Lennon style glasses. He was also known for wearing a silver earring. Zoran's overall appearance was of a European rebel-intellectual. In Germany he opposed capitalism, in Yugoslavia he opposed socialism.

He was never allowed to teach at Belgrade University, even though he had close friends among philosophy and sociology professors. For a short while he worked as a lecturer at the University of Novi Sad.

* * *

Zoran Djindjic was among the founders and most prominent members of the Democratic Party. After the first democratic elections in December 1990, he became one of the 26 opposition deputies in the Serbian National Assembly. Only seven candidates were from the Democratic Party. Djindjic was among them.

Soon after he was elected chairman of the executive committee of DS. He demonstrated unconditional loyalty to party Chairman Dragoljub Micunovic¹¹⁵ in all rifts that shook the party until 1993. The widespread opinion was that the two were inseparable and that they would defeat all opponents in the party, working together.

Prior to the parliamentary elections in 1993, Djindjic decided to challenge Micunovic's authority. The two leaders of the Dem-

¹¹⁵ Dragoljub Micunovic was Zoran's most favorite University professor.

ocratic Party offered two different visions of the party's future. Djindjic managed to win majority and to run the electoral campaign. He rallied new people, secured a good budget for the campaign, and radically changed his image and the image of the party, winning 27 Parliament seats, the highest number of deputies won since the party's inception. Djindjic then called the Democratic convention, ran for the chairmanship against Micunovic, winning by a landslide.

This marked the beginning of Djindjic's era in the Democratic Party.

* * *

In the fall of 1996 regular federal and local elections were called. Opposition parties had rallied into a coalition called "Zajedno"¹¹⁶. Dragoslav Avramovic, whom Milosevic had rejected and replaced as the governor of the Yugoslav Central Bank, responsible for curbing hyperinflation in 1994 and vastly popular figure acted as a unifier

Shocked by the loss of power in all important towns, the regime was in panic and set out to annul the elections result, as we have described earlier in this book.

As a response to Milosevic's violence over the will of the electorate, civic protests broke out throughout Serbia. The people protested because they felt deceived, and the opposition because it felt it was robbed of something valuable. The protests lasted 88 days, the crisis deepening from day to day. Demonstrators blocked streets and roads, demanding Milosevic's responsibility and resignation. Daily confrontation between the police and people threatened to grow into armed conflict. Patience was running out at both ends.

Foreigners intervened at last. Former Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzales arrived on behalf of the European Union. He negotiated the following deal: Milosevic would recognize the election result, and the opposition would give up demands for his removal. Both sides were satisfied, only hundreds of thousands of protesters felt a bitter aftertaste.

¹¹⁶ "Togather".

Djindjic was elected first democratic Mayor of Belgrade since World War Two.

An incident that broke out during the protests deserves special mention. At the height of the protests (January 1997), Djindjic met with Milosevic secretly. He met the major culprit of the crisis and informed no one about this. Not his coalition partners, not fellow party members, not the Serbian public. When the truth was revealed, Djindjic flatly denied this at a rally in Belgrade, before tens of thousands of people. He admitted much later that the meeting indeed took place, never saying any specifics about this peculiar *rendezvous*.

It did not take long for the conflict between Djindjic and Draskovic to break out. The "Zajedno" coalition split in fall of 1997. As a result, Djindjic was replaced as Belgrade Mayor, after an agreement between Draskovic and Milosevic. Still, the "Zajedno" coalition retained power in most towns and survived until 2000. Personal relations between the two leaders (Djindjic and Draskovic) were never ironed out.

Another stain on Djindjic's political career was made during the NATO bombing of Serbia in the spring of 1999. During those terrifying days, Djindjic decided to escape to Montenegro, keeping his flight secret from everyone, leaving the Democratic Party and Serbia stranded. *He aposteriori* justified his flight with security reasons. Supposedly, there was a plan for his liquidation and so he had to move out. Djindjic returned to Belgrade after the bombing ended, only when he realized that a protest rally in the Western town of Cacak on 29 June had great success despite his absence.

* * *

It was Vuk Draskovic who summoned the meeting of all the opposition leaders on 10 January 2000. It was actually at that occasion that the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) was created. Djindjic refused to attend the gathering only because he would not cede leadership to his old rival. Djindjic guessed right that Draskovic planned again to assume leadership of the democratic movement. After the disgraceful episode of his open collaboration with Milosevic regime from 1997 to 1999, Draskovic

and his SPO lost much of their popular respect. This represented a good opportunity for Draskovic's political recovery.

Djindjic's first tactic was to ignore the formation of DOS. Yet, as soon as he realized that DOS had greater potential for action than the Alliance for Change¹¹⁷, he began to attend the meetings and to have the main say.

Kostunica attended the first meeting of DOS, surprising everyone by responding to Draskovic's invitation. After years of political isolation and passivity, Kostunica was again among opposition leaders.

Until the election of 24 September 2000, DOS and the Alliance for Change worked side by side. Djindjic kept both options open. In the last moment prior to the start of the electoral campaign, Djindjic opted for DOS and brought his partners from the Alliance for Change into this large coalition.

In the meantime, he was waging an internal struggle for leadership in DOS. Draskovic had two advantages over Djindjic. He had strong support from Washington and financial power. Americans still considered him the only leader in Serbia who could stir up the masses against Milosevic. In addition to this, Draskovic and his party were financially strong due to shady deals and other misdeeds of the local government in Belgrade.

* * *

The fact that Zoran Djindjic was not America's pet became evident in January 2000.

For no obvious reason, he announced his withdrawal as leader of the Democratic Party. He reiterated a few times that he was seriously considering not running in the next party convention. He proposed Miroljub Labus as his successor, as he was a prominent party member and university professor at the time. Labus declined the offer without much consideration. This is what Labus said to the author of this book about the affair:

¹¹⁷ Political coalition of several parties and individuals headed by the Democratic Party. Created in 1998. Very active against Milosevic in 1999.

"That was one of Zoran's typical setups. You know him as well as me. He wanted to keep pulling the strings, while I would assume responsibility in the public. I would not have that".

Djindjic got himself into trouble. The opportunity for electing a new party chairman was not to be easily missed. Of course, Djindjic changed his mind right away and decided to run for chairmanship. His party foes took advantage of his awkward offer to Labus, immediately launching an anti-Djindjic campaign.

There existed quiet opposition against Djindjic in the party for a long time. This came as their chance and they were ready to take it. Quite by surprise, fledgling deputy chairman Slobodan Vuksanovic emerged as Djindjic's main rival. Various interest groups rallied around him since their sole objective was to eliminate Zoran Djindjic.

No doubt Draskovic would have rejoiced over his fall, and Milosevic would not have minded either. Finally, Americans who were not particularly taken by Djindjic would have the question of leadership of DOS settled in favor of Draskovic.

Two facts are definite beyond any doubt. Vuksanovic developed close ties with U.S. representatives in Banja Luka¹¹⁸, had a large budget and was spending it lavishly in the course of the party campaign.

The entire plan, which was no secret to Djindjic, he took as a personal challenge. It seemed that Zoran enjoyed toying with his opponents. He got pleasure in upcoming crossing swords with Vuksanovic. Now that he knew who was working to bring him down made him more determined to win.

The outcome of the party struggle could have been foreseen from miles away. Djindjic was not a loser, and his opponent was no match for him, in spite of all the help he had from outside. Zoran beat Vuksanovic, but not with such a convincing result as expected. He then removed a few of Vuksanovic's abettors, Slobodan Vuksanovic left the party on his own and that was the end. Djindjic easily reinstituted his authority over the party membership.

¹¹⁸ The capital of Serbian entity in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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Yet, he was getting ready for a much more difficult battle against another Slobodan: Slobodan Milosevic. The election in the Democratic Party and his victory were just a fore game.

* * *

The Draskovic, Djindjic, Kostunica triumvirate did not last long: the first two vied continuously for the prop of the last, and after much maneuvering and back-stage schemes, Djindjic definitely won over Kostunica.

Dragoslav Avramovic, who was considered to be the main candidate against Milosevic in the presidential election, was taken seriously ill in May 2000 and was forced to pull out of every combination. Djindjic took advantage of this favorable moment and offered Kostunica the vacancy. Draskovic continued to insist that he run and refused to back Kostunica. The outcome was as Djindjic anticipated: he managed to tie Kostunica to himself, thus alienating Draskovic for good. The other leaders of DOS accepted the new leader with enthusiasm. Occasionally, a voice of admonition reached Djindjic that Kostunica was not the best choice. Besides, formally it was Kostunica who eliminated Draskovic from the coalition, not Djindjic. Moreover, Djindjic acted as if he were a mediator seeking a compromise between Kostunica and Draskovic. The truth was that he saw a dangerous adversary in Draskovic, not in Kostunica.

Backed by everyone else, Kostunica carried off a landslide victory against Milosevic on 24 September 2000.

Djindjic masterminded the campaign. He had complete control, of the whole organization and funding of DOS. Kostunica alone had an independent election staff.

As in 1996, Milosevic refused to admit the defeat. The authorities announced a second round of presidential elections in two weeks. Kostunica refused to agree to a deal and was firm in his stance not to give up his victory.

Djindjic again prepared an alternative strategy. He planned a final blow that would topple the Milosevic regime.

On 5 October 2000, a stream of people from all over Serbia poured onto the square in downtown Belgrade, outside of the Federal Assembly building. The last act of Milosevic's ouster be-

gan. Everything ended by the time night fell. Milosevic publicly admitted defeat the following day. Kostunica was proclaimed the President of Yugoslavia.

Undoubtedly, the key man of 5 October was Zoran Djindjic.

He was at the heart of events and perfectly ran the entire campaign that led to triumph. No question about it: That was the starry moment of his political career.

Early parliamentary elections were called for 23 December. That day marked the humiliating end of Milosevic's rule. The ticket of DOS with Djindjic at the head won three quarters of seats in the Serbian Assembly, Djindjic being elected Serbian Prime Minister in January 2001.

* * *

Zoran Djindjic came to head the government of a country in ruins.

Security forces on a rampage, headed by criminals with police ranks armed with dangerous weapons and ready to commit any beastly crime.

The administration primitive, incompetent, irresponsible and corrupt.

The national economy - devastated. The national wealth squandered or robbed. Enormous capital in the hands of a small number of tycoons acquired through abuse of power or theft, under the wing of Milosevic's government or linked to it.

Society lost in the fog of Titoist delusions, Milosevic's wreckage, years of fear and ignorance. An environment burdened with distorted ideas on private property, justice, statehood, outside world, and its own history.

The education system destroyed in Communism, indolence, false nationalism and intolerance toward Western civilization.

Judiciary corrupt and ideologically hued, biased, and unacceptably slows in passing judgment.

The health sector - a machine for stealing and grabs; hospitals looking more like dog houses than institutions where people receive medical treatment.

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The country's international position - disastrous. Yugoslavia -
- expelled from all international institutions, blamed for heinous crimes against humanity and deeply in debt.

Serbia - full of refugees, war invalids, cripples poverty, violence, and misery.

It is hard to say what was the worst. Whether it was the political institutions, national economy or people's morals.

So, Djindjic and his government had insurmountable problems before them. The foundations of the system had to be radically changed as well as the mentality and habits of the people, while at the same time the nation expected rapid improvement of the living standard.

To be honest, a government made up of better and more capable Ministers than Djindjic's government had been, would scarcely have achieved more in battling these problems.

Grading Djindjic's government by its performance, the grade would be very high. But, if the same government and its Prime Minister were judged by their failures and omissions, the grade would be very low.

The successes are indisputable: stability of the national currency, balanced state budget, drastic reduction of inflation, regular payments of pensions and salaries, reform of the banking system, efficient privatization, return to international organizations, and membership in the United Nations, admission into the Council of Europe, arrest and extradition of Milosevic. Those were definitely major changes that toppled layers of Communist legacy.

The biggest mistake was at the core. Djindjic believed that changes could be made by taking the shorter path. Rules of democracy, freedom of media, respect of public institutions, transparency of work, political responsibility, those were the things that Djindjic saw as obstacles on the road to reform. On the old rule, he was convinced that the goal justified the means. He tried to make use of the inherited levers of power in order to change Serbia.

As much as that was wrong, it was impossible too.

Really, what kind of a person was Zoran Djindjic?

The fact is that he was a target of criticism and low attacks more than any Serbian politician of our age. During his time in opposition and in government, his faults and political errors were systematically brought out. He was often a victim of flagrant falsehoods. There is hardly a word of praise or kindness to be read about him.

Zoran never enjoyed vast popularity. People either respected him or hated him, but very few sincerely loved him. That was partly the consequence of years of negative propaganda, which spread the vilest of rumors about him, and partly because Djindjic himself showed no desire to be liked.

Djindjic was one of the best educated people in the Serbian opposition. He was the kind of person who never stops working or improving himself. When he realized it was necessary to speak English, he began learning the language. In a very short time he became fluent. He could listen to English programs for hours, though the content was of no interest to him, only for the sake of practice. He often asked friends to speak English to him so that he could expand his vocabulary. As everything else, he learned English without a teacher and without help. When he prepared for the position of Prime Minister, he collected numerous textbooks about contemporary economics and skill of government. He would read whatever book he acquired about these topics with special devotion, at every opportunity.

This exceptional quality made Zoran Djindjic repulsively superior to others. He thought that if he could study and work so hard, others should have to do so as well. Even more so since their education and knowledge were far below his. A sentence he said before he died is remembered. Walking with crutches, just prior to his death, he is reported of saying:

"Even with these I can race anyone up the stairs of the government building. There's no one who can beat me even with crutches".

Djindjic had the quick wit that could easily separate the important from the unimportant. He was capable of recognizing the

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gist of the matter and sought an answer in a split second. Still, he had no patience for deep contemplation, believing it was a waste of time. Although he majored in philosophy, he had obliterated everything of philosophy in him, only because he concluded that it troubled him in making political judgments. He was interested only in solutions to problems:

"Do not tell me about causes, I already know that. Have you got a solution or not. If you do, say it, if you do not, shut up," he frequently told his associates.

Djindjic was conspicuously superior intellectually. He stood out in every conversation, and often deliberately showed how superior he was. This gave rise to malice and envy among many people. That is why people hung out with him only if they had a personal benefit to do so. Others kept their distance.

Zoran was not very sociable. He was a loner, an introvert turned toward himself. He had no close friends and took no one into his confidence. He was not extremely cordial or kind, but rather cold and inaccessible, at times even unfeeling. His acquaintances were often intimidated by him.

He rarely made an effort to be agreeable company. When he did, he revealed a boyish curiosity and need for casual childish friendship. It was a dear and cheerful Djindjic that only few people happened to discover. Whoever met this hidden side of his personality might have felt sorry for him, knowing the internal discipline that was needed to curb his free spirit. Djindjic the pal and companion was hostage to Djindjic the worker and order-giver.

Whatever he set out to do, he put all of himself into it. That was actually a kind of specific ambition, a sort of personal test more than sheer thirst for power. Djindjic was eager to prove that he could succeed where others failed. To him defeating Milosevic was a matter of personal affirmation. He entered the battle as a knight would a duel. The crucial thing here was that he wanted to throw Milosevic on his knees and make the final blow. The interests of the people in that conflict were of secondary significance. As Prime Minister, he had a similar attitude. Zoran wanted his own success above all. Serbia's progress ensued as an inevitable consequence.

Zoran Djindjic regarded himself as a true European. His image of Europe, however, was limited to his experience in Germany. He thought all Europe was German and beyond that there was nothing worth respecting. Djindjic had little knowledge of Europe's turbulent past and was not aware of the rich diversity of the Old Continent and its nations. He felt to a certain extent uncomfortable in other parts of Europe except the German-speaking regions. He preferred the Nordic cold, its order and monotony, to the beauty and warmth of the disheveled Mediterranean south. He enjoyed Vienna and was quite indifferent to Paris.

Djindjic saw Serbia's future in the framework of his perception of Europe. He dreamed of making Serbia into a Balkan Austria. He expected Serbs to be as disciplined and hard working as he was. He believed the people should work on improving themselves, as he did.

"If people want to live as Europeans live, they must accept responsibility as Europeans do", was one of Djindjic's favorite messages.

Zoran despised weakness in people as well as in nations. He was not a patient man and hated dithering. In his system of values, speed and resolve were the exclusive measures of success. Serbia had lost precious time and now it had to try very hard to make up for what it had missed. Basically, he was right, the problem being that for some reason Serbs would not accept this truth from him.

Djindjic was not a demagogue, nor was he tactful. His stance provoked exactly the opposite reaction in public than he desired.

What Djindjic took for granted turned out to be the most disputed among Serbs. Serbia craved comfort and encouragement yet received from Djindjic a bared depiction of reality.

* * *

Djindjic was intelligent but he was not gifted. He made up for his lack of talent with hard work.

He was neither an inspirational speaker nor a talented writer. He spoke with interruptions and disconnectedly, sometimes stammering. For lack of precise terminology, he delved into comparison and metaphor. Then again, his metaphors were not

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the stylistic games of a gifted speaker, but an extorted means of someone who had a problem with public speaking. As time went by, Djindjic's public language gradually improved. He never achieved the heights of a narrator but succeeded in being listened to attentively. He worked on his public speaking tirelessly, preparing for it in detail, learning his speeches by heart or writing down thoughts on his palms.

Zoran was far better in closed conversations than on the open stage. He expressed his views simply and orderly. Usually he spoke in theses, grouping his thoughts one point after another. He was always crystal-clear, his words perfectly thought-out.

Zoran Djindjic was not a statesman of great ideas and long-term vision. He was a pragmatist and a realist, seeking concrete answers to concrete questions. His view was directed to the future, but was not far-reaching. Zoran could not envisage Serbia as an encircled national and cultural model.

Djindjic's ultimate goal was Serbia's accession to the E.U. He lived in the conviction that this would fulfill all of Serbia's dreams. His thoughts went no further or deeper than that.

Djindjic changed inside as well as outside. When he turned to politics he cut his hair short, removed his earring and put on a suit. Once he changed appearance, his new look remained with him until the end, as a uniform.

He emulated European politicians in dressing. He was rigorous and conservative, always in a dark suit and a white shirt.

Zoran kept his physical stamina and weight with everyday training. He was particularly proud of his youthful figure and good health. Restrained in everything, Djindjic was unable to let himself go and enjoy life.

* * *

Djindjic did not perceive Kostunica as his equal. He did not regard him as a trustful ally, either. Not even as a dignified adversary.

To Djindjic, Kostunica was an indolent and individual, useless for small action much less something important. Zoran only pondered on how to employ Kostunica for the achievement of his goals. He was confident that Kostunica could be molded into a

mere political vehicle. At the same time, he was well aware that a person of Kostunica's traits was closer to the people in Serbia than he was.

It happened, however, that Kostunica broke away from his control, becoming independently powerful after 5 October 2000. Faced with the new turn about, Djindjic applied his favorite tactics: he played as if he was ready for conciliation, avoiding open arguments and giving in to Kostunica, while operating behind his back.

Kostunica was the one who imposed new rules of the game from the very start. Instead of deconstructing the Communist system, he chose to form an alliance with the key levers of Milosevic's power structure and establish his rule in Serbia with their help.

Djindjic, a pragmatist, quickly realized what was happening. He quickly accepted the new rules, positive that he could overpower Kostunica on his turf.

The fundamental, although concealed, conflict between them emerged over the question who would assume full control over the armed forces i.e. the police and the military.

It would be fair to say that sheer power was equally important to both of them, the basic difference being that Kostunica decided to continue on Milosevic's path without dithering, while Djindjic accepted this as a necessity in the given situation.

Zoran Djindjic and Vojislav Kostunica were as dissimilar characters as one could imagine. One was fast, the other was slow. One was hard-working, the other was idle. One was modern, the other old-fashioned. One was full of enthusiasm, the other was gloomy. One was adept and agile, the other unwieldy and sluggish. One was a true European, the other limited by localism.

As creatures from different planets, the two could never cooperate simply because they never understood each other.

If Djindjic failed to devote any attention to Kostunica, the latter was obsessed by Djindjic. Kostunica could never conceal his envy for Djindjic since their early days in the Democratic Party.

Djindjic's effort brought him into the center of the Democratic Party, due to the fact that he was in charge of creating and ex-

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panding the party's membership network. Zoran seized the opportunity, knowing that it would lead him to the top.

Kostunica remained on the side in his usual style, waiting for party *prestige* to come by itself.

Their relationship became more complicated in DOS. In events leading to 5 October, everything revolved around Djindjic, not Kostunica.

Right after the victory, Kostunica was elected President of FR Yugoslavia, Djindjic - Prime Minister of Serbia. Formally, Kostunica was before Djindjic. In reality, though, Djindjic had greater power and influence. The same climate prevailed in DOS. People listened to Djindjic more than Kostunica. But, soon enough, things changed dramatically in favor of Vojislav Kostunica.

* * *

Incredibly but truly, Djindjic's assassination was made known well in advance. It came as no surprise to anyone in Serbia. Djindjic was certainly aware of the danger.

How does one explain such lack of caution on Djindjic's part? A man who was never unthinking or naïve rushed into his own death. He must have known that he had enemies on all sides: Milosevic's followers, hardened opponents of The Hague Tribunal, organized crime, Kostunica with his party. His life was threatened from every corner. That was the price of his personal power and role of the reformer.

Even today Djindjic's reaction to the first assassination attempt appears unbelievable. He almost mocked his assassins, only to be killed a few days later in the middle of the street.

The ease with which he received Milorad Dodik's warning is inexplicable. It seems that Djindjic was challenging fate, intoxicated by power, strength, and his ability. That may have been his weakest spot. That may have been the reason why his assassins succeeded and he died.

Time will be to Djindjic's advantage, no doubt about that. Decades ahead will make him a national hero. History loves martyrs. Murdered leaders do not fade into oblivion; they become legends.

Djindjic's killers assured him a place among the immortals.

* * *

A chronicler cannot avoid the temptation of historical comparison, no matter how precarious it could be. If there was a figure whose destiny resembled Djindjic's, than that was the fate of U.S. President John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

Both were forerunners of a new age. Representatives of a modern generation in America and Serbia, they both carried a spirit of the future, optimism and youth. Kennedy was the first U.S. President born in the 20th century. Djindjic was the first leader of Serbia born after World War Two. Both had the energy that unfailingly led to the top. Kennedy and Djindjic had the same ambition: They both wanted to change their nations; to rid them of past prejudices, bad habits and outdated values. Both were doing so directly, utterly and sometimes, brutally. Both believed in their nations as they believed in themselves.

Kennedy and Djindjic died comparatively young, just as they stepped onto the big stage. Neither of them completed his first term in office. Both were at the peak of their vitality when they died. Kennedy was 47, Djindjic was 50.

Kennedy spoke about the new world, Djindjic about new Serbia. Both encountered insurmountable obstacles in real politics. Kennedy had the Soviets against him, Djindjic had Milosevic. The former believed that he could come to an agreement with the Russians, yet he had to threaten them with a nuclear war. The latter believed that by removing Milosevic Serbia would be liberated at once, yet he was forced to arrest and deliver him to The Hague at a huge personal risk.

Both were fatally wounded by a sniper. One in a presidential limousine, the other at the gate of the government building. Powerful conspiracies operating from the dark were behind both assassinations. In the case of Kennedy, the real truth was never fully revealed. It is almost certain that the same will happen with Djindjic's assassination.

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The consequences are conspicuously concurrent. After Kennedy, America returned to its old policy. Changes came 10 years later. All indications are that such developments await Serbia as well.

Kennedy became an American icon. Thus it will be with Djindjic in Serbia.

4

Djindjic was buried a few days after he died, in the so-called Alley of Great Men, in the New Cemetery in Belgrade. Christian Orthodox service was held in the unfinished St. Sava Cathedral.

The final farewell was attended by people who were invited as well as uninvited, by friends and foes, acquaintances and strangers, locals and foreigners. Bishops and priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church officiated for the first time to a Prime Minister since the end of World War Two. Thousands of people crowded in the church, some curious, others mourning. One had the impression that on that day in March 2003, European hypocrisy and Serbian mimicry went hand in hand. Standing by the casket calmly and with dignity, Djindjic's family was the living testimony that he had left behind the trace of a good husband and caring father.

The Montenegrin Archbishop delivered a disgraceful speech, disrespectful of the deceased. Luckily the speech was not heard well, as if the church walls were trying to stifle the shameless bishop. It became clear only then that Djindjic had been far above everyone present.

An endless stream of people appeared following the casket. Hundreds of thousands of men and women walked slowly and orderly behind their dead leader. If they did not follow him in life, they were following him dead. As if all of Serbia felt a pang of conscience. Or was it fear of an abandoned nation. How do we go on without Djindjic?

He was laid down in a marble vault, among graves he did not belong with. They placed a Christian cross among hundreds of atheist pyramids.

Milan St. Protic

The hope of a European Serbia died with Zoran Djindjic.
Serbia was left to midgets.
Unfortunately, we realized that too late.

Vojislav Kostunica

Vojislav Kostunica's career is not over yet. He still holds a high-ranking position in Serbian politics. Yet, after more than a decade of his public activities, it seems quite possible to offer a fair depiction of his personality and character.

1

Kostunica was born in Belgrade near the end of World War Two, in March of terrible year 1944.

His father was one of those prewar intellectuals who demonstrated readiness to cooperate with the new Communist government.

The senior Kostunica did not become a member of the Communist Party and did not raise his son in the spirit of Communism. The class of Serbian bourgeoisie to which the senior Kostunica belonged, was partly fearful, partly compliant, seeking *modus vivendi* in collaboration with the existing Communist order. Probably, it was the father who passed on to the son the kind of acquiescence that ensured tranquility and peaceful sleep.

Vojislav Kostunica grew up in a fairly educated milieu during those troubled times just after the war. He was quiet and withdrawn and did not attract much attention, not from professors or students. He was inconspicuous and disciplined a role model of an obedient and diligent boy.

The young Kostunica was not a rebel, partly because his nature was not bellicose, partly because he followed his father's conciliatory ways. At home, young Vojislav could not learn the stoic defiance and strong morals. Most likely he accepted from his parents the duplicity that guaranteed security and progress, but bred indifference and silence.

To be true, Kostunica never embraced Communism. Like his male parent, he remained a muted and unobserved fellow traveler of Tito's regime.

Kostunica's youth was rather monotonous, no ups or downs, no surprises or breakthroughs. If he was not driven into storm by circumstances, he would forever have remained on the side of events. Kostunica took no interest in mischiefs or the challenges of boyhood. He lived like a shadow of a man.

Kostunica grew up in years when Communism was at its peak. When he began his intellectual development late in the 1950s, Yugoslavia languished in the gloomy hopelessness of Titoism, severed from political and cultural trends of modern civilization. People lived in deprivation, financial as well as spiritual. The hope that Communism was short-lived and would soon be over completely faded by then. Faith and aid from the West died down among Serbs after the tragic destiny of Gen. Mihailovic and his movement. Tito and the Communists were the only reality to live by.

Perhaps it was because of this that Kostunica was not the kind of young man who would covet the shining lights of Western capitals, a carefree life and consumer abundance. He was a lad yet nothing that appealed to young men of his age appealed to him. The world of textbooks that he chose did not arise from an intellectual curiosity of an open mind. On the contrary, in the world of other people's ideas, Kostunica found the easiest escape from reality and a life without temptation. Vivid inquisitiveness that carries a young man to the depths of thought was not part of his character. He read and studied to avoid unnecessary problems.

Kostunica was not a young spirit ceaselessly asking questions and seeking answers. He accepted truths as already defined in the exact way they were offered to him. He did not accept Communism because he did not accept any ideology.

He married a girl from a notorious family from Montenegro. Her father was a fanatical Communist, a "sword of the revolution", then a long-term judge of the Supreme Court in former Yugoslavia.

* * *

Kostunica did not change at all in Law School. He remained a good student, but not prepared to make life difficult for himself

just because he thought differently from the ruling ideology. After graduating, he was appointed teaching assistant at Law School in Belgrade (1970).

He worked in the department of constitutional law and political theory. At the time, early in the 1970s, he joined a moderate free-thinking circle of older colleagues. Due to open criticism of Tito's new constriction, Vojislav was expelled from Belgrade University together with several professors (1974).

Just before expulsion, he earned his doctorate. The topic of his dissertation was non-Marxist, though the title contained traces of Marxism: "Political System of Capitalism and the role do its Opposition."¹¹⁹

Somewhat later, a Committee for the defense of freedom of thought and speech was formed in Belgrade. Kostunica was among the founders. This unofficial association was under surveillance by the regime, but not persecuted. Their activities were reduced to statements, verbal and written, in the defense of various political adversaries and opponents of Titoism.

* * *

If Kostunica did not accept Communism, he accepted its dogmatism.

In his interpretation, liberal democracy contained the same kind of rigidity so characteristic of Marxism-Leninism.

In his understanding of politics, democracy was actually a mere dogma. Escaping from intellectual skepticism, Kostunica looked for strict rules in democratic theories. In his narrow-mindedness, Kostunica the democrat resembled a stern Communist. In Kostunica's perception, democracy was an order, an order whose value is not to be tested. In his view, it was not a political procedure that provides best guarantees for personal independence. Incapable of philosophical reflection, Kostunica resembled a blind follower, akin to a medieval Christian believer. He did not become a democrat out of deep conviction, but to arm himself against Communism. One could easily imagine him on the other side. If by chance he became a Communist, he would

¹¹⁹ Ph.D. dissertation published in 1977.

have been one of the most stunt supporters of Marxism-Leninism.

Thus his political outlook, basically superficial and intolerant, at times sank into banality.

Doctrinaire as he is, Kostunica would qualify as a "Jesuit democrat". There are conceptual differences between him and Communists, but they share a similar mentality. The saying that Communists and anti-Communists are two sides of the same coin is best corroborated in Kostunica's example. Or perhaps would it be better to say that Kostunica was never really an anti-Communist.

* * *

Kostunica was one of the founders of the Democratic Party in December 1989. This was the first officially founded political party after World War Two, Besides the Communists. Assuming the name and tradition of the prewar Democratic Party, the new group tried hard to capitalize on the former party's reputation.

Kostunica did not stay long with the Democrats. The reason he left was the creation of DEPOS (Democratic Movement of Serbia), the first important alliance of democratic forces to oppose the Milosevic regime. In spite of a decision by the DS leadership not to join DEPOS, Kostunica and his supporters acted contrary to this and joined the large coalition.

The Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) developed from this faction and was formally established on 26 July 1992.

2

When DEPOS (Democratic Movement of Serbia) was formed in May 1992, it seemed that the opposition had finally made the right move. Unifying the main democratic parties, reinforced by notable individuals from public life, really seemed impressive. DEPOS was supported by the Serbian Orthodox Church and Crown Prince Aleksandar Karadjordjevic.

The four-point program sounds strong even today. It was bang on the mark: Milosevic's resignation, dissolution of the Parlia-

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ment, formation of an interim government and early elections for a Constituent assembly.

This was followed by a seven-day rally (June-July 1992) to demonstrate the power and size of the people opposed to Milosevic's regime. The last scene of the rally was indeed magnificent and unforgettable. The square in front of the Federal Assembly building was packed with people with clear sight and strong will. Tens of thousands of people were holding candles in the dead of night and then the city lights went out. We were all pretty sure: Milosevic must fall.

But none of us ordinary participants of the main event knew what was happening backstage. One needed to take a step behind the other side of the curtain to learn and understand what went on.

After such a success, why did the leaders of DEPOS start negotiating with the authorities, only to gain nothing?

How could they agree to elections in December 1992 under Milosevic's terms?

Who gave up the demands from the rally? In whose name and for what reason, and accepted the terms set by the regime?

Who was most responsible for the election defeat and breakup of DEPOS?

The truth is that if things turned differently, the war and destruction in former Yugoslavia maybe could have been prevented.

3

Kostunica and his party were totally inactive from 1993 to 2000. They were not involved in any opposition activities against Milosevic and they took no action on their own.

They contested the 1993 parliamentary elections on their own and won seven useless seats (of 250).

When Dragoslav Avramovic invited the democratic forces in Serbia to unite for the federal and local elections in 1996, Kostunica was the first to reply affirmatively, but then changed his mind and left the "Zajedno" coalition without a valid explanation

After Milosevic ruthlessly rigged the vote and election result, the Democratic Party of Serbia avoided joining the three-month long protests in Serbia. Kostunica appeared in public only once when called by students in Belgrade; he did not do well. The students were in no mood to listen to his speech about Serbian national interests. They wanted Milosevic's unconditional dismissal. As Kostunica evaded this topic and made no public statement about it, he was sent off with a tepid applause and sour remark here and there. At that time Belgrade's youth was rather defiant.

In the meantime, the composition and the leadership of DSS changed considerably. Kostunica brought into the party people who had a dubious past but were conspicuously well-off. Rumor in and out of the party had it that those people associated with the Secret police.

The financing of the DSS was shrouded in secrecy from the very start. No one asked where funds were coming from and Kostunica never discussed it. Various stories circulated. Some of them went as far as Cyprus, to people who became wealthy with the breakup of former Yugoslavia and shady deals with the Milosevic regime. But only Kostunica knew the real truth about the funds and perhaps a few people close to him.

* * *

As time elapsed, Kostunica and his party increasingly distanced themselves from other opposition parties and took up a central political position between themselves and Milosevic.

It was obvious even then that the change on the political stage was planned and meticulously carried out. By placing himself between the conflicting sides, Kostunica hoped to win over part of the electorate of the Socialist Party of Serbia. Gradually, the edge against the authorities became less cutting and questions on the rights of Serbs in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo were mentioned with increasing frequency. Kostunica's party did so transparently, reiterating the views and pursuing Milosevic's pol-

icy.¹²⁰ Criticism of the existing order was softer and less convincing.

The DSS's departure from its original program was reflected primarily in its national policy. In the mid 1990s, the Kostunica and his party established close ties to Radovan Karadzic¹²¹, his party and government in Bosnia-Herzegovina. For propaganda purposes, though, the cooperation suited both. Karadzic could show he was ideologically independent from Milosevic, and Kostunica was able to boast of a powerful and influential political brother.

Whether there was something more substantial in their relationship still remains unknown. In any case, the new DSS policy under the slogan "national as well as democratic" gave Kostunica a privileged position in Milosevic's Serbia.

* * *

No one knows whether Kostunica ever met with Milosevic prior to 5 October 2000.

Unlike other opposition leaders who bowed before the master, Kostunica avoided meeting him. His party never negotiated with the authorities and never appeared as a potential coalition partner. Other parties and leaders had.

Kostunica knew how to capitalize on his political innocence. The fact that he was not a member of the Communist Party and never met with Milosevic was put forward as irrefutable evidence in his favor. Public opinion, particularly in Belgrade, created an image of Kostunica as politically correct, morally pure, and truly democratic. This image lives to this day, more or less.

The Democratic Party of Serbia eschewed political activity subsisting as a political club rather than an opposition party.

¹²⁰ During the NATO air strikes, the State Television regularly broadcast statements issued by the DSS in its primetime newscasts. Not a word of defamation was heard about Kostunica and his party from leaders of the ruling party or government controlled media. The DSS more and more resembled an opposition party that struck a deal, the kind that existed in some East European countries throughout Communism.

¹²¹ Bosnian Serb political leader during the war. Accused of heinous war crimes. Still at large.

They hosted dull press conferences, occasionally issued claptrap statements, and that was it. The DSS became a harmless organization with no will or power to pose a threat to Milosevic and his system.

Very few people seriously counted on Kostunica and his party. Until the spring of 2000.

* * *

If that was the case, who proposed Kostunica as DOS's presidential candidate in 2000?

Zoran Djindjic did.

The other leaders agreed, mostly because they saw a chance for themselves through his candidacy.

Why?

Because they realized that with this move the coalition would have another leading man besides Djindjic. Rivalry was inevitable and they were looking for a space for themselves in-between the two.

Thus Kostunica stepped into the foreground out of nowhere. He got in the media spotlight right away, both domestic and foreign. He set himself apart from other leaders and conducted his own independent policy. The gap between Kostunica and the DSS on one side and DOS on the other, deepened rapidly. From one whole, the coalition split into two centers of power and decision-making.

As elections approached and the campaign became foremost in everyone's mind, the new state of affairs was accepted as natural and regular. Removing Milosevic was, it seemed, the sole objective in the eyes of the DOS leaders. Only Kostunica, today we know, deliberated other options.

The electoral campaigns for federal President and federal Parliament were separate. Kostunica put together his independent election team. The DOS election headquarters was run by Djindjic and he was its mastermind.

The great coalition, thus, awaited that historic election of 24 September 2000 in two parallel ranks. Kostunica headed one, Djindjic the other. They only appeared to be running side by side, until 5 October. After that date they took different direc-

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tions openly, growing further apart, only to clash as blood enemies after they met again.

During the campaign, no one but Kostunica from the Democratic party of Serbia had the main say. The DSS had no prominent figure to carry the weight of an election showdown with Milosevic and Seselj.

The first and last joint appearance of all leaders of DOS took place on 1 September 2000, in Belgrade's Convention Center.

Our presidential candidate then took his memorable oath:

"I give my word... that I will try to change our country for the better, respecting the laws of God and the people, and I will not let power change me."

No comment.

4

Kostunica really crushed Milosevic in the 24 September 2000 presidential election. The difference in votes between the two rivals was beyond anyone's expectations.

Still, we will never know for sure whether Kostunica won more than half of the ballots which was necessary for the final victory in the first leg of elections. DOS claimed that he did, the regime denied it. Kostunica wanted his victory confirmed, Milosevic wanted a second leg. The people trusted DOS and Kostunica, not Milosevic and his power structure.

Neither side relented. A showdown was inevitable and judgment day came on 5 October 2000.

Kostunica was nowhere about on that crucial day. He was supposed to be the only speaker at a large rally in front of the Federal Assembly building, scheduled for 15:00 hours sharp.

More people gathered than ever before. Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children crowded the spacious plateau.

At the last moment, the crowd shouting his name, Kostunica canceled.

He never appeared on the streets of Belgrade. Not when the Federal Assembly was stormed, not when tear gas was dropped, not in front of the State Television edifice, not in clashes with the

police. Citizens of Serbia came from all over, but the winner and leader was nowhere around. They were ready to fight for his victory, while he decided to wait in the shelter.

As mentioned earlier, Kostunica appeared only once late in the afternoon, gave a speech from the terrace of the Old Court building and then disappeared. He was not with other DOS leaders during the night either. No one knew for certain where he was or what was he doing.

* * *

That night, Kostunica prevented the seizure of all power in the state, though the majority of the leaders were in favor.

In his first public appearance, he said:

"Cooperation with The Hague Tribunal is the last item on my agenda. We've got much more important things to do."¹²²

The next day he met with Milosevic, accompanied by his favorite Gen. Pavkovic. The true substance of their meeting remains a secret to this day.

He persistently protected Milosevic's Secret police chief as well as Milosevic's chief of the General Staff. Kostunica would not have them dismissed at any cost.

After a few days he received Milosevic "in the capacity of chairman of the biggest opposition party", with full respect. He

¹²² Kostunica continued to resist cooperation with The Hague Tribunal. First he said extraditing inductees was not possible without special legislation. When the law was passed, he looked for other ways to dodge this obligation. He vowed that while he was leader, there would be no extraditions for command responsibility. He reiterated his story on the need for "two way" cooperation with the Tribunal, as if there were two sides to the dispute, not a court that was trying people for serious international crimes. Then he came up with the so called "voluntary extraditions" i.e. buying off the inductees to surrender and agree to be extradited. Yet the most wanted of them all general Ratko Mladic accused of the worst crimes in Srebrenica and elsewhere is still in hiding. Despite firm promises, Kostunica and his government failed to find Mladic, put him under arrest and hand him over to The Hague Tribunal (as of 10 October) 2006).

Yet, Kostunica admitted three and a half years later, in his capacity as Prime Minister:

"Today it is clearer than ever that there will be no major progress on the path to Europe without cooperation with The Hague Tribunal". (June 2004)

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let him stay in the presidential residence and the army squad was to continue guarding him, though Milosevic was not entitled to this any more.

He fiercely opposed proposals that the top individuals of the Milosevic regime answer for the consequences of the policy they had conducted over previous years.

Suddenly, there was nobody of his old party comrades in his vicinity. His new advisors and aides were people who had shady past and unproven capabilities. His office turned into a shadow cabinet, working covertly against Djindjic's government. His office was the place from where all the strings were pulled in Serbia and Yugoslavia, all Ministers and media monitored, and dangerous conspiracies plotted.

Kostunica was very much opposed to Milosevic's arrest on 31 March 2001, but he did not object in public. He was even more opposed to Milosevic's extradition on 28 June 2001. This time he attacked Djindjic and Dos leadership of breaking the Constitution and of establishing a dangerous precedent that might "undermine the internal stability of the country". Luckily, he was unable to stop it.

From the first day in office he emphasized "legalism" as the highest goal, meaning "rule of law". Actually, it was meant to conceal his intention to preserve Milosevic's order and protect its bearers.

Kostunica defeated Milosevic but he did not change his system of government. A supposed democrat beat a real Communist and embraced his mechanisms of power.

Vojislav Kostunica turned out be a veritable successor of Slobodan Milosevic.

* * *

His first moves upon taking power were as follows.

His initial trip as president was to the Bosnian Serbs.

In the Serbian entity in Bosnia-Herzegovina, he backed Karadzic's candidate for President and this backing was crucial for the outcome of elections there.

He went to Herzegovina, where he was seen publicly in the company of people very close to Radovan Karadzic.

A day earlier, the Austrian diplomat Wolfgang Petritsch, then International High Representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina, rushed to Belgrade. Petritsch had previously been Austria's Ambassador to Serbia and we knew each other well. He was quite upset. The Austrian asked me to appeal to Kostunica to visit Sarajevo before his departure to Herzegovina and thus symbolically recognize the international independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina. I remember Petritsch's picturesque comparison:

"If Kostunica were to leave straight for Trebinje, it would be the same as Alija Izetbegovic going to Novi Pazar¹²³ without visiting Belgrade first".

He asked for advice. I proposed that he, Petritsch, secure an official helicopter with international insignia to take Kostunica to Sarajevo airport for a brief meeting with the Bosnian authorities, and then he would take the same helicopter to his final destination.

I passed the content of his conversation to Kostunica and the proposed solution. He said curtly and impatiently:

"Okay, I'll see."

He never went to Sarajevo.

That was his first international omission.

Kostunica did continue Milosevic's policy siding with his former partners not only in Bosnia, but in Montenegro too. The fact that Montenegrin socialists conducted a dirty campaign against Kostunica and DOS and been Milosevic's faithful servants for a full decade, did not prevent Kostunica's to take them as his coalition partners. A coalition between DOS and the Montenegrin socialists on the federal level was unnatural and extorted for everyone except Kostunica. He was the only one who felt comfortable in the political embrace of his sworn enemies until yesterday.

Kostunica's first obsession throughout his time in office had been the preservation of the union of Serbia and Montenegro. The insurmountable obstacle in achieving that goal was and remained the same: Montenegrin leader Milo Djukanovic.

¹²³ Novi Pazar is a town in southeastern Serbia populated by Bosnian Muslims.

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Kostunica dreamed of the victory of Montenegrin socialists against the unbeatable Djukanovic. This victory would remove the hotspot of Montenegrin separatism and Kostunica's fantasy on the survival of Yugoslavia would come true. It turned out; however, that Kostunica and his allies in Montenegro trailed far behind Djukanovic¹²⁴. Any attempt to overpower and oust him proved to be futile.

Ultimately, Kostunica was forced to negotiate with Djukanovic. The outwitting ended after several months, with Xavier Solana's¹²⁵ mediation and the creation of the so-called "State Union of Serbia-Montenegro" (February-March 2003). Under the Belgrade Accord and Constitutional Charter, the two states (Serbia and Montenegro) formed a union, with a period of duration of three years and a set of unique bodies and jurisdictions. Actually, this was a confederation, a transitional solution until the inevitable separation of Serbia and Montenegro.

Kostunica wished to be the creator of a strong solid state that he liked to call a "functional federation", with a sovereignty of its own. Djukanovic would implement his plan for an independent Montenegro patiently and in keeping with the interests of the Great Powers. The state union personified mostly what Djukanovic wanted and Kostunica tried to avoid. Djukanovic had time and could afford waiting. Kostunica no longer had the means by which to force Montenegro to remain allied to Serbia. By the way, the entire expense of the State Union fell on Serbian taxpayers.

Europe's guarantees for the State Union were no guarantees for the preservation of Serbia-Montenegro as Kostunica falsely believed. On the contrary. The guarantees referred to a future referendum in Montenegro to decide on its independence sooner or later. In the meantime, Montenegro existed *de facto* as an independent state. The official structure of the Union through

¹²⁴ In May 2006, due to great efforts of Djukanovic, Montenegro definitely opted for independence. That marked the end of Kostunica's unrealistic aspirations.

¹²⁵ Former Spanish Foreign Minister. Presently the official of E.U. in charge of foreign affairs.

which it appeared in international institutions did not hamper its course to full independence.

Kostunica put everything Serbia had in the State Union. Djukanovic kept everything Montenegrin outside of the Union. In a way, the Union turned out to be harmful to Serbia, but not to Montenegro. Thanks to Kostunica, Serbia was a kind of a hostage to Montenegro and its interests.

Level-headedness is not Kostunica's virtue. If he were level-headed, he would have realized the simple truth: Yugoslav Communism left an indelible trace. It introduced the Montenegrins as a separate nation from Serbs, hence several generations of Montenegrins were bred that in that belief for the past six decades. Most Montenegrins no longer consider themselves Serbs and do not consider Serbia their homeland. That is the reality now that no one can change anymore. The wheel of history cannot be turned back. Values and notions of the past were retailored in Serbia as well as Montenegro. It is regrettable, but so it is.

After more than half a century of Communist rule and its standards, Montenegro is not the state it once was. Most people in Montenegro desired independence and that proved to be irrefutable.

Serbia and its people have no right whatsoever to lecture others keeping them in the Union beyond their will.

This simple truth persistently eludes Kostunica's political mind, not only in the case of Montenegro.

* * *

Under Kostunica's leadership, the Democratic Party of Serbia revealed its proposal for a new Serbian Constitution in July 2003.

The draft contained two crucial solutions that attracted attention and confirmed that the party departed considerably from its ideological roots of 10 years before. It shows quite clearly that Kostunica and the DSS are not consistent in their persuasions, the way they present themselves to the public. Quite the opposite. In keeping with their political interests, Kostunica and the DSS demonstrated readiness to give up their principal political positions.

Here is an example.

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Article one of their draft Constitution says that Serbia is a republic by its form of government. The article does not mention at what point of time Serbia became a republic or how. It simply says -- the Republic of Serbia.

Let us recall. Serbia became a republic in the sense of a federal entity and not a form of government under Tito's Constitution adopted in January 1946, which was a direct consequence of the Communist revolution. The Communists removed the opposition and imposed the republican form of government in Yugoslavia as a whole.¹²⁶ Two decades after the publication of this book his party proposed that Serbia remains a republic. It did so without calling a popular vote on the question. This is even more inconsistent considering Kostunica's reputation as expert on constitutional law.

To make matters worse, the DSS draft stipulated direct election of the President. In addition to this, it granted the President a very strong right, the right to dissolve the Parliament. That is precisely what Kostunica harshly criticized when Milosevic's Constitution was adopted in 1990.¹²⁷

Kostunica's motive to alter the fundamental program stance was personal, not principled. During work on the draft, he insisted on becoming the elected President of Serbia. Thus he became a republican overnight, neglecting the trifling detail that he posed as a monarchist all his life.

The final draft of the Serbian new Constitution proposed in September 2006 by the government of Vojislav Kostunica included an additional alteration: It stipulated that "Kosovo is the inseparable part of Serbia". This is what Kostunica said about the importance of such a provision:

"Our first duty is to do absolutely everything in our capacity to preserve Kosovo within the state borders of Serbia, despite all those who are trying to take it from us. In order to succeed in this

¹²⁶ Vojislav Kostunica's book "Party Monism or Pluralism"¹²⁶ speaks volumes of this.

¹²⁷ In the meantime, Kostunica's party changed its stance again and recently called for the election of President by the Parliament. The final draft of the new Constitution of Serbia was passed in October 2006. The position of the President is identical to the one in Milosevic's Constitution of 1990.

utmost endeavor we need to defend Kosovo not only by the international law, but by domestic constitutional system as well".

* * *

The cabinet presided by Vojislav Kostunica lasted for exactly three years (January 2004 - January 2007). While Serbian Prime Minister, he did somewhat change his rhetoric on Serbia's cooperation with The Hague Tribunal. His government was responsible for the so called "voluntary extraditions" of a dozen of individuals indicted by The Tribunal. Some of them held high posts in Bosnian Serb military during the war. The truth is that Kostunica, despite public statements about "the political will of the authorities to find and arrest" the most wanted war criminal Gen. Ratko Mladic never lived up to its promise. Besides Mladic, another five inductees are still at large, allegedly hiding in Serbia. Due to that fact, the negotiations with the European Union on stabilization and association were put on hold in May 2006.

In December 2006, Serbia was invited to join the Partnership for Peace (together with Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina), contingent to fulfill its obligations towards The Hague Tribunal. This diplomatic success should be credited to Serbian President Boris Tadic who, in a letter to U.S. President George W. Bush took personal responsibility for handing over Gen. Mladic and other, rather than to the government of Vojislav Kostunica. Kostunica from his side avoided to take any public vow on the issue.

Kostunica and his cabinet called for the referendum on the new Constitution of Serbia (28-29 October 2006). The referendum brought a slim majority in favor of the Constitution (51% for, 3% against, with 46% of absentee vote). In its Preamble, the Constitution strongly underscored "the fact that Kosovo is an inseparable part of Serbia and that every future government takes as its foremost obligation to safeguard Kosovo within the state borders of Serbia". In terms of its other provisions, especially with respect of political system it represented a mere carbon copy of Milosevic's Constitution of 1990.

Early parliamentary elections in Serbia were scheduled for January 21, 2007.

5

Vojislav Kostunica is not a person who has widely traveled abroad.

He came to know the outside world from stories told by others or through roundabout sources. He acquired an interest in Western culture indirectly, without personal experience, creating his own image of European civilization and its achievements.

When he began to tour world capitals after 5 October and met Western statesmen and politicians, this image changed fundamentally. The splendid architecture and powerful political systems caught Kostunica completely unawares. He was blinded by the splendor before him and had mixed feelings about it. At the same time, Vojislav was thrilled and in awe. Thrilled at the beauty of the magnificence before him, in awe of their great might. Thus his response had to be twofold and contradictory. On one side, he wanted to leave the impression of an independent and dignified representative of his people. On the other, he had neither the courage nor the confidence for it. He would depart sure of him self and return totally disarmed.

First he thought that the supremacy of his arguments was absolute; that the outside world would understand and respect his words; that the fact that he considered himself a democrat and had beaten Milosevic would open all doors.

Then he hit a hard wall. His views came down like a house of cards. Everything that he believed was undeniable evidence turned into dust and ashes. In contact with foreigners, he sunk into helpless irritability from which a misunderstanding arose ending in intolerance.

Kostunica is not one of those people who are capable of assuming a rational view of international relations. He is even less capable of expressing his thoughts in a language and vocabulary that the world accepts and understands. To a stranger, he gives the impression of a person who has an old-fashioned and obsolete way of thinking.

In time, because of such experience, he became even more distrustful toward the West and its values.

Vojislav Kostunica as such, suited the Anglo-Saxons perfectly. They put much effort into establishing order in the Balkans during the last fifteen years. In that order, every state and every nation were given a place and role. With his conduct, Kostunica did not disrupt Serbia's flawed position established in the Milosevic era. Besides, he was no threat to peace and stability in southeastern Europe. With Kostunica's tongue-tied policy the West did not feel obligated to reexamine its approach toward Serbia. The so-called diplomacy of "conditionality" used against Milosevic was successful with Kostunica as well.

Intimately, some among Anglo-Saxons feel that Serbia does not deserve to get away easily and be forgiven for Milosevic's sins. Moreover, there are a few Westerners who still think that Serbia should suffer long-term punishment for what Milosevic's government had done.

The about-turn on 5 October was an opportunity to change fundamentally Serbia's status in the international community. All that was needed had been two important and courageous moves: Extradition of all inductees to The Hague Tribunal was the foremost condition accompanied by truthful, sincere and public defamation of the terrible crimes committed by Milosevic and his pawns in former Yugoslavia.

* * *

The truth is that Vojislav Kostunica is not avaricious at all. He has no desire for luxurious palaces, black limousines, expensive hotels or private jets. He is not accompanied by a staff of servants and toadies. He is modest and lives in the same apartment he lived in before he came to power.

Kostunica is not the kind of person who likes to impress people with extravagance and lavishness. After Tito and Milosevic who seized everything they wanted and acted as uncrowned monarchs, Kostunica really seems an ordinary man at the head of state.

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Though frugal, Kostunica is not miserly. He would help a person in need and pay another's bill. He is capable of sharing with friends and can be a real pal.

He is not the kind of person who insists on everything being perfect. On the contrary. He is quite comfortable and content with the minimum.

It is true that he makes no difference between himself and others, regardless of what position he is in. He does not have the dignified bearing that would naturally set him apart from others. He is not the type of a leader or a boss. He depends on advisors because he has trouble making decisions on his own. His advisors are not there to help him decide, but to share responsibility of decision-making with him.

Kostunica does not enjoy the company of rich people. He adheres to protocol as much as he has to and avoids ceremonies and feasts.

Kostunica has no wish for material possessions. He has no interest in expensive things and is rather different in that respect from his *entourage*. Compared to others, he is a genuine ascetic.

Kostunica has no particular interests beyond politics. The outside world holds little interest for him. He is not one to converse on a wide range of subjects. The only topic worth discussing with him is politics.

At a rally in Belgrade in 2000, he said:

"I want to live in a boring country."

For those who know him closely, that was an honest statement.

As for Kostunica's lifestyle and personal possessions, power has not changed him much. He has not yielded to the temptations to which almost all DOS leaders succumbed after 5 October.

Unfortunately, though, he changed considerably in every other respect.

* * *

If Kostunica was to be portrayed as a caricature, he could be described the following way.

Malicious younger folk would say that Kostunica looks like "flotsam after a flood".

His suit is at least two sizes too large, his fingers barely visible from the overly long sleeves. His tie is never tight, always dark and depressing, completely in keeping with Kostunica's gloomy personality. Portly, overweight around the waist, flabby and clumsy, Kostunica does not pay much heed to his outside appearance. His figure, with his short legs and big head is rather broad than tall. A slouched posture and bent knees add to his innate awkwardness.

The only part of his body that he visibly cares about is his hair. He dyes it dark brown, with disobedient bangs on his forehead and tufts of hair over his ears. Bulging eyes and fat lips are part of his conspicuous face.

When he sits he has a problem with his legs; when he stands he has a problem with his arms. When listening to someone he fidgets and shakes his arm up to his shoulder. When speaking, he rolls his eyes, looks left and right, up and down, but never into a person's eyes. His voice is nasal and drawn out. When shouting it turns into screeching.

Kostunica has difficulties when appearing in public. Unaccustomed to the big stage, he stammers, gets anxious and cannot hide his nervousness. Vojislav is a terrible speaker and hates rallies and media. He cannot speak *impromptu*; everything must be written for him in advance.

Kostunica's language is dry and ungifted. Not only is it devoid of style and elegance, but it lacks basic clarity that enables understanding. A cynic might have doubts about his innate shrewdness.

Kostunica is no better as a writer. His writings are hard labor for readers, as they were for the writer. His pen is as heavy as lead; his phrases are unwieldy and monotonous, without the beginning or end; his writing is dull and indifferent throughout.

Kostunica has no wit or talent, not a trace of charm that is so indispensable in modern politics. He has no smile or radiance, grumpy and gloomy like a bird of ill omen.

Everything about him is dry and tedious. His speaking, his writing, his life.

Being weak, Kostunica can be dishonest and evil. His hatred is quiet and secretive. He is duplicitous and envious. Kostunica

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keeps his true thoughts deep inside and is not the kind of person who forgives and forgets. He is vengeful, incapable of liking, yet very capable of disliking. Actually, he is conceited and mean, though he poses as well-meaning and meek.

To him, power is a *cure-all* for a boring life. Political leadership is proof of his personal value. Empty inside, he depends on praise from outside.

He is a monarchist who wishes to be the President of Serbia. He is a non-Communist protecting Communism. He is a democrat who insults the idea of freedom. He is a Serb who is deceiving Serbs. He is a European without the knowledge of Europe. He is a legalist who tramples on law.

Vojislav Kostunica is exactly the opposite of what the Serbian public believes him to be.

* * *

So how could such a mediocre person become leader of the Serbian nation?

Yet, there is nothing mysterious about it.

After Milosevic's disaster and Djindjic's alacrity, Serbs longed for stillness. Vojislav Kostunica personifies barren tranquility that maintains the *status quo* and moves nothing. He represents the best symbol of Serbian mediocrity. Apparently, it is that quality, one that is unimposing and undemanding, that suits Serbia today the most. Kostunica is harmless and capable of enduring. He can be with everyone and need not be with anyone. He bothers no one.

His weakness justifies the weakness of the nation. His grayness is the grayness of Serbia's daily life. He is a Serb without courage and without determination. He is the reflection of all Serbian fears and ignorance.

Alas, Kostunica is the real measure of Serbdom today.

*Dragoslav Avramovic*¹²⁸

It is not often that a person appears all of a sudden, makes a rocket-powered rise, becomes a national star and then disappears as swiftly as he appeared. And very rare when that person is in his senior years.

When the name of Dragoslav Avramovic was mentioned in Serbia early in 1994, hardly anyone knew who that was. He was a person whom Milosevic's regime introduced as the new governor of the National Bank of Yugoslavia who would rescue the country from its record breaking inflation.

This is the first time the public saw an elderly man of small stature modestly clad, a tote bag in his hand. Perky and straightforward, he used simple words, conveyed clever messages and immediately won the hearts of the broadest public.

A meager piece of information was issued about his years-long employment in the World Bank and about his career as a renowned expert on monetary issues. That was all. Avramovic did the rest himself, heartily supported by newspapers and television.

It was not a drab clerk and international banker that the Serbian public met, but a spry gentleman concerned for the welfare of the ordinary citizen. His ability to present himself as a man of the people who understood the problems of everyday life brought him a popularity that was uniquely his own, experienced by no one before or since.

Stabilization of the dinar¹²⁹, strict monetary policy, a central role of the National Bank in state finances were no doubt positive results of Avramovic's reforms, but his reputation came from personal sympathy, not from professional success. Overnight, Avramovic became a savior of the nation in the mid-1990s, the hardest days for the nation in its recent history.

¹²⁸ Dragoslav Avramovic (1919-2001).

¹²⁹ The Yugoslav currency.

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When Avramovic split with Milosevic and joined the democratic opposition, his positive influence on the masses did not lessen. He was one of the most popular figures in Serbia until his death and unrivaled.

His life and his character, however, remained in the shadow of his swift rise and even swifter demise.

1

Avramovic was born in Skopje (Macedonia) in 1919, and lived there in his youth. There he finished primary and secondary school and graduated in 1937 from the University of Belgrade.

Both his parents were teachers, most likely from Serbia. They were sent to Macedonia to work on orders from the then Ministry of Education.

Avramovic graduated from Belgrade Law School and earned a doctorate in 1956.¹³⁰

After World War Two he worked in the National Bank of Yugoslavia and the Finance Ministry. He became an expert on money and international financial relations. He was assistant professor at Law School in Belgrade in the Department of Public Financing, from 1948 to 1953.

As an expert, he joined the first official delegation of the new Yugoslavia visiting Washington after the end of the war. He often spoke about meeting with the then U.S. Secretary of State, George Marshall, and the impression that this American left on him.

In 1953 he went to work for the World Bank in Washington and stayed there for 25 years. His first appointment was as head of a department, while he finished his career as Director of the Directorate for Developing Countries. This is the highest professional office in the World Bank ever attained by a Serb.

He worked as advisor to the Secretary General of the U.N., Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva

¹³⁰ The title was Avramovic's Ph.D. dissertation was "Theory of Transfer -- Contribution to the Theory of Foreign Loans".

(1974-75 and 1989-84). He was a consultant to and a member of the Brandt Commission for questions of development (1978-79).

Avramovic spent the last years of his active service -- prior to his return to Serbia -- working on the founding of an international banking institution for developing countries, the so-called "Third World Bank" (1984-1988).

Avramovic wrote numerous articles on economy, monetary theory, and policy of prices. He wrote in English, French, and Serbian.

* * *

It is not quite clear what induced Avramovic to leave Yugoslavia and go abroad, sometime in the mid-fifties.

He avoided discussing his reasons so it was impossible to wheedle out a consistent answer to this question. Avramovic was very clever in circumventing or omitting what he did not want the public to know about him.

There are at least three stories about the true motives for his decision.

First, Avramovic fell out with the authorities on the question of economic development. He was opposed to a planned economy and the Soviet model, advocating fundamental economic reforms, encouraged by the country's break with the Soviet Union and the stances of Milovan Djilas¹³¹. When seeing the matter fail and the leadership's disinterest in new ideas, he decided to move across the Ocean.

The second story says that Avramovic had no interest in politics whatsoever. He served the Communist authorities because he realized that that was the only way for personal and professional promotion. His departure to the World Bank was the result of an arrangement with the authorities. He was sent there, albeit unofficially, in the capacity of a representative of Tito's Yugoslavia.

¹³¹ Most famous Yugoslav dissident, who stood up against Tito in early fifties arguing in favor of democratization of Yugoslav Communism. Spent nine years in prison. Author of a number of books about Yugoslavia, some of them becoming bestsellers in the West.

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The third story is that Avramovic sought an opportunity from the very beginning to leave Communist Yugoslavia and secure a comfortable position for himself somewhere in the West. The offer from the World Bank was an ideal chance in Avramovic's plans which he embraced enthusiastically.

Whatever the reason, one thing is certain. Avramovic never came into open conflict with the Communist regime in the country. Throughout his career in Washington, he never harmed the interests of Tito's Yugoslavia.

Though basically loyal, Avramovic did not represent Yugoslavia; he had no official status in any Yugoslav public institution. He was simply an expert-professional in the World Bank and in this capacity earned his reputation and built his career.

Avramovic learned at an early age that in uncertain times it was best to be as less conspicuous as possible. Stepping out onto the big stage both at home or abroad, carried a risk that this Serb from Macedonia was not ready to take. Between promising prominence or political disgrace, Avramovic chose the third path. The path of professional advancement in quiet, far from the lights and dangers of the public stage.

That is why almost no one in Serbia knew anything about the man called -- Dragoslav Avramovic.

* * *

Avramovic spent 20 years of his international career in Geneva. No one knew what property he owned in Switzerland, but he definitely considered Geneva his home. Whenever he left Belgrade for medical treatment or recovery, he went to Geneva. It was much harder for him to take a trip to the United States. In his senior years, Avramovic felt more comfortable in Switzerland than in America, either because of better medical care or because Europe had become closer to him.

His children lived abroad. He spoke English with his youngest daughter, who settled in New York. Obviously, English had become the language in which they communicated.

One could observe that his Serbian was under the influence of English and that when speaking Serbian he was actually translat-

ing from English. He used foreign words in their English meaning, not their customary sense in Serbian.

Quite understandably, Avramovic was highly proficient in English. His thoughts and his language were typically Anglo-Saxon. He could speak in nuances and make fine distinctions, with confidence and natural ease. His English was one of an educated person, powerful in expression even compared with many Anglo-Saxons to whom English was the mother tongue, yet he had a barely noticeable accent.

His Serbian had the same qualities as his English. The fact that he had not spoken the language publicly for a long time affected his fluency, but had no impact on Avramovic's ability to use it in keeping with his ideas and intentions. Evidently Avramovic used the language to say clearly what he wanted to say and the way he wanted to say it. Sometimes he was unequivocal, at other times he was implicit. It was apparent that he had spent years in international institutions where diplomatic skill was crucial for success.

Avramovic did not become an American, but he adopted many of its traits and customs. His appearance and performance in the American milieu could easily deceive the eye of an amateurish observer.

2

Dragoslav Avramovic returned to Yugoslavia at the last moment. The country was torn by war, sanctions, poverty, and inflation. Serbia was barely surviving. People were at the end of their force, overcome by misery and despair. They had little hope that things would ever get better. There was only feeble belief in the arrival of an anonymous rescuer. And he did come: In the shape of an old man, ready to raise the nation and breath into it new faith and strength.

Avramovic played his part perfectly. He was well aware that the impression he made was more important than real changes and so he entirely devoted himself to that.

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The economic moves were long familiar and comparatively simple. The old fox knew that well. Instead of a serious expert who knew what he was doing, Avramovic chose to play the role of the people's advocate. Instead of making the necessary slashes, he comforted the masses with promises of a bright future. Avramovic assumed the image of a wizard from a fairy tale, aware that only magic could save Serbia at the time. Avramovic became a good spirit that carried a load of prosperity which he doled out to the nation without question or explanation. A magician more than a governor, he won over the masses. People called him affectionately "Grandpa Avram" and the new Serbian currency "Avram's dinar". They greeted him on the street and common women kissed his hand. People bowed to him; he was their last comfort and their last resort.

It was him they believed, not his reforms.

However, matters were not as spontaneous as they appeared at first. Avramovic was the supreme demagogue in a perfectly tailored role, yet it was Milosevic's mechanism of power working in his favor. The myth about Avramovic was created by the regime media, which had previously created Milosevic.

The Serbian public produced two icons: Milosevic as national leader and Avramovic as national benefactor. Both performances were equally deceitful serving the same purpose: survival of the existing system of government. They only differed in the degree of damage. Milosevic was the embodiment of evil, Avramovic a temporary *decor* for that evil.

Avramovic was meant to be a mere instrument in the hands of the regime. In the beginning he was.

As often fairy tales are, the one about Avramovic was short-lived and disappeared in a split-second.

* * *

The nation's fascination with Avramovic had to provoke resentment from Milosevic's part, sooner or later.

His popularity exceeded the initial projections by the regime and began to overpower Milosevic's. Parallel to that, Avramovic's self-confidence and independence gradually increased. This benevolent elderly man who knew how to handle money

was suddenly becoming resolute and very interested in daily politics. As he was freeing himself from constraints and limitations, Avramovic was more appealing to opponents of the regime. Positive results of his management of the National Bank, some improvement in the living standard and above all, his charm, made Avramovic everyone's darling.

The old man managed perfectly to appeal to different social layers in Serbia. He declared himself a defender of pensioners because he, too, was a pensioner. He associated with labor unions and their leaders because he supposedly cared for the interests of workers. He mingled with ordinary population because he wanted to be considered one of their own.

As for political factors, Avramovic kept a distance. He carefully avoided standing side by side with representatives of the ruling party. He was not a member of the Socialist Party of Serbia and he did not show any particular sympathy toward it. He was moderately affable with the opposition. He wanted to look like someone able to surmount political differences and calm the warring camps. He wished to act benevolently and healingly, avoiding political commitment.

Dragoslav Avramovic posed as a leftist and socialist, but it is highly debatable whether he really was. It seems more probably that he consciously decided to present himself as such in order to be acceptable to Milosevic, bearing in mind that the Serbian people lived in Communism for over half a century and that habits acquired during that time have not faded away.

In essence, the image that Avramovic created was rather contradictory. A well off Westerner on one side, yet a representative of the Serbian working class on the other. An expert economist from the World Bank, yet a person of modest ways and demands. Appointed by Milosevic, yet a pet of the opposition.

A distinguished intellectual who spoke the language of a simple man, Avramovic managed to be unanimously liked.

* * *

His fallout with Milosevic did not spark a crisis that might have been expected.

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Avramovic was dismissed after a vote of no confidence in the FRY Assembly, and on that occasion he delivered one of his best speeches.

Yet the regime did not assail him with every available weapon after that, as it did in some previous cases. Avramovic was not put on the pillar of shame and he did not become an object of attack or insult. It was obvious that he and Milosevic had come to a misunderstanding and that cooperation was not possible. Without hatred and without harsh words. That is how it ended.

It seemed unlikely that Avramovic would become politically active on any side. His retirement from public life seemed far more probable. His character and his status did not reveal Avramovic in the role of an opposition politician, much less as a leader of the mass movement against Milosevic.

But, the tiny Serb from Macedonia surprised everyone. He embarked on an impossible mission to unite Serbia's opposition parties and leaders. Not once, but twice. His first attempt was in 1996 with the "Zajedno" coalition, which ended in failure resulting in his instant withdrawal. He joined politics again as part of the Alliance for Change coalition in 1998 acting as it's unofficial yet undisputed leader. This coalition was the core of the future DOS coalition which vanquished Milosevic in 2000.

Unfortunately, Avramovic's health deteriorated a few months before that, forcing him to retire from active politics. That prevented him from being the DOS nominee for President of Yugoslavia and the rival to Milosevic. If he had been in better health, Avramovic would have been the best and most acceptable choice for all members of DOS. But destiny wanted Kostunica in Avramovic's place. As the ancient wisdom says: What fates impose men must needs abide.

He was alive when the regime fell, but died soon after in Washington, in spring of 2001.

His personal credit for the historic success in the struggle against Milosevic's tyranny and against the fatal ideas of Serbo-Communism are lasting and indelible.

* * *

After WWII, Macedonians suggested that Avramovic declare himself a Macedonian and change his surname to Avramovski, making sky high promises if he did. An expert of his stature was exceptionally rare in those parts, more so among Macedonian Communists. Avramovic flatly refused.

He repeated before witnesses that he had never been a member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.

Asked whether he considered himself a Marxist, he replied affirmatively, with ease. When asked how his knowledge and thoughts on modern economics fitted into Karl Marx's understanding of political economy and his theory of values, Avramovic again replied with ease:

"Listen, Marx had no clue about economy. What I like about him are his thoughts on human alienation, social solidarity and equality among men. Otherwise, *Das Kapital* is sheer nonsense".

"If that is so, then you are not a Marxist, but a social-democrat."

"Well, yes, that is basically true. But here it sounds better if you say you are a Marxist."

Another question referred to his monetary reform:

"Where did you find the money to defend the fixed rate of exchange of the dinar? As far as we know, you came across an empty treasury and the highest inflation rate in the history of world economy."

"Yes, but you must know a simple law of money. The higher the inflation, the less healthy money you need to defend a stable monetary rate of exchange. I did not need much money. I found about \$200 million of free money in an account of the National Bank that everyone had forgotten about. That was enough money to stabilize the dinar. The second condition for my success was psychological. I need the nation to trust me and my reform. And thirdly, the National Bank was not to be under the control of the political authorities and for the governor to have the freedom to work independently. That is what I demanded of Milosevic before I accepted the position and I obtained such assurances from him. You may think what you like about him, but I tell you he

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kept his word. But when things cracked between us, it was over for good."

We did not push the question any further. Obviously, the money came from somewhere else. Avramovic could easily have had a foreign "guardian angel" that was very understanding. Most likely the "guardian angel" was concealed in his old firm in the U.S. Capital or somewhere very close to it.

He did not say whether anyone advised him to appear in Serbia and assume the position of governor of the Central Bank.

When the decision was made for Kostunica to be the presidential candidate, Avramovic called and requested a meeting with several leaders of DOS. He was already very ill. He had trouble finding our headquarters and climbed to the first floor with the help of DOS staff.

The old man had only one question:

"Gentlemen, tell me did Kostunica have to be the candidate? Was there no one else? Let me tell you something. I've known him since the "Zajedno" coalition and then he lied to me and deceived me without batting an eye. Please not him, for God's sake. Things will not go well if he is the leader."

Those were the words of a prophet, but unfortunately, there was no one to listen. It was too late when his words proved true. Kostunica was already elected President of FR Yugoslavia.

Djindjic replied:

"My dear professor, you needn't to worry. There was no other alternative. You would have been the perfect candidate, but alas, your health is an insurmountable obstacle.

But just so you know, professor, Kostunica won't be able to do anything without us. He has no party, no funds, and that makes him dependent on us. He won't be able to move without us. Rest assured that we'll keep him on a short leash."

"Zoran, why aren't you the candidate? I think you're a far better candidate than Kostunica. If you were to accept, I'd back you immediately", Avramovic insisted.

"No, no, that's a bad idea. Everyone knows it. I'm not a good candidate. After all the lies told about me, the prevailing opinion of me in Serbia is not in my favor. It is much better that I remain

on the side and act from the background. As for Kostunica, don't worry".

We saw him out and took him home, but we did not convince him that our decision was the right one.

If Avramovic did not care for someone, it was Mladjan Dinkic¹³². He had sympathy for Labus, but not for Dinkic, and he did not keep it secret. On the contrary. He used every opportunity to show his low opinion of Dinkic.

Not only did he refuse to talk to Dinkic, he refused to see him. Worse than that, he deliberately got his name wrong, feigning forgetfulness. So, Dinkic was "Djinkic" and "Dindjic" and "Djin-dic," everything but Dinkic.

Mostly he pretended to be forgetful. The gentleman in question was such a nonentity that he did not deserve to have his name remembered.

"What's the name of that lad?"

"Which lad, the one with Labus? You mean Dinkic?"

"Ah, yes, that lad. What did you say his name was? Djinkic?"

"Dinkic."

"Yeah, that's the one. What an ignoramus. I don't understand why Mr. Labus wastes his time with him. He knows nothing but talks an awful lot. Mostly nonsense."

As for Dinkic's book, "The Economy of Destruction", very popular at one time and considered an "indictment" against Milosevic's financial abuse, Avramovic used to say:

"Oh, come on, that's nothing more than a political pamphlet. He hasn't got a clue about economy. He's a charlatan, not an economist. Somebody gave him a load of data from the National Bank and Finance Ministry and he made hogwash out of it, not a book. Professionally speaking, it is worth nothing".

Avramovic had a poor opinion of the Djukanovic's authorities in Montenegro as well. He was very much opposed to their plan for eliminating the dinar as the official currency and accepting the euro as the Montenegrin currency. He believed it was de-

¹³² Teaching Assistant at the Belgrade School of Economics and an opposition leader. After 2000 became governor of the National Bank of Yugoslavia and then Serbian Minister of Finance (2004).

stroying the common financial market of Serbia-Montenegro. He was also convinced that it was not the right solution for implementing monetary discipline and for maintaining a firm rate of exchange. On top of that, the decision was an act of giving up control over public finance:

"If they wanted a currency of their own they should have restored the *perper*¹³³. This way they are seeking protection and support through someone else's money. If that's a smart thing to do, other countries would do it too. Montenegrins object to the because decision making takes place in Belgrade, yet they don't mind the euro which is decided on in Brussels. I was a member of the advisory team for monetary reform in Montenegro and I told them everything in advance. I told them that it would not save them from inflation and that the likelihood was of the euro in Montenegro losing value regardless of its exchange rate in the E.U. But what can I say, I was alone. Utter *ignorami* have the main say over there".

Avramovic prepared a proposal for solving the question of Kosovo before the armed clashes began in 1998. His idea was that the only way to preserve Kosovo was to form a loose three-member federation comprising Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo. Nobody else shared his view, but he insisted on it nonetheless. Disregarding soft disapproval voiced by other opposition leaders, Avramovic discussed the idea often with foreign statesmen and diplomats.

He was extremely hurt when one of Milosevic's spokesmen dubbed the opposition leaders "NATO's infantry". The rest of the leaders laughed at the distasteful and stupid remark, but Avramovic was really hurt. He would say every day, more to himself than the rest of us:

"This is how far we have come, to be called NATO's infantry! So we are the NATO infantry! Terrible! Awful! We, the NATO infantry!"

¹³³ The name of the old Montenegrin currency in the 19th century.

* * *

Dragoslav Avramovic's swan song in Serbian politics was a visit of leaders of the "Alliance for Change" to Washington in November 1999, which he led.

His health had seriously failed him by then. He barely made the long journey. First by car from Belgrade to Budapest, then the flight to New York, and waiting at Kennedy Airport to take another flight to Washington.

He mustered all his strength to go through the first two days of the visit and the meetings that followed one another. Old experience taught him to save his energy to be in top form when the most important meeting came. Thus it was.

His speech before Congress was brilliant. Avramovic was inspired, he spoke intelligently and concisely, emphasizing what he knew would have the strongest effect on Americans. Then he answered all questions with equanimity and attention, regardless of whether the question was appropriate or not. His movements, tone, and deportment were completely in keeping with the substance of his speech. He was perfectly focused and in complete control of the situation. He succeeded to win over sympathies of the majority of U.S. Senators and Congressmen and carried the debate in the direction that he had set beforehand.

He was just as convincing in talks with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, apart from behaving as an old-fashioned gentleman. Avramovic clearly knew his manners on every occasion. The only question was whether he really wanted to give all of himself and whether his physique allowed him. When both conditions were met, Avramovic could open every door on earth, no matter how many times it was locked. He was far and above any other Serbian politician.

Unfortunately, his body could not hold out until the end of the visit. On the third day of our visit, Avramovic had to stay in his hotel room. The other leaders of the Alliance for Change took off where he left off, but to be honest, most of the work was already done, completed in the best way possible.

Many people in Serbia fake being Westerners, yet they are not. The only Westerner who pretended not to be one was Dragoslav Avramovic.

Avramovic belonged to the West in every respect. Not to any West, but to the Anglo-Saxon West. He was more American than European, though he divided his life equally between the United States and Europe. He matured at a time when the United States was at the height of its fame and reputation. The great victor over Germany and Japan, the selfless defender of innocent victims of the war, torchbearer of freedom and democracy, the country of modern movements and ways of life, the United States was very much in fashion after World War Two. The American spirit caught many young folk all over the world. No wonder that it left such a strong imprint on Avramovic.

His first departure from the country was to Washington. His encounter with the huge country, its might and *grandeur*, made its mark on Avramovic for the rest of his life. The political and economic power of the United States hit Avramovic with a light that shone until his death. Even when he spoke unfavorably of the United States and when he condemned Washington's policy, he respected the United States.

There was something conspiratorial in the way he would begin a discussion on the United States with someone for whom he knew shared that intimate feeling. The old man would not speak before others about it, as if he feared that would betray his Americanism.

Avramovic simply could not forgive the United States for the air strikes in 1999. He understood its reasons, but he simply could not justify them. He felt personally betrayed. It seemed as if he felt that the United States had rejected him individually through the bombardment of Serbia.

He learned the American way of thought, his thinking being succinct and disciplined. He was able to put emotions aside and develop his views objectively, not based on his own wishes. He could be calculating and sober in examining his own position.

He was able to perceive a question with the eyes of his opponent and develop arguments contrary to his own. He formed his views gradually and thoroughly. His every thought was checked a thousand times before presented to others.

He learned from Anglo-Saxons a particular sense of humor, a bit dry and often self-deprecating. This apparent self-mockery actually concealed a sophisticated satire aimed at others. He did not try to be funny at all costs, a common trait with Serbian public figures. His observations and assessments of people and events were not only accurate, they were quite witty.

He must have left for the United States in love with the country already. The years spent there made him an even greater American than he was in the beginning. He was not one of those who live in the United States yet have the worst opinion of it. Avramovic disagreed with many policies of the U.S. government, but genuinely respected and loved the country he chose to have his children grow up in.

* * *

Avramovic's erudition was far above everyone else's in Serbia. The fact that he was a proficient economist was taken as normal. But in many other spheres, he far exceeded most of Serbian political personalities.

He never boasted or imposed his knowledge. On the contrary, he generally posed as a man of the people who relied on common sense. He used his knowledge as much as necessary; no more, no less.

There was a lot of order and steadiness in his education. The old-fashioned and comprehensive high school education he acquired before the war was a solid basis for a debate on any topic. Added to this was his knowledge of economics and social sciences in general, and his vast experience in life. Though he was never a professor, there was something of a professor in him; so many people called him that.

Avramovic was not an easy collocutor. He did not stand opposition and contradictions. Much less for a debate about his opinion. He would either have his opinion accepted uncondition-

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ally or flatly rejected. He did not make concessions or adjustments. As the English would say: "Take it or leave it".

He had no patience for Serbian squabbling and outwitting. He hated long meetings in which people would speak forever and few decisions were made.

Besides, he adored to be in charge. He would seat himself at the head of the table and speak either first or last. He was vain and self-confident. He appeared conceited to many people, even disagreeable at times. He had a habit of making it clear which collocutors he respected and those he did not consider as his equals.

That particular attribute earned him a few more hidden enemies than he would have had otherwise. Serbian elite is often reluctant to admit anyone's intellectual superiority. Especially when it is so obvious.

* * *

Dragoslav Avramovic possessed an indigenous respect for the government and the authorities. As if he was intimidated by them, maybe a little fearful. Evidently, he had seen many people suffer after overtly opposing the authorities and learned precious lessons from it. His nature was not violent or rebellious.

He was in awe of Milosevic throughout. The power that Milosevic had was in Avramovic's opinion an undisputed authority.

He believed Milosevic should be ousted from politics because he had gone too far, because he was on the wrong course, because his policies were detrimental to the interests of the people. But he also believed that Milosevic's ouster should be carried out painlessly and with dignity, as suited Milosevic's personality and status. Unlike others who thought only ill of Milosevic and nothing good, Avramovic would always try to find explanations for his actions. He reproved him in a particularly considerate manner, aware that he was speaking of the President.

In Avramovic's view of Serbia, the importance of a politician depended on the extent of his power. Naturally, this did not apply to the United States and Americans, or for Europe and Europeans. But in Serbia, which lacked a tradition in democracy, the individual power of an autocrat was the key to successful policy.

Milan St. Protic

Here, in Serbia, there should be a harmony between the leader and his people. The autocrat was obligated to heed the interests of the people, and people should support and follow its leader. Milosevic's calculations had gone wrong, and he lost his helm and course. In Avramovic's opinion, that was Milosevic's biggest fault and the only reason for his ouster.

Milosevic had to go because it was necessary, not because it was just.

He respected other people in Serbia based on the real power they had, in government and in opposition. His good opinion of Djindjic was of the same core as his good opinion of Milosevic. The power that Milosevic held in Serbia was the kind that Djindjic held in opposition.

* * *

Putting everything together, Avramovic was an exceptional figure in Serbia's political sky. His character, beliefs, and work were unusual and different. He was truly unique.

His individuality in success as well as defeat earned him a distinct place among hundreds of colorless figures who crossed the public stage in Serbia, leaving barely a trace.