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Human Rights and Democracy Violation Early Warning *Newsletter* No. 39

Večernje novosti, a high-circulation daily which belongs to strategically important national media and serves as a mouthpiece of the Government, carried Sunday, May 31 a two-page (pp. 6 and 7) *Topic of the Day* file under the caption **WHY ARE CERTAIN NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS ATTEMPTING TO INFLICT AS MUCH DAMAGE AS POSSIBLE TO THEIR COUNTRY AND PEOPLE, AND AGGRAVATE THEIR POSITION IN THE MOST BRUTAL WAY EVEN IN THE TIMES OF CRISIS** consisting of four pogrom-like texts directed (mainly) against three human rights organizations and the three ladies at their helm: *Humanitarian Law Center* and **Nataša Kandić**; *Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia* and **Sonja Biserko**; and *Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights* and **Biljana Kovačević-Vučo**.

Two pages with a mixture of headlines, pictures and cartoons (one of them depicting a \$ sign as a torrent NGO representatives playfully slide on), together with bombastic *entrefilets* based on stereotypes and prejudices, these propagandistic texts are obviously aimed at disqualify the leading human rights defenders and their organizations on the eve of the adoption of a new law on association, as well as to depict them as foreign mercenaries with no fulcrum and support in the Serbian public as organizations whose hostile activities jeopardize numerous „honest“ nongovernmental organizations' work.

Example 1:

NGOs BETWEEN HONOR AND HUMANISM

Everybody's first association is Sonja Biserko, Biljana Kovačević – Vučo and Nataša Kandić. Nobody knows exactly how much money flows into their pockets. The state is the largest donor to the Civil Society.

Example 2:

Women in Black

Women in Black represents one of the “most demonized” associations. These ladies, “disobedient to patriarchate, war, nationalism and militarism”, claim that they are subject to condemnation because their “truth telling” annoys people.

Example 3:



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SYNCHRONIZED AGAINST THE PEOPLE (with a photo showing **Kandić, Biserko** and **Kovačević-Vučo**)

Example 4:

DESTROYING STATES – Zmago Jelinčič, member of the European Parliament, on the devastating NGOs' influence.

Why does the Serbian state not react against those who work for Vojvodina's secession

Example 5:

DONATIONS – JUST A DECOY, followed by: „This year the state allocated 3 billion dinars this year, and 5.7 a year before“ – illustrated with a photo of a protest action staged by *Women in Black*

* * *

NGOS BETWEEN HONOR AND HUMANISM

While asserting that „nobody in Serbia seems to be able to give an exact account of the number of nongovernmental organizations and the amount of money that flows into this sector from foreign sources“, the author reminds that NGOs' image as foreign mercenaries and domestic traitors, attributed to them during the **Milošević** era, still clings on to them and that they themselves are responsible for the mysteries concerning their funding and “anti-Serb engagement” which have only consolidated that image. Formally, this report refers to the submission to Parliament of a draft Law on Associations, which should finally bring order into the civic sector, a law which has been awaited almost nine years, the author notes.

The basic message to be conveyed with this text is to unjustifiably identify NGO community with **Sonja Biserko, Nataša Kandić** or **Biljana Kovačević-Vučo**, although there is a large number of honest, humane and poor organizations. **Zoran Stojiljković**, lecturer at the Political Science Faculty of the Belgrade University, „independent political analyst“ close to the ruling *Democratic Party* and member of several bodies such as Council of the Agency to Combat Corruption, management Board of the state-owned daily *Politika*, and a member of Editorial Board of the extreme rightist *New Serbian Political Thought /NSPM/* – a periodical whose texts, disguised as /quasi/scientific works, make headway in spreading xenophobia and



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demonizing these very NGOs), says: „The problem is that we have reduced the understanding of civil society to those NGOs which promote political rights and do not enjoy much of respect in a part of the public. **They deal with issues from which they can derive profit rather than with key issues**¹. This brings in question the activism of various NGOs – from students to marginalized groups, those who deal with ecology, elimination of poverty“.

A colleague of his, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy **Slobodan Antić** – himself also a self-proclaimed „independent political analyst“ until recently a fervent apologetic and propaganda lieutenant of **Vojislav Koštunica's Democratic Party of Serbia** who is presently moving closer to **Tadić's Democratic Party**, who is another member of the NSPM Editorial Board and author of witch-hunting tirades full of hate speech printed in propagandistic leaflets such as *Pečat* (Seal – currently published by **Milorad Vučelić**, general manager of the state Radio and Television during the most fierce war mongering in the early 1990s), holds the view that the main problem related to NGOs' image stems from the lack of transparency in their finances: „Public attitude towards nongovernmental organizations would be somewhat different if their funding were to be more transparent, if it would be made known where the money comes from and who owns the accounts this money flows into“, adding: „Who funds Helsinki Committee reports written by Sonja Biserko? Who is giving money for her scandalous lists of the unwanted!?“ **Antić** thinks that one should not judge the entire nongovernmental sector on a few NGOs, since „most of those organizations are poor and they are trying to help people“.

Despite the efforts made by **Jasna Filipović** of the *Center for the Development of the Civil Sector*, and **Miljenko Dereta** of the *Civic Initiatives* to explain that NGOs financing is public and transparent, and that all NGOs are obliged to file financial statements that are carefully scrutinized, such efforts remain futile because the entire *Večernje novosti* report is based on the stereotype that NGOs are either political and anti-Serb or wealthy and hooked on suspicious sources of money.

It is these stereotypes that have for years served as vehicles of satanization of the very NGOs who are critically-minded towards the Government and stand for a speedier adoption of European values and accession to the EU.

Jasna Filipović underlines that subsidizing NGOs by the Government should be made more transparent, and points at the fact that the state allocates several dozens of € million to the civil sector, but it remains unclear who gets how much and for what purposes. Knowing that NGOs are given the smallest portion of those subsidies -- whereas political parties, religious organizations, and sports associations receive a lion's share -- they have demanded that these monies be accounted for separately. However, this attempt to shed some light on the matter remains unnoticed in a

¹ **Bold** type by EWS.



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propaganda barrage aimed at distinguishing between the so-called hostile, political anti-Serb and allegedly wealthy NGOs whose funding is suspicious, and a large number of charitable and nonpolitical poor organizations that are concerned with people's problems and do useful things.

The above chapter is followed by a new report which contains statements made by the most prominent NGO leaders and remind of their actions that best illustrate their doings:

SYNCHRONIZED AGAINST THE PEOPLE

Obviously intending to convince its readers of the anti-Serb essence of what **Nataša Kandić, Sonja Biserko** i **Biljana Kovačević Vučo** are doing, this typically paranoid conspiracy-theory-inspired report reminds of the alleged plight of Academician **Dobrica Ćosić** who, according to the author, suffered the effects of these organizations' synchronized exploits on his own skin: *Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights* and *Helsinki Committee for Human Rights* filed with the District Prosecutor in Belgrade a lawsuit against the writer, charging him with instigation of ethnic, racial and religious hatred and intolerance².

The conspiracy theory is elaborated further by means of adding a separate box report on Helsinki human rights committees of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, as well as *B92* and *Borba* joining the alleged campaign against **Dobrica Ćosić**, which the author considers to be no accident and clearly alludes to treason.

It is on these grounds that the author then embarks on enlightening the readers on NGO leaders sins with the aim of venting the last shred of doubt about their anti-Serb doings. Asking if „any EU member state would allow such NGO activities in its backyard“, the author lists their sins as follows:

Nataša Kandić's sins:

Last year she attended the proclamation of the independence of the illegal state of Kosovo (as **Hashim Thaci's** personal guest).

After the publication of video recordings showing the President of Croatia **Stjepan Mesić** singing Ustasha songs, the HLC Director **Nataša Kandić** said that “it's nothing terrible or sinful, because he is a proven antifascist”. Prior to that President **Mesić** decorated Ms. Kandić with the *Order of Katarina Zrinska*.

² More at:

<http://www.yucom.org.rs/rest.php?tip=vestgalerija&idSek=16&idSubSek=57&id=21&status=drugi>



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Sonja Biserko's sins:

Her statement that "Serbs have to face the fact that Kosovo is lost", that "Vojvodina acceded to Serbia and subsequently to Yugoslavia of its own free will. It is fully entitled to decide about its desired position". In a book titled "Self-isolation: Reality and the Goal" published by the *Helsinki Committee*, she drew up "a blacklist" of so-called enemies of Serbia's European path. The book's cover depicts Serbia in its boundaries excluding Kosovo and Metohija.

Biljana Kovacevic – Vuco's sins:

The unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church hired her to represent it in a dispute with the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Her statement: "There is not a single Serbian platelet in my blood, but politically I am a Serb".

The report also mentioned their joint sin: In May 2007, these three nongovernmental organizations sent a letter addressed to 27 EU member states, demanding from Brussels to increase pressure and break relations with Belgrade until all Hague indictees are handed over to the Tribunal. **Nataša Kandić, Sonja Biserko** and **Biljana Kovačević – Vučo** also agree with **Martti Ahtisaari's** statement that "the Serbs as a nation are guilty", and that it is necessary that the Serbs, like the Germans, be "denazified".

Although the above reports abound in false or distorted facts, it is pointless to deny texts written with an apparent propagandistic intention, since their essence is accurate: these NGOs are under attack precisely because of their critical attitude which -- although it is shared by a minority -- represents a voice which cannot be tolerated in the dominant mental totalitarianism in Serbia. The message delivered is that such NGOs should cease to exist so as not to jeopardize the new Serbian national consensus. It is with this view that the propaganda keeps insisting that such NGOs have no influence. They attempt to obstruct small and poor NGOs' patriotic and humane activities. Financial aspects of this problem are intentionally mystified by means of repeated insistence on allegedly clandestine sources and intransparent ways of spending of such funds.

In order to substantiate these assertions and show that such NGOs would not be tolerated in a EU country, **Zmago Jelinić**, a EP member known for extreme nationalist views is called to aid.

DESTROYING STATES



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Zmago Jelinčič, member of the European Parliament, on the devastating NGOs' influence.

The text's author underlines that „criticism towards nongovernmental organizations carries additional weight when pronounced by a member of the European Parliament, more so if that member is a Slovenian“. **Zmago Jelinčič** demands that a line of distinction be drawn between „veritable“ NGO which contribute to a democratic society, and those „controlled by foreign governments, secret services and interest groups“. He thinks it is horrible that many of those NGOs are still funded from the state budget although they work against the very state that funds them, adding that tax payers of Serbia fund NGOs which support Kosovo's independence. **Jelinčič** is categorical that there should be no place for such NGOs in a democratic society. He is especially embittered by activities carried out by **Sonja Biserko** and other NGO leaders who work undisturbed against the Serbian state and stand for Vojvodina's secession! He is angry because Serbian authorities do not react, adding that Slovenia would.

It is from the pedestal of the European Parliament that the ultranationalist **Zmago Jelinčič** explains NGOs' *modus operandi* to Serbian readers, thereby quoting the example of Nazi „culture societies“: „These German organizations used to operate prior to the World War II exactly the same way certain nongovernmental organizations operate today. That means that they had been selling lies to the advantage of their foreign patrons“. **Jelinčič**, too, connects politically active NGOs with wealth and points out that such organizations are the most active in Serbia. „They receive funds from their headquarters and currently the 'project Vojvodina' is their main task. There are 'Croatian appetites' there as well“. „You are making a mistake if you think that Zagreb has given up its intention to stretch its boundaries all the way to Srem, to Zemun“. If one doesn't comprehend that what **Jelinčič** is talking about is outright espionage and sellout, the newly appointed analyst of Serbia's civil society adds: „Foreign governments and secret services recruit mostly persons of instable character as representatives of nongovernmental organizations. These persons' mental health is not very good, and the foreign factor is taking advantage of that fact. Persons who lead nongovernmental organizations are impulsive, they behave improperly, and are prepared to serve their masters more dutifully than is expected from them“.



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This misleading collage of manipulations would be incomplete if it were not to enlighten the reader on

Who receives funds from Serbia's budget earmarked for NGOs

DONATIONS – JUST A DECOY

This part of the report represents a warning that one could get a wrong impression when looking into the budget: each ministry seems to fund „its own NGOs“ – 3 billion dinars (€31.5 million) was earmarked for subsidies to NGOs. However, a closer look at the list of organizations which receive these funds discloses that they include parliamentary political parties, religious communities, ethnic councils, sports clubs, environmental groups, artistic associations, organizations of the handicapped, Matica srpska, etc.

„But the loudest nongovernmental organizations, which often ‘interfere’ with politicians’ business, are not to be found on the state’s payroll“, the report says. Beneficiaries include various associations and groups that keep the memories and cherish the traditions of liberation wars since 1912, as well as an organization leaning on the tradition of the Ravna Gora³ movement.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports subsidizes the *Track & Field Association, Flying Targets Marksmen Club, Brigade Players Association...*

However, the report fails to mention that beneficiaries on the list of the Ministry for Labor and Social Policy include *Serbian Četnik Movement (Srpski četnički pokret)*, an organization continuing the tradition of a notorious quisling movement from the WW2 and 1990s Balkan wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A special place in the voluminous report in *Večernje novosti* is devoted to a text on the experience and achievements of **Putin’s** Russia in dealing with „problematic“ nongovernmental organizations. Instead of interpreting it in any way, here is the report in its entirety:

³ A royalist political and military movement claiming to have been antifascist. Ravna Gora movement was been rehabilitated by Parliament 2004, but it remains generally identified with quisling troops who had fought against Tito’s Communist partisans.



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Putin – A Nightmare

Vladimir Putin is a nightmare for nongovernmental organizations in Russia. The Prime Minister of Russia found a way to curb NGOs' activities in that country. Putin signed a resolution which reduces the number of nongovernmental organizations entitled to receive funding from abroad without obligation to pay taxes from over a hundred to only 12! Some of the biggest foundations, such as the Ford Foundation, have been left out. Thereupon a large number of NGOs decided to withdraw from Russia, because they cannot divert 25% of their revenues (that is the tax rate) into the pocket of Putin's Finance Minister.

NGOs have been under Russian authorities' clampdown during Putin's presidential tenure, as well. As far back as 2005, he publicly criticized "international pressure" on many European countries.

- Such pressure on reforms taking place in the countries on the territory of the former USSR leads to the creation of chaotic banana republics. I think that the USA and western countries made a mistake by supporting nongovernmental organizations and setting up numerous other missions in countries such as the Ukraine – Putin said.

Outlook:

Renewed resort to stereotypes about anti-Serb mercenary nongovernmental organizations -- personified in several NGOs and persons leading them, who for years have been subject to systematic and orchestrated demonization campaign and indeed persecution -- on the eve of the adoption of a new Law on Associations, has as its objective to marginalize the most active human rights defenders and organizations dealing with transitional justice, as well as to hamper their evident influence in the public. Frequent references to Putin's model is aimed at substantiating the treason charges and rendering a ban on certain NGOs more plausible. It is in this way that the authorities do the groundwork for a future refusal to assist such NGOS financially once that becomes their obligation pursuant to EU criteria.

The *Večernje novosti* report represents an early plea that such organizations should not be subsidized. This plea is justified by accusations that they have sistematically worked „against the people“ and thus become despised and without influence. This is especially dangerous against the background of the fact that European Union IPA funds are already being allocated by the Government of Serbia.