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ANTI-SEMITISM IN SERBIA

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‘Even the final rest is not to be that. The destruction of the cemeteries is not just an anti-Semitic outrage, it is *anti-Semitism itself*¹

1. INTRODUCTION

In her book *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt notes an apparent rule that ‘...anti-Semitic sentiments take on political importance only when they can be combined with major political problems...’² In Serbia, where the last two decades have undoubtedly been years of major political problems, anti-Semitic sentiments have assumed not only political but also social and cultural importance although there are hardly any Jews in the country at all. In view of this, how is one to approach the problem of anti-Semitism and analyze its origins in a country in which Jews constitute one of the smallest minority communities?

Whereas earlier theorists have sought the political and social causes of modern³ and contemporary anti-Semitism within the confines of enlightenment, in the advent and demise of the European nation state,⁴ current analysts regard it as an outcome of the radical and extremist tendencies in society brought on by the changed social and economic environments in evidence at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries. Although the historical contexts in which the first two analytical frameworks occurred are undeniably substantially different from the present one, this by no means detracts from their relevance. Leaving aside the contradictory effects of enlightenment and their connection with anti-Semitism,⁵ a belated project aimed at the creation of a (greater) nation state, accompanied by political and social radicalization, seems to provide quite an appropriate framework within which to analyse contemporary anti-Semitism in Serbia.

¹ M. Horkheimer, T. Adorno, *Dijalektika prosvetiteljstva* (Dialectic of Enlightenment), Veselim Masleša, Sarajevo, 1974. My italics.

² H. Arendt, *Izvori totalitarizma*, Feministička izdavačka kuća, Belgrade, 1998, p. 28.

³ Referring to the period from 17th to 19th centuries.

⁴ Adorno and Horkheimer, Arendt, and others.

⁵ Although this approach, in so far as it deals with a specific type of rationality and subjectivity, may well be useful in studying the roots of anti-Semitism in general, its relevance to Serbia’s recent historical political and social development, as well as to its present, is almost insignificant.

The idea that a homogenous national group is a basic prerequisite for a state community (that is, for its territorial and personal sovereignty as well as for the definition of its political goals) is necessarily at odds with the existence of ‘nations within a nation’.

Serbia’s greater state-national project, that is, the way it was conceived and the methods used in the attempt to realize it, could not but bring about a clash with the national minorities. In order to justify nationalism and populism, and along with them Serbia’s aggressive policy towards neighbouring states and minorities at home, one had to reinterpret Serbia’s recent past and its Orthodox Christian traditions. On the one hand, this strategy sought to legitimize the use of warlike policy as a response to the atrocities committed against Serbs in the past; on the other, it set out to lay the foundations of a new Serbian identity. Within this framework, persons belonging to certain minorities were assigned the role of ‘enemy’ – Croats, Hungarians, and Bulgarians for their World War Two collaboration with the Third Reich, and Jews as allegedly the chief culprit in a global conspiracy against Serbia and the Serbs, an attitude both in line with the widely known anti-Semitic stereotypes and betraying a total absence of any critical appraisal of Serbia’s policy and its consequences.

The basic framework within which one should address the problem of anti-Semitism today is a complex one. In the past twenty years or so in Serbia anti-Semitism has not existed as an isolated phenomenon; it should therefore be sought in the radicalization, intolerance and xenophobia permeating politics and society as a result of a disastrous, destructive policy. In view of the traditional perception of the Jews as ever others and foreigners, anti-Semitism in Serbia may, in a broader sense, be interpreted as a problematic attitude to difference rather than as a purely anti-Jewish ideology, practice, or discourse.

This study addresses anti-Semitism in four of its basic manifestations, namely as political, religious, civil, and cultural. Whereas the first is almost wholly restricted to the field of political discourse, the religious and civil often intertwine, mostly to the extent that in today’s Serbia one discerns no clear dividing line between the church as a religious institution and as a social and cultural authority and actor. Although the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) has officially entered Serbia’s political life, this study considers as being of far greater interest its influence on certain ‘civil society’ circles which may be said to generate and promote anti-Semitism. The civil form of anti-Semitism is by far the most open and radical, with the cultural providing it with motives and perpetuating its presence on the public stage. The context in which this study addresses anti-Semitism is provided by the political and social circumstances in the last decade of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries.

At present, denial and negation of anti-Semitism are especially strong in the political and social spheres, reflecting as they do a legacy of a society, policy, and elites incapable of confronting and overcoming a controversial past. This study throws critical light on the background and manifestations of anti-Semitism, and of other forms of intolerance, in order to emphasize, among other things, the need to reassess Serbia’s past and present as a precondition for the establishment of a modern, democratic and tolerant state and society.

2. *JEWS IN SERBIA*

The exact number of Jews living in the territory of the Republic of Serbia (not including Kosovo) is not known. The last official census conducted in 2002 put the number of persons declaring themselves Jews at 1,158.⁶ The total number of Jews is estimated between 2,000 and 3,000.⁷

During the Second World War nearly the entire Belgrade Jewish community perished in the Holocaust. Having embraced the main ideas of National Socialism, especially those concerning racial purity, Serbia's quisling authorities under General Milan Nedić turned into diligent executors of the occupier's policy against the Jews. The Jews were denied the right to work, robbed of their property, and stripped of all their civil rights.⁸ Aleksandar Lebl writes that from April 1941 on the Holocaust was carried out in Serbia too. The occupying authorities were assisted in their mass extermination of Jews in Serbia by the Nedić Government of National Salvation, Dimitrije Ljotić's Yugoslav National Movement 'Zbor', and the gendarmes and special police, who guarded the prisons and camps and ran down and arrested sheltered Jews.⁹ As a result, State Counsellor Harald Turner reported to Berlin as early as August 1942 that Serbia was the only country in which the Jewish and Gypsy question had been solved.¹⁰ In consequence, Belgrade was officially declared the 'first city of a new Europe to be *Judenrein* [cleansed of Jews]'.¹¹ In recognition of their successful solution of the 'Jewish question', Nedić's Serbia and Nedić himself received a published tribute from the Reich leaders.¹²

Although Nedić's and Ljotić's anti-Semitism is a historically validated fact, attempts are being made to relativize and reinterpret it by serving up all kinds of interpretations. Thus, 'In Serbia in 1941, the German occupying authorities were able to achieve the quickest "final solution" of the Jewish question because Serbia was not a German ally but an occupied country, so in Serbia the Nazis had free reign. Countries which were Germany's allies, such as Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Independent State of Croatia [NDH] were able to conduct their own policy regarding the Jews, and it could differ from Germany's to a degree. Occupied Serbia had no such choice because it was forbidden, under the terms of its capitulation, to pursue any "own" policy. The Germans sought permission from the NDH to open a camp on the old fair grounds near

⁶ Jews by ethnicity and religion. Slightly more than half of them were Jews by religion, the rest declaring themselves secular. Aleksandar Lebl, 'Antisemitizam', <http://www.kczr.co.yu/okrugli%20stolovi/politicki%20ekstremizam/7aleksandar%20lebl%20antisemitizam.doc>.

⁷ Ibid. See also 'Puzeći i otvoreni antisemitizam', Kažiprst, studio interview with Filip David, Radio B92, Belgrade, 10 April 2005.

⁸ Olivera Milosavljević, *Potisnuta istina. Kolaboracija u Srbiji 1941-1944*, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2006.

⁹ Aleksandar Lebl, 'Antisemitizam', <http://www.kczr.co.yu/okrugli%20stolovi/politicki%20ekstremizam/7aleksandar%20lebl%20antisemitizam.doc>.

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A report on the Banality of Evil*, Penguin Books, 1994.

¹¹ World Jewish Congress, www.worldjewishcongress.org.

¹² Mirko Đorđević in Nedim Sejdimović, *Antisemitizam u Srbiji: od Vožda, preko Nikolaja, do grafita*, 26 March 2005, www.nedimsejdimovic.com.

Zemun since Croatia had annexed that part of dismembered and occupied Serbia. It was there that some 8,000 Jews were murdered...'¹³

Since Israel's foundation in 1948, according to the World Jewish Congress, over 10,000 Jews have emigrated from the countries of the former Yugoslavia, including from Serbia more than half of those who survived the Second World War.

Today the majority of Serbia's Jews live in Belgrade, with smaller communities in Novi Sad, Sombor, Subotica, and Niš. Both numerically and politically and economically they exert almost no influence at all in the republic.¹⁴ In politics they occupy no prominent position but can be found in culture and in the police.¹⁵ In view of the foregoing, there is no doubt that the perpetuation of anti-Semitism in Serbia requires no (influential) Jews: 'The fact that anti-Semitism is in evidence in environments where no one has seen a Jew suggests an irrational phenomenon and a hatred for which Jews are not indispensable.'¹⁶

3. ANTI-SEMITISM IN SERBIA TODAY

The existence of anti-Semitism in Serbia shows that the formal introduction of democracy into politics through the inauguration of a multi-party system, freedom of thought and free speech in the wake of communism does not necessarily result in genuine democratization of politics and society. The effort to realize the Serb nationalist project has given birth to right-wing political parties as well as a welter of nationalist, chauvinist, and racist organizations.

Not infrequently, freedom of thought and free speech has in Serbia been taken to mean the right to hate speech, through which anti-Semitism has been and continues to be openly propagated. The general political and social climate of intolerance allows anti-Semitism to be manifested in its various forms. Given that it has grown in intensity in recent years, it cannot be regarded as a marginal phenomenon.

3.1. PRESENT SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

The removal of Milošević did not result in a total break with the nationalist policy, so in the wake of several lost wars nationalism, xenophobia, and intolerance continue to exert a strong influence on political and social life in Serbia. The frustration in political life and in society as a whole stems from the inability (or rather the absence of

¹³ Dr Krinka Vidaković-Petrov, '*Dijaspora je dijalog o identitetu*', *NIN*, 3 January 2002.

¹⁴ Rather than being a qualitative judgement of their individual or collective contribution to Serbia's political, economic, and social life, this is an objective appraisal of their potential to shape politics and its priorities, a potential which is in stark contrast to the dominant prejudice concerning their clout.

¹⁵ Filip David, '*Puzeći i otvoreni antisemitizam*', *Kažiprst*, Radio B92, Belgrade, 10 April 2005.

¹⁶ Aca Singer, president of the Union of Jewish Municipalities in Serbia and Montenegro, *Danas*, 26-27 March 2006.

a desire) to face the recent past and the catastrophic consequences it has had not only for neighbouring states and peoples, but for Serbia itself.

In spite of promulgating the new Constitution on 7 November 2006, Serbia is still not constituted as a state. The undefined status of Kosovo, which the Constitution treats as an integral part of the Republic of Serbia, prevents the definition of the country's territorial sovereignty, in the absence of which even the institutions of the state cannot ensure an institutional-legal framework indispensable to the normal operation of the state and society.

The idea, enshrined in the Preamble of the new Constitution, of a national-civil state and a state of others betrays the lack of fundamental understanding of the modern state on the part of Serbia's political elites. The defeat of the national project has brought about no redefinition of the direction in which Serbia's future is to be charted. The 'all Serbs in one state' project has been renamed 'a state first for Serbs (and then for citizens and others)'. Serbia's territorial sovereignty still being up in the air, the elites have attached priority in their political and wider social engagement to defining the personal sovereignty of the Serbian state on the basis of a single-nation identity and on that nation's collective memory.

The reordering of the collective memory and the creation of a new Serb identity are pursued with reference to three key periods in Serbia's modern history: the Second World War, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and its disintegration through wars. This process has been monopolized by the state and by the national political, social, and intellectual elites.¹⁷ In their revision of the past, these elites do not take as their point of departure a critical appraisal of the net results of each of these three periods; on the contrary, they proceed from a relativization of their problematic aspects, i.e. (anti)fascism and nationalism. For this reason trivialized (anti)fascism and nationalism find room in political decisions, cultural production, social life, and public discourse. The new interpretation of history and the selective collective memory it conditions not only define current socio-political life in Serbia but doubtless augur a controversial future too. Thus reordered national memory is becoming the root not only of Serbia's new national and state identity, but also of its inability to integrate politically and socially the members of the minority communities which are objectively opposed to such an interpretation of the past and to the future which can be built on that basis. There has been no break with this trend since 5 October 2000. On account of its internal political differences, mainly as to the desired course of change, but also of its 'ideological' differences, the ruling DOS coalition failed to make a break with the Milošević legacy. The introduction of religious teaching into elementary schools, the rigid political attitudes to Kosovo, the affording the church a direct role in politics though its participation in the Kosovo talks, the refusal of the government of Vojislav Koštunica fully to cooperate with the Hague Tribunal, etc, keep Serbia in a vicious circle of nationalism to this day.

The lack of a wider political as well as social will to take a critical look at and cognizance of phenomena such as anti-Semitism, xenophobia, racism, intolerance, etc, which are the concomitant of nationalism, deprives Serbian society of a chance to reconstitute itself into a democratic, tolerant and, above all, auto-reflexive society ready to accept difference as such instead of focusing on its own continuing frustrations or making assessments in terms of its own needs.

¹⁷ 'Sigurnost građana u nedovršenoj državi', Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2006.

3.2.POLITICAL ANTI-SEMITISM

Historically viewed, political anti-Semitism has manifested itself in specific political actions aimed at depriving the Jews of their citizenship and civic status, at imposing special levies on them and confiscating their property, at ghettoising, deporting, and exterminating them as a *final solution*. It culminated during the life of the Third Reich which devised and put into operation a machinery for the systematic production of corpses.

Implicit if not explicit anti-Semitism survives the Holocaust and the adoption of numerous international legal documents starting with the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, and others.

The roots of modern political anti-Semitism may be sought within the context of the growing radicalization of democratic societies and the increasing evidence of right-wing trends in Europe, especially in Serbia. Right-wing radicalism and populism have become a major characteristic of the contemporary European political scene. The wider social and economic crisis is characterized by a quest for a new identity in substantially changed circumstances, a still predominantly discursive quest marked by anti-immigrant, anti-Islamic, and anti-Semitic verbal attacks. In the countries of eastern and central Europe, former members of the Warsaw Pact, this is additionally aggravated by the reinterpretation of their communist and, above all, anti-fascist past including by all means the 'national' perceptions of anti-Semitism.

Since the defeat of the war project, Serb nationalism has been looking to its ideological roots, especially to the conservative thought personified by Nikolaj Velimirović, Justin Popović, and the 'pragmatic policy' of the fascist Dimitrije Ljotić and the quisling Milan Nedić. In Serbia, it was the post-communist,¹⁸ nationalistic remodelling of the collective memory, which declared Nazi collaborators victims of communism, that paved the way for the political and social sanction of anti-Semitism. The rehabilitation of the fascist, quisling, and Chetnik movements in Serbia has laid the ideological foundations for the relativization of extreme nationalism and of the consequences of the policy conducted under its aegis, thus creating a political and social climate for numerous racist and anti-Semitic campaigns.¹⁹ Given that the majority of political parties with right-wing leanings have implicitly legitimized conservative individuals and problematic periods from Serbia's more recent history, one may speak of an implicit or even explicit embracement of anti-Semitic theology and ideology on Serbia's political stage.

The rehabilitation of fascism, or of national anti-fascism according to those who conduct the rehabilitation²⁰ with a view to a 'normalization' of nationalism, provides a framework within which anti-Semitism figures side by side with racism and xenophobia. In this context, the new 'national heroes' such as Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić

¹⁸ Post-communist both in an ideological sense and in terms of negating the multi-ethnic character of the Yugoslav state and its social identity.

¹⁹ 'Ljudska prava u senci nacionalizma. Srbija 2002', Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2003.

²⁰ Todor Kuljić, 'Antifašizam and anti-antifašizam. Propuštanje korisne prošlosti', *Politika*, 10 August 2006. The author sees at work in Serbia today the 'anti-fascisization of chauvinism...the promotion of an authentic national anti-fascism' through the legitimization of domestic fascists and quislings.

are often made use of in the fight against the ‘dirty anti-Serb propaganda’. Thus, for instance, the exhibition of photographs by the US journalist Ron Haviv, ‘Blood and Honey’, in several towns in Serbia was marred by incidents caused by Radovan Karadžić’s supporters chanting nationalist slogans.

In political discourse, one notices the use of anti-Semitic stereotypes in inter-party recriminations, such as ‘Labus the Jew’, ‘Koštunica’s mother’s a Jew’, and so on.²¹ A number of members of the Serb political elite – notably Vladan Batić, the justice minister in the Đinđić government, Dušan Bataković, and Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica – have publicly expressed their respect for Nikolaj Velimirović: ‘Bishop Nikolaj is an indisputable moral authority in Serbia...our road-guide who is and will always be with us...his teachings are the appropriate model for true patriots.’²²

3.3 BETWEEN THEORY OF CONSPIRACY AND ‘COMPARATIVE VICTIMHOOD’²³

The first years of war in the former Yugoslavia were marked by a revival of anti-Semitism and the political abuse of Jews through philo-Semitism. According to Milan Vukomanović, anti-Semitism was first revived by certain political circles personified by the ‘new left and right’ and the clero-nationalist, Ljotićite and Nedićite movements.²⁴

The theory of an international conspiracy against Serbia, launched by the Milošević regime and the satellite parties such as the Yugoslav Left and the Serbian Radical Party, had the object of explaining away the failures of Serbia’s warlike and nationalist policy. An integral part of this theory was the thesis about the existence of ‘shadow rulers’, that is, of Jewish power centres, which was a main generator of anti-Semitism in Serbia. Other than there allegedly being a ‘...planet-wide Jewish conspiracy against Christian Orthodoxy, especially against the Serb people...’,²⁵ there was said to be a conspiracy by fifth-colonists including Jews and the few political groups and especially nongovernmental organizations opposed to the warlike policy.

These stereotypes are based chiefly on anti-Semitic publications, notably the *Protocol of the Wise Men of Zion*. It was in this light too that the numerous foreign and international initiatives seeking to prevent fighting in the former Yugoslavia were interpreted, because they had been initiated and signed by Jews among others. At the same time, Serbia’s Jews were asked to make an apology for the acts of the US Administration including the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999.²⁶ As Milorad Tomanić has observed, this theory of a worldwide conspiracy against the Serbs and of a ‘new world order’ was actually part of a well thought-out Serb plan boiling down to a ‘...Serb

²¹ Aleksandar Lebl, ‘Savremeni antisemitizam u Srbiji i svetu’, talk at the New Serbian Right and Anti-Semitism round table, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Belgrade, 3 November 2005.

²² Jovan Byford, ‘Potiskivanje i poricanje antisemitizma. Sećanje na vladiku Nikolaja Velimirovića u savremenoj srpskoj pravoslavnoj kulturi’, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2005.

²³ Tony Judt, ‘From the House of the Dead: On Modern European Memory’, *The New York Review*.

²⁴ Milan Vukomanović, ‘O čemu crkva (ne) može da se pita. SPC, država i društvo u Srbiji (2000-2005)’, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2005.

²⁵ Filip David, ‘Antisemitizam među nama’, *Danas*, 6-9 January 2000.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

conspiracy against the whole world and to a “new Serb order” that was to be imposed at least in the territory of the former SFRY.²⁷

As well as encouraging anti-Semitism, certain political and intellectual circles promoted philo-Semitism. In his *Potiskivanje i poricanje antisemitizma*, Jovan Byford observes that the drawing of parallels between Serb and Jewish histories was closely ‘...related to the martyrdom myth characteristic of Serb nationalist discourse...’²⁸ In the late 1980s and the early 1990s in particular this ‘analogy’ was abused by many intellectuals who pointed to a ‘historical fatality rendering the Serb and Jewish people increasingly alike’²⁹ or argued that ‘For the Serbs, every square foot of Kosovo is a Jerusalem: there is no difference between the suffering of Serbs and Jews. The Serbs are the thirteenth, lost and most unfortunate tribe of Israel.’³⁰

The promotion of philo-Semitism had another objective: to reinterpret the recent historical context of Serbia’s war of aggression against neighbouring states of the former Yugoslavia and its nationalist policy towards minorities; this was done by investing the Serb people with the role of victim on the historical model of the persecution of the Jews especially during the Holocaust. The ‘analogy’ between the fates of the Serb and Jewish peoples also drew upon the period of the Second World War especially in the Independent State of Croatia, whose ideologues ‘blamed “Croatia’s misfortune” primarily on the Serbs and then on the Jews...’ – ‘Serbs and Jews know what it means to be the object of collective hatred, so the lessons of historical experience should not be lightly forgotten.’³¹

Another object of the philo-Semitic rhetoric – wooing the Jewish-dominated power centres with a view to obtaining their support in defence of the ‘suffering Serb people and lands’ – actually helped to sustain the conspiracy theory and anti-Semitic stereotypes. The Society of Serb-Jewish Friendship, founded on 21 November 1988, was designed as a vehicle for this abuse, declaring as its aim ‘bringing closer together the two peoples who have “often been unjustly accused just because they are different [from the rest]”’³² and becoming close with those power centres which can help solve the ‘Serb question’. Among its founders were Serb nationalist intellectuals inside the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) – Ljubomir Tadić (president), Dobrica Ćosić (one of the authors of the SANU Memorandum), and others³³ – and several members of the Jewish community including the ubiquitous Klara Mandić. Financially supported by the authorities, the Society became part of the regime’s propaganda machinery.³⁴ The launching of the claims about the existence of power centres in which Jews called the

²⁷ Milorad Tomanić, *Srpska crkva u ratu i ratovi u njoj*, Medijska knjižara krug, Belgrade, 2001.

²⁸ Jovan Byford, ‘*Potiskivanje i poricanje antisemitizma. Sećanje na vladiku Nikolaja Velimirovića u savremenoj srpskoj pravoslavnoj kulturi*’, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2005.

²⁹ Dobrica Ćosić in ‘*Antisemitizam*’, *Ljudska prava u tranziciji, Srbija 2001*, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2002.

³⁰ Vuk Drašković, *ibid.*

³¹ Dr Krinka Vidaković-Petrov, ‘*Dijaspora je dijalog o identitetu*’, *NIN*, 3 Januar 2002.

³² ‘*Antisemitizam*’, *Ljudska prava u tranziciji, Srbija 2001*, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2002, p. 268.

³³ At the time the Society was founded, 16 of its 20 members were from SANU. Novi horizonti, Veza sa Izraelom, <http://www.novihorizonti.com/test/tekst.asp?ArtikalID=721>.

³⁴ Laslo Sekelj, *Antisemitism and Jewish Identity in Serbia After the 1991 Collapse of the Yugoslav State*, The Vidal Sassoon International Centre for the Study of Antisemitism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism, 1997, acta no. 12.

shots was fully compatible with the official policy of the Milošević regime based on a conspiracy theory. The Society never enjoyed the support of the Jewish organizations in Serbia. The Union of Jewish Municipalities and Jewish intellectuals strongly objected to the Society's position, criticising it³⁵ and making numerous protests against its announcements.

3.4. AMTI-SEMITIZM WITHIN THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Following the collapse of socialism, during which period the state determined the nature of its relationship with the religious communities,³⁶ and the outbreak of armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the SPC was given an opportunity to throw its full weight behind the Greater Serbia project. The SPC exploited the rise of nationalism in Serbia to ensure its rehabilitation with a view to retraditionalizing Serbian society and shaping a new collective identity. This implied, among other things, a squaring of accounts with the communist ideology, whose 'main victim was the church itself and then the Serb people',³⁷ cleansing the national identity of this ideology was considered of crucial importance for any return to traditions and Orthodoxy.

The insistence on traditions and Orthodoxy was not confined to the context of the SPC's showdown with the communists but became an integral part of the warlike policy itself. Loyalty to Orthodoxy and to the SPC figured prominently in Serb war folklore.³⁸ In 1991 and 1992 the SPC admittedly made several appeals for reconciliation and the cessation of hostilities, but as war in Bosnia took hold it 'demanded' that the war effort be pursued and blocked peace processes.³⁹

The fundamentalism of the SPC is manifested in its advocacy of a return to the roots and beginnings, its opposition to secularization, and its rejection of enlightenment traditions and modern scientific, technical, and political achievements; combined with the SPC's status of an institution enjoying the greatest trust of the citizens, this fundamentalism has been instrumental in the creation of a new Serb national identity which is largely characterized by the absence of tolerance and the rejection of modern political values.

In recent history the SPC has helped the perpetuation of anti-Semitism by laying the foundations for and fabricating the new Serb identity. The first and most significant of its actions was the canonization of Nikolaj Velimirović. The decision to canonize Nikolaj Velimirović was taken unanimously by the SPC Holy Assembly of Bishops in May 2003. As a result, Velimirović is regarded in Serbia today as the most distinguished religious personality since Saint Sava.⁴⁰ The successful rehabilitation of Nikolaj Velimirović after forty years of marginalization has been hailed by the SPC as proof of

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

³⁶ *Sigurnost građana u nedovršenoj državi. Srbija 2005*, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2006.

³⁷ Radovan Kupres, *Srpska pravoslavna crkva i novi srpski identitet*, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2006.

³⁸ Ivan Čolović, *Bordel ratnika, XX vek*, Belgrade, 2000.

³⁹ Milan Vukomanović, 'O čemu crkva (ne) može da se pita. SPC, država i društvo u Srbiji (2000-2005)', Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2005.

⁴⁰ Jovan Byford, 'Potiskivanje i poricanje antisemitizma. Sećanje na vladiku Nikolaja Velimirovića u savremenoj srpskoj pravoslavnoj kulturi', Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2005.

the capacity of the ‘Serb nation as a whole for revitalization, as well as the much-needed validation of its spiritual values.’⁴¹ The touting of Nikolaj Velimirović as a key spiritual authority has been accompanied not only by the issue of his works but also by the publication of numerous laudatory writings about him. However, Velimirović’s connections with the Nazi collaborators – ‘...Bishop Nikolaj, “[who was] close to Nedić and Ljotić not only did not object to the totalitarian political systems, but clearly came out in their favour”...’⁴² – and his demonstrated anti-Semitism – ‘All of the modern European devices are the invention of the Jews, who crucified Christ: democracy, strikes, socialism, atheism, tolerance of all religions, pacifism, world revolution, capitalism, communism alike. All these are the invention of the Jews or rather of their father the devil’⁴³ – are in direct contrast to the myth about his martyrdom.

The person and work of Nikolaj Velimirović serve as an inspiration to many right-wing youth organizations which operate if not formally as part of the SPC then under its wing, and which are in the forefront of the anti-Semitic drive in Serbia today.

Several Jewish demands that the SPC dissociate itself from Nikolaj Velimirović’s anti-Semitism have not borne fruit because ‘...Velimirović’s anti-European, anti-culture, and...anti-Semitic spirit is implanted in what today constitutes the substance of a good many people from the church.’⁴⁴

When the SPC articulates its dissociation from and condemnation of anti-Semitism, it does so mostly in the context of its abuse of philo-Semitism. Its philo-Semitic rhetoric is based on the use of comparative victimhood,⁴⁵ the object of which is the defence of the Greater-Serbia project and the negation and relativization of its extreme manifestations including anti-Semitism. In its numerous press releases, the SPC refers to the martyrdom and victimhood of the Jewish and Serb peoples in the past, stresses the authority of the Christian Orthodox Church, and denies that its dogma encourages anti-Semitism. Although the SPC is officially opposed to anti-Semitism, the fact remains that certain circles within it are anti-Semitic; also, the canonization of Nikolaj Velimirović suggests that as an institution the SPC continues to figure in Serbia’s political and social life as a promoter of at least implicit anti-Semitism.

Given that anti-Semitism appears in Serbia today within a wider context of radicalization, intolerance, xenophobia, and racism, and considering that the SPC has largely contributed to this state of affairs by its political and social engagement, one cannot help feeling that its declarative condemnation of anti-Semitism is a gesture of political correctness rather than reflecting its substantive position on this and related issues.

The active support of the SPC to the rehabilitation of fascists, collaborators, and Chetniks from the period of the Second World War – Dimitrije Ljotić, Milan Nedić, and Draža Mihajlović – all of whom were more or less anti-Semites,⁴⁶ bears out the fact that

⁴¹ Atanasije Jevtić, *ibid.*

⁴² Mirko Đorđević in *Ljudska prava u tranziciji. Srbija 2001*, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2002.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Filip David, Most Radija slobodna Evropa: Koliko je antisemitizam prisutan u Srbiji i Hrvatskoj, *Dijagnoza bolesnog društva, Danas*, 16-17 April 2005.

⁴⁵ Comparative victimhood. Tony Judt, ‘From the House of the Dead: On Modern European Memory’, *The New York Review*.

⁴⁶ Laslo Sekelj, *Antisemitism and Jewish Identity in Serbia After the 1991 Collapse of the Yugoslav State*, The Vidal Sassoon International Centre for the Study of Antisemitism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism, 1997.

other than declaratively, the SPS does not wish to dissociate itself from anti-Semitism in its ranks.

3.5 CIVIL SCENE ANTI-SEMITISM

Blatant anti-Semitic incidents are a feature of Serbia's 'civil scene', which is made up of a large number of more or less formal radical right-wing and (clero-)fascist groups. The identity of the persons standing behind the more violent incidents involving the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, monuments and religious facilities, the writing of graffiti and the pasting of posters cannot be established with any degree of certainty: except for three persons arrested for putting up anti-Semitic posters in March 2005, the public is still in the dark as to the identity of the perpetrators.

Characteristically, the right-wing and clero-fascist organizations attract mostly young people who find their foothold of belief in what has been promoted in the last twenty years or so as a wider social trend, namely revised Serb nationalism and return to traditional Orthodox values. The more extreme among these, such as skinheads, Nacionalni stroj (National Formation),⁴⁷ Krv i čast (Blood and Honour), and Rasni nacionalisti - rasonalisti (Racial Nationalists - *Racialnalists*), have embraced the Nazi ideology as their own. All of these organizations have in common extreme anti-Westernism and rejection of liberal values, racism, nationalism and chauvinism, ideological exclusivity, and xenophobia. Needless to say that anti-Semitism figures too in this milieu. Whereas the proved activities⁴⁸ of the aforementioned groups amount mostly to virtual anti-Semitism, the activities of Serb right-wing youth organizations such as Dveri srbske (Serbian Door), Obraz (Honour), Sveti Justin Filozof (St Justin the Philosopher), Nomokanon (Nomocanon), and Svetozar Miletić include numerous and highly popular panel discussions and periodicals.

Although many public activities of Serb right-wing youth organizations are not explicitly anti-Semitic, the very fact that they support, among other things, the rehabilitation of Nikolaj Velimirović, Milan Nedić, Dimitrije Ljotić, and the Chetnik movement suggests a latent anti-Semitism.

Since civil sector anti-Semitism conforms to the pattern over the last decade and a half of expressing intolerance and often of rabid hatred of minority groups in Serbia, it paints a picture of society's general state of affairs. As the Israeli ambassador to Serbia, Jafa Ben Ari, has observed in an interview with *Danas* (9 May 2005), in Serbia 'there is no question of anti-Semitism *per se*, but of hatred simmering below the surface'.

3.6 ANTI-SEMITISM IN CULTURE - PUBLISHING

Since the end of the 1980s Serbia's publishing sector has been a most prominent propagator of anti-Semitism, with over 150 titles published by various publishing establishments. Some of these specialize in anti-Semitic publishing, notably Ihtus - Hrišćanska knjiga and Klub nacionalnih knjiga Velvet.

⁴⁷ The Serbian Ministry of the Interior (MUP) classes this organization as anti-Semitic, among other things, *NIN*, 29 December 2005.

⁴⁸ Placing lists of Jews and anti-Semitic texts of Third Reich officials on web sites.

The *Protocol of the Wise Men of Zion* has proved an especially successful product of the anti-Semitic publishing effort, having been printed in twelve different editions between 1990 and 2001,⁴⁹ among the publishers, Ratibor Đurđević holds pride of place, having authored most of over fifty anti-Semitic titles published by Ihtus - Hrišćanska knjiga.⁵⁰

According to Aca Singer, many of the anti-Semitic titles freely published and circulated in Serbia in recent years are far more injurious than the Protocols: Ratibor Đurđević's *Jevrejsko ritualno ubistvo* (Jewish ritual murder) is one of such works. The following is a list of some of the titles that have been on display in Belgrade bookshops: *Jevrejska zavera* (the Jewish conspiracy); *Srpski narod u kandžama Jevreja* (the Serb people in Jewish clutches); *Pod šestokrakom zvezdom – Judaizam i slobodno zidarstvo u prošlosti i sadašnjosti* (under the six-pointed star – Judaism and free masonry in the past and at present); *Zašto se divim Adolfu Hitleru* (why I admire Adolf Hitler); *Mrtve krave protiv šest miliona mrtvih Jevreja* (dead cows vs. six million dead Jews); *Zašto je rasizam ispravan* (why racism is right); *Zašto mrzim Jevreje* (why I hate Jews); *Protokoli sionskih mudraca* (protocols of the wise men of Zion); *Vladika Nikolaj o Judejcima, neprijateljima hrišćana i hrišćanstva* (Bishop Nikolaj on the Judeans, enemies of Christians and Christianity); *Zli i prokleti* (the evil and damned); *Zavera nad zaverama* (the conspiracy of conspiracies); *Zlotvori čovečanstva* (mankind's fiends); *Pet krvavih revolucija judeo bankara* (the five bloody revolutions of the Judean bankers); *Svetosavski nacionalizam u judeo-masonskom okruženju* (the nationalism of St Sava in a Judeo-masonic encirclement); *Holokaust – dogma judaizma* (Holocaust – the dogma of Judaism); *Talmud – izvornik satansko-judejskog porobljavanja čovečanstva* (Talmud – the fountainhead of the satanic-Judean enslavement of mankind); *Prokleti Hanan* (the cursed Hanaan); *Judejska zavera protiv boga i čoveka* (the Judean conspiracy against God and man); *O semitskoj opasnosti i lomljenju srpske kičme u Drugom svetskom ratu* (on the Semitic peril and the breaking of the Serb backbone in the Second World War); *Zašto su Jevreji kroz celu istoriju protiv Srba. Ko su oni?* (why the Jews have been against the Serbs throughout history, who are they?); *Jevreji u ogledalu Svetog pisma* (the Jews in the mirror of the Bible); *Zli i prokleti: Dušmani savremenog čovečanstva* (evil and cursed: the foes of modern mankind); *Drama savremenog čovečanstva* (the drama of modern mankind); *Cionizam, komunizam i 'novi' svetski poredak* (Zionism, Communism and the 'new' world order); *Sindrom straha od Judejaca u Americi* (the fear of Judeans in America syndrome); *Rugobe i laži američke demokratije* (the monstrosities and lies of American democracy); etc.

Reprints of the works of Milan Nedić, Dimitrije Ljotić, and Nikolaj Velimirović figure prominently in the anti-Semitic publishing sector. Further, periodicals such as *Logos*,⁵¹ *Kruna*, *Velika Srbija*,⁵² and *Pravoslavlje*,⁵³ as well as certain tabloids, run anti-Semitic texts or articles by authors who can be linked to anti-Semitism. In reply to protests from the Union of Jewish Municipalities, the publishers and authors of such articles mostly reply that the readers themselves should be allowed to judge what is true and what false in them. In spite of many complaints filed by the Union of Jewish

⁴⁹ Laslo Sekelj, *NIN*, 2 August 2001.

⁵⁰ The letter of the Union of Jewish Municipalities in Yugoslavia to the SPC Holy Assembly of Bishops dated 28 November 2000.

⁵¹ The periodical of the Belgrade Divinity College students.

⁵² The organ of the Serbian Radical Party.

⁵³ The organ of the SPC.

Municipalities against publishers of anti-Semitic books, the prosecutors have decided not to prosecute criminally in most cases.⁵⁴

The presence of anti-Semitism in culture is also substantiated by Nebojša Vasović book *Lažni car Šćepan Kiš*, published by Narodna knjiga of Belgrade: in this work with a marked anti-Semitic subtext, Danilo Kiš is accused of having achieved his success thanks to his international Jewish connections; that he chose not to write about the ‘cooperation of Jews and Nazis and those who...“profited from” Nazism and Stalinism’.⁵⁵ The book reduces the ‘Jewish identity to “gain” and to a “racial” or rather racist substance’.⁵⁶ As well as maligning Danilo Kiš, the author alleges that ‘cultural policy in Serbia was for years determined by writers such as Oto-Bihalji Merin, Eli Finci, Oskar Davičo, Erih Koš...’⁵⁷

4. GOVERNMENT REACTION

There is hardly any adequate reaction on the part of the Serbian authorities to anti-Semitic propaganda, incidents, publications and to hate speech in general in which anti-Semitism figures. Under Article 134 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia, anti-Semitism may be criminally prosecuted as the dissemination of religious, national, and racial hatred. A demand by the Union of Jewish Municipalities to include in the Criminal Code a special provision penalizing the criminal offence of anti-Semitism, negation of the Holocaust, minimizing the number of Jewish victims,⁵⁸ and glorifying Nazi ideology and leaders was turned down. Further, Article 38 of the Law on Public Information of the Republic of Serbia prohibits the publishing of ideas, information, and opinions encouraging discrimination, hatred or violence against persons or groups of persons on the basis of their race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, etc. In spite of this, a great many of the complaints filed against publishers of anti-Semitic literature by the Union of Jewish Municipalities have been turned down by the prosecuting authorities.⁵⁹

Most reaction to anti-Semitic discourse and incidents remains on the level of verbal condemnation and critique. A series of coordinated incidents in March 2005 provoked a stormy reaction from the liberal public and well as verbal condemnations from the SPC and the SANU; all the same, lack of an adequate response led Civic Initiatives to issue a press release saying that the ‘new wave of extreme Serb nationalism is under the aegis of certain state and church institutions’.⁶⁰ On the occasion of the incidents at the Novi Sad Faculty of Philosophy on 9 November 2005, Professor Milenko Perović charged that the authorities’ unwillingness to prohibit the activities of extremist

⁵⁴ Aca Singer, the president of the Union of Jewish Municipalities in Serbia and Montenegro, *Danas*, 26-27 March 2006.

⁵⁵ Aleksandar Jerkov, *NIN*, 24 February 2005.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Filip David, Most Radija slobodna Evropa: Koliko je antisemitizam prisutan u Srbiji i Hrvatskoj, *Dijagnoza bolesnog društva*, *Danas*, 16-17 April 2005.

⁵⁸ Aca Singer, the president of the Union of Jewish Municipalities in Serbia and Montenegro, *Danas*, 26-27 March 2006.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* Moreover, in 2001, Milija Milovanović, the Belgrade deputy district prosecutor, dismissed a complaint by the Union of Jewish Municipalities of Yugoslavia against the publishers of the *Protocols*, saying there were no grounds for *ex officio* prosecution.

⁶⁰ *Danas*, 24 March 2005.

organizations betrays the fact that the 'ruling political nomenclature in some of its elements shares the political beliefs of these extremist organizations.'⁶¹

It appears that the government's strategy is to characterize anti-Semitism in Serbia as an isolated phenomenon instead of treating it as an integral problem of the general socio-political radicalization. Furthermore, any reference to its existence and manifestations is frowned upon as an attempt to discredit the democratic policy and society and to obstruct the process of reconciliation. The reactions of numerous politicians from the ruling coalition, as well as of certain institutions of the state, to the spate of organized anti-Semitic attacks in the spring of 2005 suggest a link between anti-Semitism and major centres of political power bent on damaging the reputation of the country: 'Just as we have begun to repair the reputation of the country, an action has been launched in order to damage that reputation. This action *is* orchestrated, but from a different source and with a different objective...'⁶²

In response to the report of the Council of Europe monitoring mission on the Serbian parliamentary elections held on 28 December 2003, which criticizes anti-Semitic tendencies during the election campaign, the Ministry for National and Minority Rights of Serbia and Montenegro announced on 28 January 2004 that the 'carelessly pronounced, sweeping assessments can only harm the process of reconciliation in the region and the development of inter-ethnic trust.'

Unfortunately, such interpretations of anti-Semitism in Serbia and reactions of the authorities indicate their unwillingness to get to grips with the legacy of a policy, now redefined as 'democratic nationalism', which they continue to promote with considerable zeal.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Eliminating anti-Semitism from Serbia's political and social life necessitates the following:

1. Having suffered military defeat, Serb nationalist policy must also be defeated mentally because the present nationalist political and social mindset continues to generate intolerance, xenophobia, fascism, anti-Semitism, and so on.
2. In order to change mental attitudes in Serbia, the curricula must be purged of all apologetic reinterpretations of the role of the collaborationists in the Second World War, of the role of Serbia in the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, and of all anti-Semitic ideologues and authors.
3. International institutions, especially the Council of Europe, ought to insist that the authorities react adequately to anti-Semitism and to other manifestations of hatred and intolerance, in compliance with relevant international documents.

⁶¹ Radio Free Europe, 26 August 2006.

⁶² Miroljub Labus, *Danas*, 24 March 2005.