

International Centre for Minority Studies
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**SERBIA – ONE YEAR AFTER NATO AIR-RAIDS:
THE FRUSTRATION AND ISOLATION
OF A EUROPEAN NATION**

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I. Methodology of the research:

The team consisted of five scholars with a different approach to the topic and to the respondents, with their own methodology and tools, i.e. a sociologist - specialist in political science, a specialist in Slavonic studies, a historian -specialist in Balkan studies, a philosopher and a historian - anthropologist.

The research was carried out from May 24th till May 30th and it is the fourth stage of an interdisciplinary fieldwork dedicated to the fate and prospects of Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania and Serbia after the end of NATO air raids. The team members worked individually, in scattered groups, among different social and age groups. During this fourth stage the scholars applied again the method of the anthropologic discussions, as well as a system of questions drawn for semi-standardized sociological interviews and surveys regardless of their scientific profile. Data from sociological surveys, research and journalistic publications were additionally analyzed.

A new and sophisticated methodology was adopted which is implemented by an interdisciplinary team making use of the tools and knowledge of several social sciences. The French academic journal *Ethnologie française*, XXX, 2000, 3, when publishing the fieldwork records from the first stage, in an editorial note introduced a precise definition of the new methods as “urgent anthropology”.

The aim was to make a snapshot of the socio-political situation in Serbia and of the psychological state of the Serbs, i.e. the mass attitudes, expectations and hopes among the population in Serbia and among the Serb and Roma refugees from Kosovo one year after the end of NATO air raids.

The stereotypes and social attitudes in Serbia and among the Serb refugees toward Western Europe, the USA and the Balkan neighbours were studied, as well as the attitudes and reactions against the recent wars in Croatia and Bosnia, and the events in Kosovo, and the Albanians.

The team was interested in the Serbs’ assessment of the internal political life in the country, of the economy and culture, their attitude towards the governing bodies and the opposition.

The surveys were carried out in Belgrade and the neighbouring settlements, Novi Sad and some surrounding settlements, Uzhitse, Pozhega and some towns in Southeastern Serbia.

The respondents were over 40 persons, men and women between the age of 20 and 65. The representatives of the intellectual élite predominated among the social groups, i.e. – scholars, writers, translators, journalists and students. There were also workers from enterprises, people from the sphere of services and trade, and peasants.

II. Psychological characteristics of the Serbs and the Serbian refugees from Kosovo:

Serbian society as a whole and the separate individual in Serbia have experienced a severe trauma and they are in a state of deep frustration by the events of the last 10-15 years. The dissolution of the Yugoslav federation, the wars that followed and the loss of territory and population, the big number of refugees from Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo (over 1 million people), which additionally aggravate the collapsing economic and social system in Serbia, have exhausted the Serbian vitality. People are tired, desperate and pessimistic as regards their future as a nation and as individuals.

All respondents, regardless of sex, age and social status are in a dead-lock, they are economically dependent and vulnerable, and they are afraid. Their fears are of the most wide spectrum, i.e. economic and social uncertainty, fear for their biological survival because of the collapse of the health system and the lack of medicines, fear of environmental pollution and radiation after the air raids, fear of civil war, fear of political repressions, fear of isolation. Most often respondents gave a brief answer to the question about the hopes and the future prospects of the Serbs and the Serbian state: "There are no prospects. The social catastrophe is a lasting thing. We, the Serbs are slowly, painfully and continuously pining away. Step by step we are sinking to the bottom, but we all know that there is no bottom..." A respondent historian summarizes: "Some say that the people cannot sink. This is an illusion. History is full of the tombs of peoples who had become extinct. It is quite natural that there is resignation and apathy."

The Intellectuals:

The intellectuals, dissidents and liberal circles in particular, have been making lately an in-depth analysis of everything that has happened: in Bosnia, in Croatia, in Kosovo. They have been analyzing the frightening dimensions and parameters of the consequences, of the possible scenarios for the future. Their analyses are exact, precise, as a laboratory dissection where they are absolutely cruel in their evaluations of themselves and their own guilts as Serbian elite, as well as of the Serbian people as a whole. A respondent professor in history went even further saying that the situation in Serbia is extremely heuristic for the scholars: "We are a research El Dorado. There are so many non-standard situations for the anthropologist, the sociologist, and the historian on such a small territory." Sometimes the critical approach towards the national blunders borders on the tragic: "We are in the situation of the Germans. There are always two books on my bedside table which I read over and over again, i.e. "Psychology of the Masses" by G. Lebon and "Letters to the German Friend" by Herman Broch. "Each of us should reconsider what has happened and assume responsibility" – these are the words of a professor in sociology. And yet more: "We have turned into a consumers' and ragamuffins' state – the Mafioso structures are on the top, below is the ragamuffin-middle class, ragamuffin-workers and ragamuffin-intelligentsia..."

The nationalistic moods among the intellectuals are in a painful crisis. The fact that it was namely from their circles, i.e. the Academy of Sciences, the Union of Writers, the media, that nationalism had emerged and the whole social space had been irradiated with it, creates a sense of guilt and great misfortune. According to the respondents sociologists the root of the problems in Serbian society during the past 10-15 years is the fact that they had been immured in collective identity. The sense of guilt in the intellectual élite is based on the fact that, along with the politicians and the common people, they also participated in the collective identity which, in principle, is not typical of the élite.

The pathos towards the Kosovo problem has completely died away and people realize the total loss of the Serbian positions in the province. They are aware of the culprits for the ignition and escalation of the Kosovo crisis. Since part of the intellectuals have euphorically participated in the propaganda machine on both sides, the regime and the opposition, which is equally nationalistic, are debating now with difficulty and displeasure the "Kosovo" issue. A respondent scholar who is a dissident and has resisted the nationalistic euphoria said, "I don't feel like speaking on this topic because we did not resist sufficiently, we were afraid, we kept silent and the present situation is a collapse of our state dignity".

Surprisingly reserved is the attitude of the élite toward the refugees. The humanitarian aspect of this issue has been recognized in principle though indifferently, and the negative effects of the refugees' presence are analyzed. Only those scholars who have devoted themselves to studying the refugees – their demographic structure, behaviour, social activity and adaptability, mental level, etc. – have closely followed the tragedy and they feel partial to the fate and suffering of their compatriots. As a whole, the élite recognizes the fact that there are almost no top intellectuals among the refugees, who could have a positive effect on the social processes in

Serbia, as well as in the Serbian intellectual circles, thereby exhausting the interest in them. A writer dissident told us that the Serbian refugees from Kosovo would create additional tension: "They have settled along the border with Kosovo and there they will always be a potential initiator and instigator of the Serbian strivings towards Kosovo. One such example is the town of Kursumlija that had ten thousand inhabitants; now it has in addition 20 thousand refugees from Kosovo".

The comments about the Serbs who have remained in their native places in Kosovo are exceptionally restrained. There exists a tacit opinion among the intellectuals that these are fanatics, who are the bearers of the worst Serbian nationalism and that they are the perpetrators of the all-Serbian misfortunes and falls. Among the official circles, however, the version is that the Kosovo Serbs who fight legally for the rights of the Serbs in Kosovo by cooperating with the European institutions, are traitors.

The attitude to the Albanians is calm and free of hatred or a superiority complex. The evaluations of them are surprisingly tolerant: "Some of the good investigators of Kosovo history and the Albanians during the Ottoman period belong to the Albanian colleagues. They are talented scholars", a respondent historian said. A Serbian writer and publisher: "According to me the Albanians are notable for their extreme vitality. Even from a biological point of view, they are probably the most vital nation in Europe – in terms of population reproduction and hardly curbed aggressiveness. We, who are around them, are, to a great extent, worn out nations. That's why I think that they'll continue in quite a natural way to implant themselves into Kosovo and will make meaningless the mytho-maniacal strivings of our national-socialists towards this province. Given the historical processes, this province has been a historical memory for us for a long time already; as a reality - it is Albanian." A professor in philosophy, publisher of an independent journal: "The Serbia problem lies in the fact that the Albanian intellectual and political élite is in Kosovo or is of Kosovo origin. It is natural for the Albanian national revolution to get centered around this Kosovo élite". Question: "Your wording was quite clearly - you spoke of *Albanian national revolution*, but what are its immediate objectives?" Answer: "With us, in the Balkans, national revolutions have always aimed at national liberation and national unification. With the Albanians these objectives have been distorted and the *Albanian national revolution* demands an independent ethnically cleansed state."

People from the small towns and the villages:

A big part of the respondents intellectuals are inclined to summarize that the prevailing part of the Serbs has not realized yet what happened, they have not understood the dimensions of the crisis and the isolation, they cannot get rid of some myths, illusions nor of the national arrogance. It is obvious that now the Serbian élite is focused more on itself, it has become estranged, because our interviews showed an exceptional maturity and the sadness of the bitter realism which we witnessed among the prevailing part of the people in the villages and small towns, as well as among the common people of Belgrade. We heard some of the most precise evaluations about the sobering up of the Serbian nation, about the consequences of the failure of the Great Serbia project mainly from the common people, from Serbs who had been forced to be at war, who bore the whole burden of the crisis and who, regardless of the quite gloomy future perspective, cherish the yet unrealized hope for the survival of the Serbian nation, though in a more distant perspective. The latest sociological surveys confirm the statement that people reflect soberly, pragmatically though depressively. The process of getting rid of the tangles of collective identity and returning to the individual and personal existence, thinking and responsibility, is visible.

Quite obvious is the change that has occurred in the Serbs' mentality, in their emotional and rational world. These are not superficial changes but sweeping changes which affect the foundations of the personality, the community and the nation. It would be quite wrong to continue with the old perception of the Serbs on the basis of old stereotypes and characteristics that were adequate a few years ago. Serbs stare profoundly at themselves, at their cultural and historical experience, at their own national psychology, they examine and analyse, each one

individually and from a different angle the sufferings during the past 10 years, they part with illusions and myths and they remember with deep nostalgia the Yugoslav Federation.

The process of re-appraising themselves and of maturing is still in its initial stage, but there are already some tangible results. There is not even a trace of national haughtiness among the prevailing part of the respondents and one can clearly feel a sense of guilt and shame among not a small part of the respondents. Not infrequently did people speculate on the brutalities committed, on the dark layers, which war can unlock in each person. A respondent, a young and educated man, said, "I grew up in a small provincial town. When they mobilized us, I hid myself but my friends went to war. I have always thought that I knew them as I knew myself and I could not believe that they had killed whole families, but this was a fact. Now I think that I deserted not because I had fears for myself but because I was afraid of myself. I am terrified at the thought that if I had gone to the front I would have turned into a killer too. I am not sure of myself anymore..."

It is amazing that there are no xenophobic attitudes towards the Albanians among the common people, there is not any sense of hatred and seeking revenge. In many cases, the questions that we put as Bulgarian scholars were filled with more prejudice than the answers we got. There are about 200 thousand Albanians in Belgrade who are working and living there without being troubled by anyone. A respondent from the village of Lestani has a job in a company in the capital where 100 Albanian workers from Kosovo are working: "It's not fair, because my colleagues have jobs, they get their salaries and they can travel freely to their relatives in Kosovo, while no Serb can set foot there, they have no idea whether their relatives are alive or not. The relatives of the Albanians from Kosovo also come here - for medical treatment, for pensions, for some documents - all this without any problems." A respondent Serb, refugee from Prizren, said, "I understand what you expect to hear - bad words against the Albanians, accusations of violence. I cannot lie and that is why you will not hear such evaluations. We lived very well and we helped each other even when NATO was bombing. We were brought up in one and the same way as regards the most important things- they are conservative and patriarchal, so are we. The criminal detachments of the Albanians from Albania were those who resorted to violence against us and drove us away from our homes - we are close to the border, they invaded us and pillaged. When KFOR started settling and we started fleeing, our neighbours wept. Not long ago they sent us a video-tape of how we fled from our homes - Albanian friends were filming with a camera so that we had documents about the evil done." Another refugee added: "They have bent them too, because the refugees who came here two or three months ago say that the Albanian neighbours are afraid to help the Serbs anymore. They fear their own people..." Some respondents told us a dramatic story of an Albanian from a Prizren village who took care of two old disabled Serbs who had not managed to escape. In the course of almost six months he looked after them, he brought them food, but the social attitude towards him got worse and worse. One day he told the old persons that he could not look after them any more and in order to make them flee he threatened them with his weapon. The two old persons managed somehow to run away, they hid and at last they reached the Serbian border where they died of exhaustion and fright. There are plenty of such stories because the war and the dramatic events have laid the beginnings of a new history, new folklore and new mythology.

For years on end the Serbs have got used to compare themselves to the Balkan neighbours with a sense of superiority, irony and disregard for the others. Quite deliberately they have always compared themselves with their main rival - the Bulgarians. The only war, which the Serbs lost in the modern history is the Serbo-Bulgarian War in 1885, which even to this day, has been reflected but in one sentence only in the Serbian history textbooks and the national memory is obligingly trying to forget this fact. Until recently, the Serbs' favorite juxtaposing cliches were: "Serbs are heroes, Bulgarians are slaves", "We are easy-going and Bohemians while Bulgarians are surly fellows, stingy and philistines", "Bulgarians know how to plough and dig and we know how to fight and drink", etc. Now they probe into the Bulgarian experience from the past, into

the losses suffered by the Bulgarians, as well as into what has been achieved for the past years. They already understand the reasons for the Bulgarian resignation with the territorial losses, the lack of irredentism and chauvinistic claims, they understand the lack of national self-confidence amidst Bulgarians, which often verges on national nihilism. Much more impartial and sympathetic is their evaluation of some historical, political and regional events, which they previously treated with indifference or a sense of superiority.

Our team, deeply disappointed after having participated in several feeble demonstrations and meetings of the students from *Otpor*, as well as of the united opposition, which was alleged to change Serbia, had some discussions with the demonstrators: To our question, "Why is the anti-governmental demonstration so feeble" we got the following answers: "I am ashamed to be a Serb, I'll call myself Montenegrin now, at any rate they live as free people", "Everybody is afraid, the opposition leaders most of all, they fear Milosevic's killers", "We do not have any opposition, we have been listening to this stuff and nonsense for years. You better tell us how you, the Bulgarians struggled. Come and help us, bring more reinforcements because we are very weak..." A retort from our team: "How come? You, the Serbs were the heroes, weren't you, and we, the Bulgarians were slaves?" An answer from a group of respondents – economists and businessmen who work in a big private enterprise: "This is nonsense, this is part of the myths. We, the Serbs, we are not heroes at all, we are simply cuckoos (in the sense of fools). If we escape from the myth, the truth is that we, the Serbs, start as a herd when the chieftain, the king, or the tyrant shows us the enemy and tells us to go fight and die. And we, the Serbs, go, fight and die without asking ourselves "why?" But when we have to start alone, from below, we, in order to fight for our freedom, for ourselves, we are frightened, we don't know how, we are not in a position to do it." "You, Bulgarians are sly, when they send you to death, you think first of all whether it is worth dying!" Another respondent: "We are patient like animals, that is why it will be difficult to introduce democratic changes in Serbia". A retort from our team: "It is known that we, the Bulgarians, are the most patient people in the Balkans". A reply with laughter from a group of respondents: "These are false stereotypes, we, the Serbs are much more patient than you are. Your patience, when it wears out – you become dangerous, you have it your own way. You see, we even don't have tenacity".

A respondent from the village of Umka, a tradesman, 32 years old, diplomaed engineer. He fought in Croatia and when they mobilized him to go to Kosovo he deserted: "Such is our nation, people are not to blame, they suffer and they do what they are told to do. They sent us there (in Croatia), and every day they brought killed and wounded people. I was a radio operator, I was not on the front line and that is why I survived. We did not understand why we were there. We spoke in between, we asked ourselves and most of us found it wrong that we were there shooting. We said it was sheer nonsense to die just to change the people on one territory with other people. Chauvinism is something very bad". Question: "How are you living now, what is lacking?". Answer: "We are lacking liberty, traveling, the world. We are short of money. We are short of everything. The world has isolated us and is punishing us but they do not realize that people now have become quite as blind, as horses with blinkers, because they are sort of imprisoned. This is a big mistake". Question: "Who is guilty for what has happened?" Answer: "It is true that power is in the hands of one man and his close associates – an absolutist. Like Tito, but Tito was clever, good-hearted, taking care of the people. In fact, the truth is that we all are guilty – the politicians, the people, the external forces. I am guilty too, as well as my neighbour and all the Serbs. I came to hate politics for ever. After I returned from the war I stopped reading newspapers, watching TV, I don't want to know anything – I don't know who is ruling our country, who's ruling Bulgaria, Russia. I know nothing and I don't care." Question: "There will be a big rally tomorrow in Belgrade, it can change things in Serbia, are you coming?". Answer: "No use going to rallies. If I go, they'll break my head with a truncheon at the worst, and I want to work, I am ready to change myself, I am ready to work a lot but I do not

want to be at war and to become a mainstay of any politician – a new one will come and steal for himself”.

The refugees:

The Kosovo refugees who are now on the territory of Serbia and Monte Negro are officially called “*internally displaced*”. They do not have an acknowledged status of refugees and this additionally aggravates their social status.

According to approximate data the number of refugees is the following: from Kraina – 600 thousand people, from Bosnia – 150 thousand people and from Kosovo – about 250 thousand people.

In Serbia, one can outline quite clearly the differentiation among the refugees from Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo. There is one group of settlers who have arrived in the metropolis with “sackfuls of money”. Undoubtedly, they are those criminals who have enriched themselves at the expense of the plundering during the military operations, i.e. marauders, participants in punitive detachments, criminals, traffickers, etc. They have settled in villages, they have built big houses with yards, gardens and all possible extras, they have started their own business for laundering the military profits. Imperceptibly and quietly they are trying to merge with the local residents. In some villages close to Belgrade local people have become less in number than the families of these new settlers.

Such villages are very difficult for the researcher because people are reticent, inaccessible and they hardly confide their secrets. Most of the retail shops in these villages are in the hands of the new settlers and their families, e.g. a hairdresser’s – owned by a local woman who married a refugee from Bosnia; a supermarket – by a family of refugees from Bosnia, a coffee shop – by refugees from Kosovo, etc. Local people know, or rather they guess the origin of the wealth but they speak about this in a low voice, furtively looking around. These new settlers with unlimited possibilities, state that in their opinion, local people have also enriched themselves out of the wars: “We all are tarred with the same brush, let’s not pick holes!”

The villages, where rich refugees have settled, have not been accidentally chosen – usually the natives are also well off, they look back to the old times with yugo-nostalgia, they are ill disposed towards America and NATO. They accept Bulgarians with reserve but not with a sense of superiority. In the course of our conversations they became more friendly and started asking in order to compare the standards in both countries and the hardships which both nations, Bulgarians and Serbs, are passing throughout. Very often, the respondents’ opening up started with the following words: “We know that you, Bulgarians, were against NATO air raids. We are grateful for your sympathy, one cannot forget such a gesture. Your politicians are just as dull and criminal as ours – let them steal and finish the people” or “We watched carefully on TV the demonstrations in Bulgaria against NATO – this was very important for us because we were scared, the bombs were falling quite close, we endured great stress. The Bulgarians’ support was an important solace, namely that someone was thinking about us, that we were not alone.”

A small refugee camp with Serbs from Kosovo is located in a similar village. The hostility of the local people and the new rich settlers towards the refugees is striking. They have isolated themselves from the camp, they do not offer any help and do not allow their children to communicate with the refugee children. People in the camp rely on the help of a non-governmental organization from Belgrade, on the Red Cross and the monks from the neighbouring monastery, who visit them every day and supply them with provisions from the monastery lands. This attempt to marginalize the refugees and keep them aside is due, according to our observations, to guilty conscience and fear. It is in the refugee camps that you can find the real tragic victims of the war. The new settlers and the nouveau riches from the local population are those who made the most of the war. It is impossible to establish contacts and reconciliation among these people.

It is namely in the camps or in some miserable ghettos that thousands of refugees from Kosovo, Serbs and Roma, all of them in a tragic state and in shock depression, are living, neglected by all

– not only by the official authorities and Milosevic but by the international humanitarian organizations as well. This state of depression and dead-lock has alarming dimensions among the Serbian refugees of all ages. States of neurosis can be noticed among the youngest children as well as among the oldest people. The middle generation is exerting painful efforts to provide for their families the minimum for biological survival, trying to find opportunities for some readaptation. Young people between the age of 16 and 20 are in the worst psychological state. Some of them sit for examinations not to lose the academic year. They are overwhelmed with the isolation and the lack of any prospects. After having stayed for one year in the camps, their depression is on the brink of degenerating into profound distress and aggression – without a clear addressee for the time being. They do not want to go back to Kosovo, nor are they willing to stay in Yugoslavia – what they want is to get far away from the Balkans.

The Serbian refugees, who are innocent victims in the Kosovo war (the culprits have long since created their own prosperity), have one will and only one hope, since they are not guilty for what has happened, i.e. *to go back to their native places and their homes in Kosovo*. Their nostalgia and willingness to return are so strong that they are ready to be settled not even in their own homes if they are already occupied by the Albanians, but to be close to their homeland at least. They rely on the international community for their safety. They hate Milosevic and the ruling circles in Serbia for all they have done to them, for the sad plight they have been in for an year now.

The version that they had coexisted very well with their Albanian neighbours was repeated and verified over and over again. Terrorists from Albania have forbidden the Albanians from Kosovo to communicate with their neighbour Serbs. The same terroristic troops, which came from across the border, set the Serbian houses on fire (this terrorism grew particularly after 1998) and punished those Albanians who were labelled as collaborators of the Serbian regime.

The theme about Albanians crossing the frontier from Albania is a recurrent one. Respondents from the Citizens' Society in Prizren and the environs maintained that according to their knowledge, after the flight of Serbs and Roma from Prizren, the town grew up to 360 thousand inhabitants. They were 180 thousand before. According to them, most of the new settlers came from Albania. They gave another example with the almost twice as large number of citizens in Pristina.

Respondents from a small refugee camp in Zemun – 70 persons from Pristina, Suva reka, Gniljane and Prizren: “Now we are trying to find an answer to the question ‘what happened’, because we lived together very well. Obviously, we were honest in our living together but they, the Albanians, were not. We would like to stay together, to continue living as before, but no one is asking us. People are not guilty, guilty are our politicians and the Albanian politicians, NATO too”. A respondent – a teacher for 23 years in a village entirely populated by Albanians: “I felt all of a sudden the deterioration of relations because the village children and the parents stopped greeting me. It was very oppressing. In 1992-1993 the Elders suddenly and tacitly ordered the young Albanians, who had only 2 children, to give immediately birth to a third and fourth child. They imposed it severely, as an ultimatum – many of the young women had to drop their studies or their good jobs in order to obey”. Another respondent added: “They obey according to the patriarchal tradition, so it is no surprise that alienation set in between us somehow all of a sudden – probably this was the Elders' decision”.

A respondent says, “I grew up in a village with mixed population. Since childhood we have raised cattle together, we have studied, played football, wooed the lasses all together. We had the first cigarettes and sips of brandy in secret also together. Everything together. Neither we nor they believed that NATO could be so unjust and that they would bomb. It was dreadful for all, us and them. You see, it is only for one year that I have been talking like this – we - they, us - them. It seems I am not the same person, we have gone out of our senses. There are no prospects, madam!” The same respondent, after we informed him that we were coming from Kosovo, started asking us feverishly about land: “Is it tilled, is it under crop, what exactly is the crop,

what has grown up...?” Our answer that the land has not been touched, that no one was cultivating it now in Kosovo induced strong excitement, sadness and tears among the refugees from the villages.

In this camp we heard a slightly different version about the guilt of the Albanians who came from Albania: “There was a period when the Albanians escaped from the communist regime in Albania and they were saying that terror was reigning there. The state gave them land, houses, shelter. Thus they gained strength and then they claimed the throne...” A respondent middle aged woman added: “They lived as Lords – they had more money than us, they had jobs, they got foreign currency from their relatives living abroad...”

There exist strong anti-American feelings among the refugees. “Americans are to blame for everything, they used the Albanians for some goals of theirs, but nobody knows what exactly these goals are”, “We shall be on their conscience, if they have any – they blamed us that we killed the Albanians, but we have always lived together”, “They equipped the terrorists and traffickers whom we all tried to keep clear of, both we and the Albanians. Somewhere in the woods, the terrorists and Milosevic policemen were shooting at each other but we, down in the villages, we lived peacefully and helped each other”.

They are looking at Europe and the international police contingents with hope and confidence. They hope that soon they will be offered safety guarantees to go back to Kosovo. Living in exile and cast out by everybody they are at the end of their tether. It is hardly likely for them to believe that they will not come back. They all dream of their houses, the waters, the springs, the trees – a behaviour typical of painful nostalgia.

The Roma refugees have settled mainly in the existing ghettos in and out of town. Some of them found relatives and were sheltered in their dirty bidon villas, others are paying rent for miserable cardboard and wooden constructions in the ghettos. Their state is wretched. They are forced to sell off the scanty aids, which they get through The Red Cross and the Serbian Orthodox Church in order to pay their rent and buy food for their children. They have been pushed in the most miserable places polluted with chemical and solid waste where the stench, the noxious dust, the rats and the lack of sewerage and water, expose the children’s survival to a permanent risk (for example the ghetto under the bridge in Pancevo). Authorities are not interested in Gypsies. There are much harder problems and society and the institutions pay absolutely no attention to the local Roma and the refugee Roma.

Some of the Roma told us that the reason to escape, to leave houses, gardens and sizable property, was because the UCK partisans, and in our opinion, probably the armed gangs from Albania, made them buy their children off at DEM1000 to DEM 3000 per child. Otherwise they threatened to kill the Roma children. To the question: “Did they threaten you or did you see it with your eyes?” some respondents answered that they saw how they shot their neighbour’s child after the parents refused to pay the ransom but most of them said that they had heard stories from their relatives, and without hesitating they immediately left their houses to save their children without taking anything with them. They are frightened to the extreme. Respondents from Uroshevats, Gracanitsa and the villages around Prizren, said that UCK people killed ruthlessly all the Roma, they destroyed their houses, and then they fled en masse in June 1999. Soldiers from KFOR encouraged them: “Run, run and save yourselves”, but no one made an attempt to defend them. They are convinced that their houses have already been burnt down and razed to the ground.

A Roma respondent from Sarbitsa said, “We lived very well, we were a well-off clan and we were on good terms with both Serbs and *Shiptars*. But somehow, suddenly, there was something wrong with the *Shiptars*, quite suddenly, first they stopped greeting us. They did not say “good morning” in the street. And then, after they drove us away, they started plundering. We are nine families and we left seven big houses”. At present, according to OSCE expert evaluations there is not a single resident of Roma origin in Sarbitsa.

A Roma refugee from Vucitran: “I had to flee with my family quite unexpectedly, we took nothing with us, it was a matter of survival. We left a big and luxurious two-storey house. There was something wrong with the *Shiptars* and we felt that they wanted to live alone. They don't want anyone else. But later, when we came here, to Pancevo, we realized that they wanted to make a state of their own. It is not possible to go back”.

Unlike the Serb refugees, the Roma do not believe in the support and protection of the European forces. All Roma respondents are unanimous: “We cannot go back. If only our army (i.e. the Serbian) and our police come back we, only then could we also return. Otherwise - no!”

As we have heard the most contradictory evaluations about the state and behaviour of the Roma who identify themselves as ‘Egyptians’ (by the way, there are such people in Bulgaria as well under the name *agüpts* we put the following question: “We have heard that there are people among you who call themselves ‘Egyptians’. Are they Roma, did they escape from the *Shiptars* along with you?”. Answer: “The Egyptians have always been with the *Shiptars*, they always pretended to be Shiptars, too. They have never acknowledged to be Roma or Gypsies. They maltreated the Roma, the Serbs and the *Gorantsi* together with the *Shiptars*. They might have chased them now too, once you ask, but it serves them right.”

III. The political processes in Serbia – retrospection and a snapshot in June 2000

Retrospective background:

The disintegration processes in the Yugoslav Federation started apparently after 1985 when the federation lost its strategic role of a buffer between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Nationalistic ideology and propaganda started to develop in each of the federative state units, anticipating the future distribution of the federative resources. These processes naturally reflected on the Yugoslav Communist Party, which split after the 14th Congress, with the Slovenian communist party leaving first, followed by the Croatian communist party. Each of the republican parties started activities for the establishment of an independent political and economic foundation. This process was described by a respondent, a famous opposition politician and scholar, with a sense of humour in the following way: “Suddenly each national communist party was given the incredible opportunity to have its own state and they (i.e. the communist leaders) made it in the shortest time”.

Activation of the nationalistic propaganda in each of the republics was the most direct lever to fulfil this scheme. When in the beginning of the 90s changes became more radical, the leaders of the communist parties from the six republics carried out a series of meetings in order to find a common and acceptable solution for stopping the disintegration processes or for their finalization. Future problems had already been outlined: in fact, there are no ethnically clean republics. The Serbs have been scattered everywhere and in the largest number and that is why the collapse of Yugoslavia would turn into a big problem. The Serbs' native places are everywhere in the six republics and in the autonomous provinces, thousands and thousands are the intermarriages, and according to our respondent sociologists, 3 million persons identified themselves as Yugoslavs at that time.

During the Autumn of 1991 a meeting of parliamentary delegations from all republics was held in Sarajevo. Each delegation presented its vision for solving the crisis: the Slovenes proposed the preservation of the monetary union; the Croatians preferred the transformation of the federation into a confederation; the Bosnians and Macedonians preferred the three-tier federation variant, the Serbs and Montenegrins insisted on keeping the centralized federation.

According to our respondents, politicians and political analysts, Milosevic's crime is that when he understood about the forthcoming break up of the federation he tried to forcibly solve the problem. Most of the military and economic resources of the federation were in the hands of the Serbs and Milosevic, which reassured him that he was in a position to include the territories populated by Serbs by extending Serbia borders at the expense of the republics that were breaking away.

Of course, one can see here the disunited and egoistic policy of the West European countries and the USA towards Yugoslavia's dissolution. Milosevic relied on the neutrality of the West and Russia but it turned out that each country had its own position and its own interest supporting the dissolution or against it, as well as in the possible division of territories

Another conflict zone was outlined which accompanied Yugoslavia dissolution, i.e. the use of the principle of sovereignty. It was again the opposition politician, our respondent with the sense of humour, who made the following statement, "We have come to a sort of a theatre of the absurd, to something like a delirium for sovereignty!" In order to illustrate the problem, the same respondent gave an example with the village of Kievo in the Republic of Croatia: "In 1991 Croatia declared that it did not recognize the sovereignty of Yugoslavia but only the Croatian sovereignty. The Serbs in Kraina declared themselves against Croatia's sovereignty and recognized the Kraina sovereignty. There is a Croatian village in Kraina, named Kievo, which denounced Kraina sovereignty and recognized Kievo sovereignty only. A Serb was living in the village of Kievo who hoisted the flag in his yard and declared: I am a Serb and I have my own sovereignty, so I do not recognize Kievo sovereignty!" This story would be a wonderful joke if it were not an illustration of a national catastrophe, or rather the catastrophes of several nations. In what way should the principle of sovereignty be applied by the separate republics and in the regions with ethnically mixed population? In the concrete example of Yugoslavia the principle of sovereignty led to absurdity, to cruelties and to the absolute fragmentation of society.

A respondent political analyst added to the theme of the break-up of Yugoslavia and the obsession with sovereignty: "The point of intersection of two political and geopolitical mistakes has turned into a historical tragedy, i.e. the mistake of the international community embraced the aggression and chauvinism of the national politicians and all this happened against the background of immature civil societies, of people who were not in a position to prevent the deadly venturesome policy".

It is of particular importance how the international community will approach the definition of the minority communities status. Former activities have shown that a different approach was applied to the different republics. In Kraina the Serbs were not allowed to obtain an autonomous status, the Serbs in Bosnia succeeded in obtaining the right to cantonization. The issue of Kosovo's status is on the agenda because the Albanians are capable of forcing the international community to bless the formation of a new Albanian state.

One year after the end of NATO's air raids against Yugoslavia public opinion in Serbia is convinced that "the territory of Kosovo has been amputated from Serbia", that "Kosovo is lost", that "Serbs have nothing to do there anymore". It is only the Serb refugees from Kosovo who are willing that Serbian power returns to the province. Respondents are unanimous that now in Kosovo "a vulgar nationalistic Albanian establishment" exists and the depressing point is that "even the most liberal Albanian intellectuals do not say that the Serbian refugees should return to their homes". The opinion of most respondents is that "if the problem with the Serbs in Kosovo is not settled, a deep trauma will remain which will permanently provoke the desire for revenge and it will be a fertile soil for extreme, fascist-like and nationalistic politicians and formations".

According to most respondents-intellectuals the effect of sobering up and of demythologization of public consciousness in Serbia has been achieved after Yugoslavia's break-up, the wars that followed, and the heavy losses. Respondent: "It was extremely difficult for us, the historians in the past, to present objectively history and to convince our compatriots that it was not the Serbs who defeated the Ottoman empire, the Austrian-Hungarian empire, Nazi Germany and finally Stalinist Russia. The great masses of people were convinced that these were historical facts and they would not accept other interpretations." Another respondent - scholar: "End of the over self-confidence, self-satisfaction, end of the partial approach to history and the unrealistic approach to the present day..." The dreams of Great Serbia have remained in the past and its map exists only in the propaganda publications of Sheshel's Serbian radical party. Sheshel's party official documents demanded the extradition of all non-Serbs and an ethnically cleansed Serbia.

Presently, sociological surveys unambiguously show that the majority of Serbs accept “the others” calmly (the other nationalities are accepted by 86% of the Serbs, 4% reject them and 10% give no answer), and in some cases they even show demonstrative tolerance; A respondent from the village of Umka – a saleswoman said, “I am not interested what is the person by faith and ethnic affiliations. I only wish he were clever and thought about people. Let the new ruler be the first Gypsy down the street, provided Milosevic leaves and life returns to normal in the country”. The same woman added, “We have never made any difference among people. One of my daughters-in-law is Croatian, the other is Slovene, we have Bulgarian relatives from Tsaribrod. We have always respected each other and lived well. Politicians have forcibly separated us.”

Now the philosophy of the common people in Serbia is deideologized, demythologized, and reduced to the basic principles of survival. This is life on the brink of survival or, as a respondent professor in philosophy said, “Survival as a life style and philosophy where the real life of the individual and the family is perceived as a greater value than the collective national identification”. According to our team driving the Serbs to the wall can have surprisingly grave consequences. Impoverishment with unclear or hopeless outcomes on a psychological plane not only frustrates but also leads to *anomie*. Social and psychological downfall may have unforeseen consequences.

Economy according to respondents but not according to statistics:

A drastic drop of output has been recorded in Serbia. The regime of sanctions is stifling industry and trade companies. Enterprises are working at 20-30% of their capacity. According to the data of the G-17 economic analysts the direct and indirect losses for Serbia from NATO air raids amount to about 30 billion US dollars. The average monthly salary varies between DEM 70-80, but in most of the enterprises workers get their salaries with a 2-3 month delay. Official unemployment is 30%, but real unemployment exceeds 50%. There are still no visible traces of the social and economic catastrophe, which has its explanation.

First of all, agriculture is functioning flawlessly which, in terms of the prevailing forms of property, has always been private. The production of foodstuffs is well organized and it gluts the market with agricultural produce. Meanwhile, through fixed low prices the state is trying to guarantee the consumption of electricity, thermal energy, and water, as well as of some basic foodstuffs that are in short supply, i.e. vegetable oil, sugar, rice, etc. Actually, the domestic energy prices are so strongly reduced that the respondents, when complaining of impoverishment and their daily problems, never even mention electricity and heating – this is a trifling expense for the family budget.

The free regime that Yugoslavian citizens had for decades to travel and work in Europe and around the world, has secured some foreign currency reserve for the prevailing part of the families in Serbia. Before the war, citizens had over 20 billion dollars savings – though the money has vanished, these reserves still allow the Serbs to live comparatively well and to keep to the possible existence minimum. As it usually happens, there are leaks in the embargo for the state and private Mafia, so that one can find fuel and imported foodstuffs in the country. There is no famine, though people fear famine dreadfully, but they worry about the great deficit of medicines or about the incredibly high prices of life saving medicines and quite ordinary drugs.

The basic economic resources, which Milosevic’s regime continues to draw out, are the assets that have remained from the Yugoslav federation. According to respondents economists they amount to some dozens of billion of dollars. By the way, a sort of mythology has been created about these significant financial resources. Part of the respondents maintained, “Once Tito received credits from the USA amounting to 100 billion US dollars and he immediately invested part of this capital in different foreign companies and enterprises that are now properties of the ruling circles. Already in the beginning of the 90s the remainder of these funds that was still in Serbia, was exported by the regime to foreign banks or it was invested in enterprises abroad.” Thus, during the embargo period and the wars, the internal and external deficits were balanced

through the foreign assets. Most probably, part of this financial resource was used in “schwartz” (illegal business) and in the black trade in weapons and drugs in particular.

Our question was, “Where does the money, which Milosevic uses to restore the damages from NATO bombings in an economy stifled by the embargo, come from”? Almost every day, the Government is carrying out wide propaganda campaigns on the restoration of bridges, buildings and private houses. This success, which is widely covered by the press and the national electronic media, keeps Milosevic’s prestige and restores the confidence of part of society in the managerial abilities of the regime. Some respondents maintained that during the war, people loyal to Milosevic, imported foreign currency in suitcases and part of it is being used for recovery activities and for subsidizing electricity and heating for household needs. The same is true of the present: “This sly person is stealing not only for himself, he invests in construction, hence winning people...”

The party state firms and enterprises, as well as the private companies of the ruling top and Milosevic’s family, represent an important economic basis for the regime. It sounds paradoxically, but some respondents maintained, “In Serbia it is natural for a member of the supreme leadership of Milosevic’s party or, Mira Markovic’s party to be the director of a big enterprise at the same time”. In this way they exercise absolute control not only over the state enterprises, but over a great part of the private ones, too.

From a psychological point of view a big part of the population feels to be at the social and economic bottom. This is due to the strain and the sense of utter hopelessness rather than to the process of really sinking to the lower depths. Although the Serbs have not experienced any hunger after ten years of war, they feel entirely discouraged with the present situation of the economy. A respondent economist, head of a small enterprise: “Seven or eight years ago I used to pay the workers a salary of DEM 3000. You can judge alone how much I received myself. Now I pay these same workers DEM 30 and I receive DEM 80. This is a sheer misery. After I buy some food for the dog and have two beers with my friends, my salary is gone. But what oppresses me most is the impossibility to travel. In the past my passport was permanently in my pocket and I travelled whenever I felt like it. Now I cannot go anywhere – I have neither money, nor can I get any visa.” A respondent saleswoman in a shop: “Ten or fifteen years ago I used to travel all the time. I visited my relatives in Bulgaria and I really wondered how you were living – poorly, stupidly isolated. And what about Romania – misery and fear. Now look how the map has changed! Now you, Bulgarians, are free while in this country – just misery and fear.”

Some friends of ours with whom we watched the panorama from the Belgrade fortress, down below, where the two big rivers, the Danube and Sava, meet, said: “You are enraptured with the view, aren’t you? One of the most splendid views in Europe. But actually, we have now two dead rivers – merchant ships are not sailing, there is no trade, fishing is dead because the bombs have polluted the waters. These rivers personify life in Belgrade, that is why we can say that we also are dead, marginalized by the whole world.”

Political Processes:

The prolonged embargo proved that it had successfully stifled the economy but was helpless against Milosevic’s regime. The continuation of the isolation is justified neither economically, nor politically. A gesture of solidarity of the European states towards the Serbs could have an extremely positive effect now, when they are looking critically at themselves and feel frustrated and lonely. Each friendly gesture on the part of Bulgaria now will be paid off many times over when building future mutual relations. Bulgaria must make an attempt, through the Bulgarian Red Cross and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, through some NGOs, to help the refugees from Kosovo. As they suffer most of all from lack of medical care and drugs, Bulgaria can make an adequate and equal gesture as it did for the Albanian refugees in the Radusha camp by sending there physicians and medicines. Our conclusion is that isolation and embargo, as well as all international punitive measures are disuniting the Serbian society and it is not in a position to stand united and oppose Milosevic with a clear will.

One of the most negative effects of the isolationist policy is the capsulation in which young generations grow up. At present, the *Otpor* activists represent the generation whose childhood and adolescence passed in a period of wars, nationalistic propaganda and reticence to the world. The new Serbian generation is quite different from the middle-aged generation. To a certain extent, they are not able to debate among themselves and to clarify their platform and ideology. Maybe for this reason, the most accessible thing for them is to borrow from what is undoubtedly positive in the consciousness of each Serb, i.e. the revolutionary activity and the symbols of the antifascist resistance.

There is no mechanism in Serbia to carry out a change in the regime or to change the government from inside. The regime is monolithic, it holds the power solidly and uses a specially established repressive machine. Throughout Belgrade and the province people discuss the fact that Milosevic has accommodated in the barracks near Belgrade about 120 or 150 thousand militiamen, i.e. people who have stained their hands with blood in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo. According to legend he pays them very high salaries, provides them with clothing and feeds them. They are so felonious that they have nothing to lose and defend Milosevic's regime tooth and nail. They are ready to kill at any time. This is the factor that keeps in fear both the opposition and the citizens. Part of our team saw them in action, when for dispersing not more than 30 or 50 students who had blocked the traffic at one of the basic Belgrade junctions, they sent about eight armoured jeeps. While still moving 3 or 4 uniformed persons got off each jeep holding not truncheons but leveled pump-guns. As we were running away together with the students, we came to know from the inside the feeling of fear and were convicted that these people were ready to shoot.

The closing down and the nationalization of the free TV Studio B was also done brutally and violently by the personal paramilitary formations of Voislav Sheshel, who provided them, in his capacity of Vice prime-minister, with State Security documents. The free B2-92 radio was nationalized too, and more than 50 editors and journalists were blacklisted which bans their access to the media. More than 850 *Otpor* activists or adherents of this students' movement were arrested and detained for several hours or even a whole day, and were interrogated.

Otpor is the students' resistance against the further transformation of the regime into a fascist one. Unlike the official united opposition it enjoys a very high social support. Respondents in the province said: "These are our children, our hope is on them. They are clever and educated, they should know how to save us from this suffering!" The tendency is for the students' *Otpor* to gradually turn into a national resistance movement. According to a respondent political analyst, *Otpor* has already turned into something entirely different: "I think, students are only 5% of the numerical strength of the movement. Disappointed members and adherents of the opposition parties and people disappointed with the official and ruling parties are joining it (especially in the province), together with some former members of the paramilitary formations, who are looking for a place where to hide or to be able to give vent to their aggression." We could not find any confirmation to what extent these assertions were true. Most of the respondents whom we asked for confirmation did not deny it but they thought that the ratio was strongly exaggerated and the students were still the basic strength. By the way, Dobriza Cosic is already a member of the students' movement.

Milosevic is using all tools of terror and propaganda to crush the youth movement, which is a certain indicator that at the moment, he is afraid mainly of it. All Belgrade is plastered with big coloured posters which portray a youth in a nazi uniform with the *Otpor* emblem on the peaked cap (an outstretched hand with a clenched fist), and *Madeline jugend* inscriptions. All this has an effect on the more illiterate people because it illustrates the basic thesis of the regime about the enemies of the Serb people – "the external fascists" – the USA and "the internal fascists – the fascist hirelings" – the students' movement and the opposition. Students are ascribed acts of terrorism, even political assassinations. After the assassination of Bosko Perovic, the Minister of education gave orders that the school year be interrupted on May 24th; faculties were closed and students were banned from entering the universities. The murder of Perovic, before being

investigated, was used as a motive for the Combating Terrorism Act, drafted by the Yugoslavian Left, to be submitted to Parliament for discussions.

The united opposition, such as it is at the moment, is not a threat to Milosevic. The leaders have neither realistic, nor topical programmes for democratic changes, nor do they have a clear idea about how to take the country out of the international isolation. Instead, they are wasting days and nights in fruitless discussions about their unification, preparing the scenarios of rallies and demonstrations which are on the wane. The only trump of the opposition (and this is the only thing that clearly demarcates it from the regime) is the will to overcome the policy of isolation, which is suitable and is part of Milosevic's policy. In fact, the sanctions of the international community are in favour of the regime's policy of isolation. The opposition, on its part, fears to demonstrate pro-European attitudes, maybe because it is not aware that such attitudes exist among the people. The opposition leaders put all their eggs in just one basket, that of Russia. These are the legitimate arguments most suited to public opinion – the support of Russia: "Moscow will support us, Moscow will exert pressure on Milosevic". All this does not carry conviction and when one adds the visible enrichment of some of the opposition leaders through their own Mafioso and business structures, one can understand the entire mistrust and despair of the Serbian society that they could ever find an appropriate opposition force to show them a way out of the crisis.

Milosevic, on his part, is probably also aware of his predestination. His regime can exist only in a situation of absolute and unlimited totalitarian opportunities. However, opportunities are absolutely limited and that is why he will have to give in, sooner or later. In the words of a scholar from our team: Serbia is in a vicious circle – impasse for the regime, impasse for the opposition, impasse for the international community, impasse for the ordinary Serb.

IV. Conclusions

Within the already established tradition of our previous fieldwork records we shall not systemize all conclusions that could be drawn on the basis of the information collected. We have focussed on one or two findings, which, according to all members of the team, are urgent in order to gain wide publicity. In this case we shall make only two conclusions:

- The international community is demonstrating a **double standard** as regards the Serb and Roma refugees in Serbia. Our team worked in the Kosovo refugee camps on the territories of Macedonia and Albania and we witnessed the deep concern of the world towards the refugees during the spring and summer of last year. We also witnessed serious concern after the withdrawal of the Serbian army and police from the province so that the refugees could quickly and successfully return to their native places.

The Kosovo refugees who are "internally displaced" in Serbia at the moment, are neglected by all, left without any hope and the financial and moral support. There is no institution which promises them any security guaranties so that they could return to their homes, which is their sincere wish.

- The international policy of sanctions and embargo against **Serbia is not undermining** Milosevic's regime. At this stage this policy is convenient for and synchronizes with his own policy of isolation. The sanctions guarantee an environment where the Mafioso structures are getting richer and richer, and more and more powerful, spreading their influence outside the Serbian borders and former Yugoslavia.

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Translated from Bulgarian by Violeta Angelova