4 SYNERGIES

BLOWING THE WINDS OF CHANGE

When we, a group of young Serbs – living both in Serbia and abroad, proud of both our Serbian origin and our European aspirations – set out to create the Institute 4S, our goal was clear and simple: we wanted change.

We wanted Serbia to move faster, work better and trust more – both itself, its neighbours and the entire European family of nations.

We are not blind and we are not utranches – we know that Serbia lacks much. But we also know Serbs can do much more and are worth more than some – still living in the 1990s black-and-white conflict mindset - would like to portray.

THE PROPOSAL FOR THE FUTURE STATUS OF KOSOVO BY UN ENVOY MARTTI AHTISAARI SETS TWO DANGEROUS, HIDDEN TRAPS FOR DISMEMBERING SERBIA AND STANDS NO CHANCE IN BELGRADE, EVEN WITH A NEW PRO-EUROPEAN GOVERNMENT.

KOSOVO’S PANDORA BOX

One of the most dangerous and unrealistic ideas circulating today in international politics consists of considering the Serbian province of Kosovo as a ‘unique’ case.

MOSCOW’S KOSOVO TAKE (RUSSIA’S INTEREST)

The position of Russia, a UN Security Council and Contact Group member, has become of key importance for the solution on the future status of Kosovo, from the beginning of the negotiation process, Russia holds the position that the UNSC Resolution 1244 and the fulfillment of “standards” are the basis for the settlement. Moscow is in favor of a solution that takes into account the interests of both negotiating parties and argues that the Contact Group should play a role of a mediator assisting to strike the compromise by means of recommendations, but not to impose a decision on one of the parties.

APHOCALYPSE NOW

Serbian Satirical Aphorisms

Did you ever believe a Chinese fortune cookie? Of course not. They are tasteless and their proverbial messages have been so much chewed upon that they’ve long lost any kind of truthful flavor. CUT through time and space, here comes the new fast food prophecy – the Serbian satirical aphorism, postmodern style. Just like a mix of cultures and trends has shaped the delicious, highly calorific Serbian cuisine, so have the political and social circumstances in post-WWII Yugoslavia patch up another kind of fulfilling intellectual aphrodisiac – the one-or-two-liner aphorism, the best embodiment of Serbia’s trademark ironic morale.

EU’S ROLE IN THE KOSOVO COMPROMISE

Washington’s push for some form of independence has been opposed by Moscow’s threat to use a veto in the UN Security Council in order to prevent a one-sided solution, unacceptable to Serbia.

This leaves the European Union – with its four members in the Contact Group (France, Britain, Germany and Italy) and two in the UNSC – in the position to shift the balance either towards “more independence” or towards “more autonomy.”

Although it is the member countries of the Contact Group and the UNSC which are leading the process, Brussels would be wrong to let the solution to the status cause a rift within the EU and let UN mediator Martti Ahtisaari propose a comprehensive plan without its full backing.

THE STATUS OF KOSOVO AS SEEN FROM AN ENCLAVE

We are not hardliners, just normal people living under terrible conditions “only two hours of flight away from the European capitals”, to quote a common phrase from the 1990s wars.

We are trying to integrate, but we don’t want to cut links with Belgrade. We want to cohabitate with the majority Albanians, but not at the price of giving up our identity.

In case of independence, the result will be either a total boycott and isolation of Kosovo Serbs or a mass exodus. Kosovo will become either a ghastly apartheid or a monstrous monolithic state in the heart of Europe, a true ‘precedent’ in modern politics.

In-Press

Institute 4S
Symbol of Serbian Synergy Scope

Dismembering Democratic Serbia

Institute 4S, Symbol of Serbian Synergy Scope
After six months of existence, we distributed 4,000 copies of our cd-rom "Kosovo 2006: The Making of a Compromise" to leaders, policymakers, diplomats, analysts and journalists on all six continents; we attracted dozens of thousands of visitors to the cd-rom’s site www.kosovocompromise.com, organized ten promotions in seven countries, got quoted in over 70 media items in 15 world languages.

Numbers are not everything. They can sometimes be symbolic, sometimes also part of a symbol. Like in our name - 4S - Symbol of Serbian Synergy Scope.

The term refers to a necessary synergy 1) between Serbian and European interests, 2) among Serbian people, 3) between the Serbs in Serbia and their diaspora, and 4) between the Serbs and other nations they live with.

When we, a group of young Serbs – living both in Serbia and abroad, proud of both our Serbian origin and our European aspirations – set out to create the Institute 4S, our goal was clear and simple: we wanted change.

We wanted Serbia to move faster, work better and trust more – both itself, its neighbours and the entire European family of nations.

We are not blind and we are not utopians – we know that Serbia lacks much. But we also know Serbs can do much more and are worth more than some – still living in the 1990s black-and-white conflict mindset – would like to portray.

We are deeply frustrated by the lack of progress in the understanding of Serbia and the Serbian nation as a whole. We are angry about double-standards – in particular in regard to Kosovo. We refuse to accept this as a fait-accompli.

That is why the Institute 4S was formed in Brussels. As a non-profit, non-governmental organization aimed at monitoring and analyzing European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes of Serbia and the Serbian people, as well as exchanging and proposing ideas, contacts and solutions to strengthen and speed up these processes.

We are not linked to any political party or state institution whatsoever and will remain so, but we are keen on Serbian interests: be it in regional reconciliation, in the struggle against the independence of Kosovo, in the pursuit of talks on Stabilization and Association with the EU, in the campaign for the integration into the NATO Partnership for Peace Programme, in the fight against any kind of extremism, prejudice and hypocritical abuses of the rule of law.

We believe that Serbs and their fellow Europeans can create synergies and focus better their intellectual and political resources on making the right moves.

This Institute will seek to provide tools and solutions for better cooperation and understanding among Serbs, between Serbs and their regional partners as well as between Serbia and the EU.

With the cd-rom "Kosovo 2006: The Making of a Compromise" we have achieved our aim: we have stirred and shaken the international debate on Kosovo. With the newsletter "In Press 4S", we want to continue on this path and introduce new ideas and new faces writing on Serbia, the Serbs, their regional role and their European integration in the political, security, economic and cultural field. Our upcoming projects, such as the analytical network "Future 4S", the Institute’s web portal and the economic program will soon be underway. See you on the road from Belgrade to Brussels.

Predrag Ćeranić is the Director and one of the founders of the Institute 4S.

Predrag Ćeranić

**DISMEMBERING DEMOCRATIC SERBIA?**

The proposal for the future status of Kosovo by UN Envoy Martti Ahtisaari sets two dangerous, hidden traps for dismembering Serbia and stands no chance in Belgrade, even with a new pro-European government.

Ahtisaari’s first trap lies in the packaging of his proposal. Wrapped in the format of “limited sovereignty”, the crux of Ahtisaari’s proposal is expected to be a gradual, supervised form of independence, which in fact means that “Kosovo is not (yet) an independent state, but is (already) independent from Serbia”. In practice, signing up such a proposal would amount to accepting “slightly delayed” independence.

The second trap stems from the first one and relates to the implementation of the agreement. Only someone naive, with a short memory, and totally uninformed about the Kosovo situation would forget the way the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 had been implemented. Ever since 1999, year after year, the international administration in Kosovo incrementally kept on building up the province’s attributes of ‘statehood’.

Instead of tearing up a country, creating new borders and further balkanizing the Balkans, Ahtisaari should try to patch up the previous mistakes of the UN mission in Kosovo and to bring back the negotiations on a fair track.

Predrag Ćeranić

Aleksandar Mitic is the Director and one of the founders of the Institute 4S.

A Aleksandar Mitic

**Aleksandar Mitic**

In Press
KOSOVO’S PANDORA BOX

One of the most dangerous and unrealistic ideas circulating today in international politics consists of considering the Serbian province of Kosovo as a ‘unique’ case. Under such thinking, Kosovo is a unique case which should be imposed on Serbia in breach of all international laws and regulations, but the solution will be ‘unique’ one; hence no precedents can be an applicable precedent to any of the hundreds of other similar disputes and territorial claims worldwide.

Those arguing why Kosovo’s case should be ‘unique’ suggest it should be so because:

1. the province had a recent history of institutional discrimination and brutal crackdowns on a separatist campaign,
2. NATO bombed in 1999 and
3. the UN has been administering the province in the last seven years.

But is Kosovo really so unique?

So much blood has been shed, so many interventions have been led, so many international administrations and peacekeeping forces have ruled dozens of other regions around the world facing a similar perspective of separatism. Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transdniestria, Palestine, Tamil Eelam, Northern Cyprus, the Basque Province, Chechnya, Northern Ireland, western Macedonia, Republica Srpska, Tibet, Taiwan, Kurdistan...

All of these areas, and many more, will be following the Kosovo talks very closely, especially given that most of them have suffered even more violent, hateful conflicts and have waited for the solution to be found for much longer than the province of Kosovo.

There are hundreds of ethnic groups in the world who feel “territorially” discriminated.

Are there any solid reasons that the case of Kosovo Albanians is superior to all the rest?

An Albanian state exists already just a few metres from the borders of the two most of the truly discriminated ethnic communities around the world dream of minimal autonomy, since both Albanians and雨men want Kosovo to become a full self-governance which Serbia is offering: they want to create nothing less than a second Albanian state in the already fragile Western Balkans and thereby risk provoking other minorities to demand independence.

To those arguing that NATO’s intervention in 1999 should be the basis for Kosovo’s independence, one should remind the developments in Kosovo since then: the expulsion of more than 230,000 Serbs, the shameful enclaves and ghettos in which the remaining Serbs and other non-Albanians live still, the destruction of 130 Orthodox churches, notorious organized crimes networks, blatant nationalist historical revisionism and some 60-70 per cent unemployment in spite of uniquely large transfers of international funds into Kosovo. Since 1999, Kosovo’s de facto existing military formations have participated in warfare in both southern Serbia and Macedonia.

Given the continuous pressure on the Kosovo Serb community, it is easy to imagine that the independence of Kosovo would most certainly lead to a monoethnic Albanian Kosovo. Serbs who left will never come back.

As such, it would completely undermine the arguments of those who supported the NATO bombings in 1999 in the name of the “multinationality” of Kosovo. Moreover, the year 1999 would have looked like a campaign for the independe

ence of Kosovo, which is light years away from the proclaimed goals of the “humanitarian intervention.”

This is a truly problematic perspective, especially since NATO’s intervention has led out by bypassing the UN Security Council.

With respect to law, Kosovo can become independent from Serbia only by voluntary negotiated agreement or by violating the 1945 UN Charter, the 1975 Helsinki Final act, the 1991-92 Baidr
 Commission, the 1999 UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and the 2006 Serbian constitution.

When Transdniestria, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh voted last fall to reform their own independe

mind paths, the international condemnations were outright.

When Russia says the solution for Kosovo should be equally applicable elsewhere — it is accused of plotting against its neighbours.

But, if Serbia’s insistence on territorial integrity is “déméde” and Russia’s insistence on universal standards is “controversy”, how does one explain the stakes of a growing number of European Union member countries which are opposing Kosovo’s independence and rejecting the idea of Kosovo’s “uniqueness”?

At the last several meetings of the EU Council of ministers and heads of state, Spain, Cyprus and new EU Member Romania were at the forefront of the EU bloc opposing Kosovo’s secession.

Are there countries too falling to the “paranoid Serbo-russian bloc” or are they plain and simply worried about the implications of Kosovo’s illegal independence in the Basque country, northern Cyprus or Transdniestria?

MOSCOW’S KOSSOTO TAKE

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From the beginning of the negotiation process, Russia holds the position that the UNSC Resolution 1244 and the fulfillment of “standards” are the basis for the settlement. Moscow is in favor of a solution that takes into account the interests of both nego-
tiating parties and argues that the Contact Group should play a role of a mediator assisting to strike the compromise by means of recommendations, but not to impose a decision on one of the parties. It is possible that the Russian representative in the UNSC could exercise his right to a veto and would not allow an imposed solution on one of the parties.

RUSSIA’S INTEREST

Russia is interested in the Kosovo case for several practical reasons, notwithstanding its traditional support for Orthodox Church and Serbia. First of all, the Russian Federation includes Chechnya, which had been highly marginalized under the Russian Federation. In the West, Chechnya is often called “the Russian Kosovo”. After two mili-
tary campaigns against the separatist move-
ment in Chechnya during the 90s, the basic

It has been a public secret for a while now that some “goodwill advisors” had been suggesting to the team of UN medi-
diator Martti Ahtisaari to find a “legal basis” for the uniqueness of Kosovo in order to avoid setting a precedent.

But Ahtisaari should be cautious enough not to test this “legal solution”. Breaching international law might appeal ethnic Serbian separatist aspi-
rations in Kosovo, but it would certainly open a Pandora’s box of separatist virus

ewside.

Jan Oberg is the Director of the Transna-
tional Foundation for Peace and Future Research (TFF) in Lund. Aleksandar Mitic is Chief Analyst at the Institute 4S, Symbol of Serbian Synergy Scope.

The day before the January 31, 2006 Contact Group meeting in London, Russian president Vladimir Putin made recommendations on the secessionist trends inside the federation, on the other, an independent Kosovo would open the door to independence and international recognition for the secessionist prin-Russian republics now part of the Com-
monewealth of Independent States (CIS).

Thus, the settlement of the Kosovo status is a controversial matter for Russia on one side, Chechnya threatens the integrity of the fed-
ation, on the other, an independent Kosovo could open the door to independence and international recognition for the secessionist prin-Russian republics now part of the Com-
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FIDELITY TO UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES

The day before the January 31, 2006 Contact Group meeting in London, Russian president Vladimir Putin made recommendations on the Kosovo matter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov and clarified Moscow’s official position. Putin said that the settlement should be prepared so that it could be used as a universal model for the solution of similar problems around the world, especially in the territory of the former USSR. He men-
tioned Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transd-

Marta Patrasso is a Moscow-based political analyst specializing in cross-cultural communi-
cations in ethnic conflicts in the Balkans.

It follows that if the independence of Kosovo is imposed on Belgrade or Kosovo exists from Serbia unilaterally — which is possible accord-
ing to the Kosovo Prime-minister Agim Ceku — Russia would likely recognize the independe

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tional Foundation for Peace and Future Research (TFF) in Lund. Aleksandar Mitic is Chief Analyst at the Institute 4S, Symbol of Serbian Synergy Scope.
While it is true that the political situation in Kosovo is best reflected in the issue of Kosovo Mitrovica, the author cannot agree with those saying that the future of Mitrovica will determine the future of Kosovo. The matter is rather the other way round.

For seven years now, Kosovo Mitrovica has been branded a ‘unique’, ‘special’ case. When one says Mitrovica, the first thought is of a ‘divided city’. There are 220,000 Gogogian keywords with the keywords, Mitrovica problem. It should not have been that way.

THE LAST URBAN REFUGE

When the international troops entered Kosovo back in 1999, more than 800,000 Albanians got back to their homes in a short time. A surge of crimes then took place against the Serbian population. Kidnappings, rapes, plundering caused major verbal and physical abuses and maltreatment, arson and lootings terrified non-Albanians, which got expelled or fled. The international troops and administration blatantly failed to protect them.

While most Kosovo Serbs and Roma found refuge in central Serbia, many stopped in the northern part of the province, which has a Serbian majority, and gathered mainly in the northern part of the city of Kosovska Mitrovica, an area of only three square kilometers which makes up only one fifth of the 80,000+ city.

As all the other urban settlements in Kosovo were brutally emptied of non-Albanians, the Kosovo Serbs did not have to put up a last stand at the Ibar river which divides the city of Mitrovica. They had an easy bridge and managed to prevent violent intrusions of Albanian extremists, despite many bloody incidents and terror attacks.

Seven years later, the lines in the stand-off remained unchanged. The southern part of the city is inhabited by 70,000 Serbs and no Albanians, whereas the northern part is inhabited by 10,000 Serbs and c.2,000 Albanians and Bosnians.

The Northern part of Mitrovica came under huge pressure. International politicians, pressured by the Albanian leaders, defined it as “the main problem in Kosovo”. While the community leaders break down, the rest of village follows quickly, selling their properties in the yard. The community are equally opportunistic, or even worse, the Albanian extremists are continuously using mafia-type methods to force even more Serbs to leave and sell valuable real-estate: they always threatened them with the risk of being killed outside the enclaves. People struggle everyday with their problems but still manage to live next to each other. For now, the dramatically altered heads in the homes of its residents as well.

BAR FLOWS IN PEOPLE’S HEADS

Today, Kosovo Mitrovica is, before anything else, a policy-making problem, the bigger south wants to engulf the valley, bridges and to manage to prevent violent intrusions of Albanian extremists, despite many bloody incidents and terror attacks.

In the city, people share real life problems. The destroyed infrastructure and great rate of unemployment have made many people cut off from the streets and do small trading business. The so-called kiosk lords are not idle, as they have collected kiosks and second-hand import cars from abroad have ruined the original urban look of the city and caused traffic chaos. Adding to the problems of many years of lack of investment, the old neglected infrastructure, which could not support the postwar multi-lication of the number of population, insufficient water and electricity supply, accommodation and occupied property, IDPs and poor, lack of youth programs and space, an increased crime rate and drug addicts -- it is evident that these are large and realistic problems.

People struggle everyday with their problems but still manage to live next to each other. They are once getting used to the presence of the other community. Reconciliation should be a natural process instead of an imposed one. Today, as Pristina and Kosovo are the two cities that live one with each other. For now, the divided Serbs are facing today the issue of identity.

The status of Kosovo as seen from an enclave

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While with the start of the negotiations, the international community has once again launched a strong political, diplomatic and security campaign aimed at North- ern Kosovo, if as the question of how the North will respond to the proposed solution was more important than the status itself.

What the Serbian population wants is to have separate North Kosovo, the Kosovska Mitrovica municipality established de jure, instead of being engulfed in a sin-gle, southern-dominated organizational structure, as aggressively requested by ethnic Albanians. Local Serbs need to be encouraged and supported in those ef-forts. That is the only way to make them feel safe and secure, protected from the obvious administrative strangulation and majorisation from Pristina.

Ethnic Albanians should recognize this as an open card on the table. They need Serbs to preserve an image of a multi-ethnic society. Without ‘North’ Kosovo Mitrovica, chances for a future survival of the declining Serbian community, broken into a few enclaves in the southern and central part of Kosovo, including three pseudo-urban areas in the North, are almost impossible.

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While London is closer to Washington’s stance, Madrid, Bratislava, Athens, Nic-

1) Give up the ‘laissez-faire’ policy and maximum tolerance towards the Alba-

nian side and the policy of permanent pressures and conditions against the Ser-

brian side;

2) Respect internationally recognized borders, the Helsinki Final Act, the UN Charter and the results of the Dayton Commission which do not allow prov-

inces of the former Yugoslavia (like Kosovo) to secede;

3) Avoid the policy of double standards;

4) Do all it can to find a solution which will give Kosovo the possibility to use all the instruments from the Stabiliza-

tion and Association Process and allow its road towards the EU without giving it statehood status;

5) Work on strengthening the integra-

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BOOK REVIEWS

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“Serbs in Kosovo and Metohia” (Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2006, 471 pag-

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WHAT SERBIA’S PfP CAN OFFER TO NATO?

THE SERBIAN MILITARY IS IN THE PROCESS OF INTENSIVE RE-STRUCTURING, MODERNIZATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION. THE AIM OF THESE PROCESSES IS TO CREATE A MILITARY WHICH WOULD COMPLY WITH NATO STANDARDS, STARTING FROM THE CIVILIAN CONTROL OF MILITARY AND GRADUALLY MOVING UPWARD TO INCLUDE WEAPONS AND COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT STANDARDIZATION. ONE OF THE MAJOR GOALS IS TO ESTABLISH HIGH LEVEL OF OPERATIONAL INTEROPERABILITY WITH NATO.

TREMENDOUS IMPROVEMENT

One could analyze the NATO–Serbia relationship from different angles, but in general, after the 1999 NATO bombing campaign, there has been a tremendous improvement and significant efforts to establish closer cooperation and partnership. A pragmatic and partner-oriented relationship between the two sides was established at the end of the 1999 conflict. Today, it continues to develop and evolve. One of the examples is the collaboration between the Serbian Army (formerly, the Yugoslav Army) and KFOR (NATO-led forces) in the Gnjilane–Dinare line (KSK) on the administrative border of Kosovo. Serbia signed an agreement giving the right to NATO troops to pass through Serbia and Montenegro (2005), as well as the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the U.S. Military. Serbia was admitted into the Partnership for Peace Program following a decision of the NATO summit in Riga on 29 November 2006, and an official signing ceremony attended by president Boris Tadić on 14 December. A few days later, the NATO Military Liaison Office opened in Belgrade. All these important steps have considerably strengthened Serbia’s relationship with NATO.

Looking back over the past few years, one could recognize the beginnings of a positive and productive relationship, which includes today a range from institutional cooperation at the military and diplomatic level to academic exchanges and the near-term, the future looks promising for both sides as the relationship intensifies. That would include programs which open possibilities for Serbian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) officials to participate in NATO exchanges.

Some examples of the cooperation between the two sides are the establishment of the NATO Liaison Office in Belgrade, the partial integration of Serbian military into ISAF, a presence of Serbian units on a higher level compared with other PfP countries. The accession of Serbia to PfP has opened the door for shared knowledge and experience.

A new and democratic Serbia is ready and willing to discuss and coordinate its national defense and security policies on ongoing basis with NATO and its partners. Therefore, one could say with confidence that Serbia, as a new PfP member, will act as a loyal partner and nation which will work cooperatively to provide security to the region and the world. It is safe to say that Serbia will steadily move along the Euro-Atlantic road of integration.

THUMBS UP FOR SERBIA’S ECONOMY

“THE STRONGEST GROWTH IN 2006 WAS SEEN IN SERBIA, AT 6.3 PER CENT, WHILE SEVERAL OTHER COUNTRIES GREW AT 5 PER CENT OR MORE.” (EBRD, 2006).

“In the last six years, production growth rate in Serbia was increased by 40 per cent and in parallel, we have a GDP growth rate of 6.8 per cent” (Marko Novakovic, 2008).

Observations of the international financial institutions on the Serbian economy have been very positive at the end of 2006. They are encouraging for Serbia further economic development as they provide motivation and positive messages to foreign investors. In 2006, the Serbian state budget reached some 1.6 billion euros through privatization, in addition to 2 billion euros from foreign direct investments.

Macroeconomic policy moved toward targeted inflation, which did not gather speed thanks to consistent economic reforms. The real estate market in Serbia is still underdeveloped, and the post-electoral period will provide for further liberalization of the market.

In the next years, the employment rate is not expected to increase up to a satisfactory level (current unemployment rate is 24-27 percent), and the new government will strongly focus on policies and measures aimed at stimulating new job openings (for example, a good model can be found in the National Investment Plan - state non-returnable grants to domestic and foreign investors for every new created job post in sectors of production, R&D, IT, innovative services, etc.).

Moreover, taking further steps in the regulatory field, building institutions and pro-active cooperation with all relevant key players in the international scene will enhance further positive trends and the investments share in the GDP. The rate should reach 30 per cent in the next two years (it is 20 per cent at present).

At the same time, public expenditure will progressively decrease in relative terms. It will also be necessary to decrease the tendency of public debt levels, which is expected to peak in 2009 and then decrease steadily.

Finally, the new CEFTA horizon in 2007 is expected to have a beneficial contribution for Serbia.
Did you ever believe a Chinese fortune cookie?*

Of course not. They are tasteless and their proverbial messages have been so much chewed upon that they’ve long lost any kind of truthful flavor.

Cut through time and space, here comes the new fast food prophecy – the Serbian satirical aphorism, postmodern style.

Just like a mix of cultures and torrents has shaped the delicious, highly calorific Serbian cuisine, so have the political and social circumstances in post-WWII Yugoslavia patched up another kind of fulfilling intellectual aphrodisiac – the one-or-two-liner aphorism, the best embodiment of Serbia’s trademark ironic moral.

But first of all, a disclaimer. Most Westerners make the simplifying mistake of calling any proverb or famous literary quote an aphorism. There are many web pages and anthologies of such false aphorisms quoting what Plato and Tchekhov said about their caves or theirs, or paraphrasing Murphy’s laws and Chinese fortune-cookie sayings.

An aphorism, as defined and practiced in Serbia, is a short, sharp, linguistically effective sentence or two, which imperatively contains an unexpected twist and which describes in a most striking, clarifying way the hidden truth of some common social matters or states of mind.

What makes Serbian aphorisms different from classic proverbs is their multilayered, opened-end nature, their surprisingly creative wordplays, their unpremeditated individualism and their killer dose of black humor, satire and merciless sarcasm that still conveys a strong humanitarian appeal.

Such satirical aphorisms appeared after WW2 in totalitarian countries of Eastern Europe where oppression was even stronger than elsewhere, namely in Poland and in the former Yugoslavia.

What started as an exercise de style of a few courageous writers quickly became picked up by ordinary people, and by the 1960s hundreds of amateur aphorists joined the movement, known in Serbia as the Belgrade Aphoristic Circle.

The main theme back then was an ironic criticism of the so-called “better life”, a leitmotiv of communist demagog, which had to be done in a stylishly veiled, indirect way so as to avoid censorship. The main goal was to restore a sense of individual dignity and psychological integrity of a confused and misled population.

After the 1980s, the situation in Poland calmed down, but the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia provided Serbian aphorists with a variety of inspiring new topics: civil wars & civic rights, hyper-inflation & hypermarkets, UN sanctions & peacekeeping missions, untouchable males & great dictators, endless transitions & democratic limitations…

In general, the more difficult and hopeless the times in which we live are, the more repression, stupidity and lies there is – the more fertile and intense the spiritual resistance of the aphorists will be.

This connection is strongly expressed by Aleksandar Baljak, Serbia’s most prominent aphorist, when he optimistically predicts: “Our best aphorisms were created in difficult times, but for our modern satire – better days lie ahead.

A synthesis of literary art and colloquial philosophy, an aphorism reveals the depths of reality and discloses its true, ugly face. It has a demystifying, sobering role, but it also contains a concealed love and understanding for human misconceptions.

It is not a cheap thrill for the idle like a joke or a stand-up comedy one-liner, but a brave ethical act aimed at destroying everything that is unworthy, bad and fake in a society, but also inside ourselves.

This is why aphorisms can be a great way for empowering the individual; for asking or answering controversial questions; for accusing without moralizing; for apologizing without humiliating; for awareness raising; for self-criticism; for self-redemption.

Aphorisms are inspirational both for those who make them and for those who read them. When you invent or hear such a fantastic diagnosis of a situation, you almost don’t care what happens next, because you are already sure that you have understood it all, and that’s what we’re all here about.

In a time when the human rights industry has become not more than a big fundraising competition which benefits only the most shameless hustlers and wheiners, our frail civilization deserves to have empowering tools that are freely available to all.

People in Serbia read affordable aphorism booklets in buses and waiting rooms, during lunch breaks or literary evenings, laughing on their own like happy lunatics. Aphorisms also appear in newspapers, and the best ones get picked up in slang, graffiti, street posters or screenplay lines. I myself have systematically collected aphorisms for the last ten years. Whenever I wonder why I am still living in this crazy country after years of civil wars, domestic repression and international satanization, I turn to my collection of aphorisms for reassuring consolation and a 100%-proof optimism fix.

Understanding the world around you, fighting back at the Gods with pen and paper, turning satire into a state of mind – it really means transcending it all. All of a sudden, a wasted childhood becomes an asset; terminal living in Serbia – a privilege.

From this perspective, Serbia stops being a traumatized, post-war country lost in transition, and turns into a stylish crossroads full of off-beat characters trying to contribute to a better understanding of this world by making up great lines.

These authors – vagabonds, politicians, psychiatrists, dentists, postmen, winemakers… have no illusions that they can change anything, but they also can’t bear to stay idle, so they do a brilliant service to humanity – they make their ingenious comments public. If they can’t change the world around us, at least they can change our perception of this world. More than often, this is more than enough.

From now on, this newsletter will feature a section on Serbian satirical aphorisms.

It will probably be the part that you read first and that you remember the most.

Occasionally, however, please remind yourselves where all this small wisdom originated from.

Boris Mitrić is a Belgrade-based filmmaker, author of the award-winning documentaries “Pretty Dyana” and “Unmik Titanik”. He is occasionally shooting his third documentary film “CUT through time and space, here comes the new fast food prophecy – the Serbian satirical aphorism, postmodern style."

*CUT through time and space, here comes the new fast food prophecy – the Serbian satirical aphorism, postmodern style.

I have a choice: I will either be a marionette or my life will hang by a thread.

Rade Jovanović
pensioner

Why shouldn’t we be proud of our past when each new day is worse than the previous one?

Aleksandar Crnčić
deputy minister

Only those who believed the rumors that there was not enough food died of hunger.

Rala Pageli
child dentist

After the seventh glass, I drank the sixth one. After the sixth, I drank the fifth one. And so on, until I sobered up.

Milan Beštić
sales consultant

Protesters were brutally attacking, with their backs, the sticks of surprised policemen.

Aleksandar Baljak
aphorist

When I returned from the interrogation, my mother recognized me right away. Her heart was telling her that was me.

Milan Zdjelar
winemaker

Democracy is when you can say what don’t even dare to think about.

Dragan Račić
gas-station worker

The Minister was astounded when he found out that he was receiving a triple salary. He immediately drew up a budget to start an investigation.

Momčilo Mihajlović
copyshop clerk

When I see a destroyed mosque, I am ashamed to be a Serb. When, a bit further, I see a destroyed church, I am proud to be a Serb.

Ivan Mažuranić
barfly journalist

Shakespeare never said: "Something is rotten in the state of England".

Vladimir Jovčević
Joy international chess master

War criminals were giving autographs.

Slobodan Smičić
psychiatrist

The worst has not passed.

The best is yet to come.

Ilija Marković
economist

Finally, there was light at the end of the tunnel. Not one, but two!

Bela Marčić
history professor

[www.dribblingpictures.com]
From Gračanica to Chicago, the worldwide promotion of the Institute 4S analytical cd-rom "Kosovo 2006: The Making of a Compromise" has reached nine towns and cities, with the participation of up to 1,000 officials, diplomats, politicians, experts and journalists, and the distribution of more than 1,500 copies of the product.

In clear and concise multimedia format, this disc presents crucial background to the Kosovo conflict and provides for the first time a wide-scale, in-depth analysis of the possible outcomes of the status talks, with real pros and cons, causes and consequences, bluffs and arguments, winners and losers.

The first, so-called "European" leg of the tour, went from Rome, through Paris, to Paris and Vienna. Members of the Serbian negotiations team on Kosovo (Slobodan Šamardžić, Sanda Rašković-Ivić, Dušan Bataković and Aleksandar Simić) participated at the promotions, giving an insight on the Serbian negotiations platform on Kosovo.

The second, "Serbian" leg of the tour, had stops in Belgrade, Kosovska Mitrovica, Gračanica, Banjaluka as well as in Chicago, at the annual conference of the Serbian Unity Congress.

Participants at the promotions included EU and NATO officials, diplomats from member countries, parliamentarians, experts from renowned NGO’s and think tanks. The director of the project Aleksandar Mitić, research coordinator Boris Mitić and production manager Predrag Ceranić presented the project and outlined its purpose and argumentation.

The distribution of the cd-rom was furthermore carried by all main Serbian state and non-state institutions: from the Serbian negotiations team, the Serbian government, the Presidency, the Assembly, the Coordination Center for Kosovo and Metohija, the Foreign Ministry, to the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Thanks to this synergy, almost 5,000 copies have been distributed to date – including to some of the world’s top officials, negotiators, members of the UNOSEK team and of the Contact Group countries, parliamentarians of the US Congress, Russian Duma and European Parliament.

In addition, up to 100 media items have been written about the cd-rom and its contents in 15 languages – from German through Romanian to Catalan.

Finally, the web site of the cd-rom was visited by dozens of thousands of people from around the world. This has led to feedback from "priests in Philadelphia to analysts in the Philippines" and copy requests from some of the leading US and UK universities.

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