

Right-Wing Extremism in Serbia

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- During the 1990s the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) was the most important promoter of the far right in Serbia. Slobodan Milošević's regime managed to keep it under control, thanks to its control over the mass media, although the SRS managed to poll 30 percent of the vote. However, after the political changes of October, 5th, 2000 (the fall of the Milošević regime) and the former SRS leader Vojislav Šešelj becoming an indictee before the Hague Tribunal (ICTY), the SRS split in 2008. The majority of the party and its supporters turned to the duo Tomislav Nikolić and Aleksandar Vučić, who since then have made successful efforts to pragmatically re-profile the new Serbian Progressive Party (SNP) as a moderately conservative political party. Following the general elections of 2012 the SNP formed a coalition government together with the post-Milošević SPS and Nikolić won last years' presidential election.
- Currently there is no powerful far-right party in Serbia that would unite the far right under one umbrella. This significantly weakens the action potential of the far right. After the defeat of the »old« SRS in the 2012 elections and the SNP's evolution into a moderate national-conservative party, Serbia today is one of the countries in Europe with no far-right political party in parliament, for the first time since the break-up of former Yugoslavia.
- However, there are strong movements at the far right of the political spectrum that despise parliamentarianism and political parties. They strive to bring Serbs back to their alleged roots – albeit Arian in the case of the neo-Nazis, or Serbian orthodox ones in the case of the *Obraz* group. Working-class youths, usually unemployed and generally not well-educated, serve as their recruiting base, and their activities take place in stadiums and streets where they can insult black football players and get into fights with the fans of opposing teams and the police, knowing full well that corrupt judges will spare them longer sentences even if they commit grave criminal offences. This situation is certainly aggravated by mass unemployment, which currently stands at more than one fourth of the overall population of working age and about 50 percent of people under 30 years of age.



Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. The Far-Right in Serbia during the 1990s	1
3. The General State of Affairs and Far-Right Actors in Serbia 2001–2012	2
4. Action Potential of the Far-Right in Serbia	5
5. Measures to Restrain the Far-Right	7
References	8



1. Introduction

The far right in Serbia, as well as in other post-socialist societies, came out into the open after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The wars between the Yugoslav successor states (1991–1995) acted as catalysts in the shaping of the far right, since they brought mainstream nationalism onto the agenda and hence rendered extreme nationalism, as an underlying tenet of the far right, socially acceptable. It was during this period that the uncritical glorification of World War II Chetnik traditions was resurrected, particularly the Chetnik plans to create an »ethnically pure« Greater Serbia which had led to the genocidal massacres of Muslim populations in Sandžak and Eastern Bosnia in 1942 and 1943 (Dedijer, Miletić, 1990).

The broader acceptance of the far right in Serbia was considerably facilitated by Serbia's foreign policy position. Following the aggressive foreign policy of the Milošević era, which culminated in the wars in post-Yugoslavia, the UN imposed harsh economic and cultural sanctions, which drove Serbia into isolation, thus favouring an increase in xenophobia, a special case that distinguishes the country from all other Balkan states. In May 1993, for example, 76 percent of the Serbian population were found to have xenophobic views, while previously that figure had never exceeded 15 percent (Pantić, 1998: 68; Goati, 2001: 69). In this context, we should be aware that it is not only the Serbian far right, and not even exclusively Serbian nationalists, but also the broader public in Serbia who still believe that the United States and the European Union have applied double standards with respect to Serbia when dealing with the problems of the former Yugoslavia.

In the view of many Serbs it was »the West« that first encouraged secessionist nationalism and introduced the idea of the republics leaving the former Yugoslavia. Western politicians insisted that the dissolution of Yugoslavia could only take place if the boundaries of its republics (i.e. the »internal borders«) were observed – i.e. remained unchanged. Yet, as many Serbs see it, Serbia subsequently became the only one of the former Yugoslav republics to have its boundaries altered when Kosovo, a former autonomous province of Serbia, seceded under the protection of NATO bombers. Finally, Serbia would like to annex four municipalities in Northern Kosovo where Serbs are in the vast majority, but many Serbs see their country as »prohibited« from changing the bor-

ders of the seceded Kosovo in order to do this. In general, the Serbian public considers this policy as unprincipled and unjust, which, along with the dire economic situation, fosters national frustration and consequently the broadening and strengthening of Serbian nationalism and of the far right. Given that many Serbs hold this perception of the events of the last twenty years, there is little space for them to admit that the initial aggression had its origin in the failed policies of Milošević, which inevitably led to Yugoslavia's dissolution.

2. The Far-Right in Serbia during the 1990s

During the 1990s the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) was the most important, if not indeed the only, promoter of the far right in Serbia. It was the party that, thanks to its charismatic leader, Vojislav Šešelj¹ – the youngest person to acquire a PhD degree in socialist Yugoslavia and the former Professor of the Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo (B-H) and of the Law School in Belgrade – and despite the primitive nature of his views enjoyed considerable support of the body politic and marginalised other figures on the far right. Šešelj is presently an indictee before the Hague Tribunal (ICTY). However, Slobodan Milošević's regime managed to keep this support under control, thanks to its control over the mass media, its placement of secret service agents within the SRS, and ultimately its incarceration of Šešelj. As early as the May 1992 elections for the Federal Parliament of the FRY, when the wars between the Yugoslav successor states were in full swing and when the SRS was still cooperating with the SPS, it managed to poll 30 percent of the vote in Serbia: yet only one and a half years later, by which time it had become embroiled in a conflict with Milošević's SPS, this support had fallen to 13.8 percent (Goati, 2001: 52, 72).

Generally, from 1990 until it split in 2008, the SRS was a »planet« of the far right with a number of more or less organised or dispersed far-right satellites orbiting around it. This tactical cooperation was to continue uninterrupted until the late 1990s, despite differences over some issues. It was not until 1999, when skinheads killed

1. In the second round of the 1997 presidential election he managed to win a victory over Zoran Lilić, nominated by Milošević's SPS. However, since the election law at that time stipulated that more than half of registered voters must participate in the ballot for it to be valid, he had to reconcile himself with the fact that he did not become president.



a boy of Roma ethnicity named Dušan Jovanović that these links broke. Šešelj refused to support the killers, and the neo-Nazi skinheads terminated their cooperation with the SRS.

However, after the political changes of 5 October 2000 and the fall of the Milošević regime, new far-right organisations began to form in a different social environment. These established cooperation with the SRS, which, under the leadership of Tomislav Nikolić and Aleksandar Vučić, was by then gradually moving towards a more moderate position, focusing on social issues and thus gaining popularity with the voters.

3. The General State of Affairs and Far-Right Actors in Serbia 2001–2012

At the very beginning of this period the far right was very much on the defensive, barely managing to stay alive. The enthusiasm for Europe on the part of much of Serbian society, which cherished the unrealistic hope of swift social development and accession to the EU, together with the resolute modernising leadership of the new prime minister, Zoran Đindić, created an atmosphere in society that was not conducive to the development of far-right ideas. Accordingly, the SRS won only 8.5 percent of the vote in the December elections of 2000.

However, as the public came to realise that the promised rapid social development and EU accession were not feasible and, moreover, faced a wave of privatisation that threw vast numbers of people out of work, the number of people who perceived themselves as »losers« of the transition increased rapidly and a mood of disappointment and despair gained the upper hand among large sectors of society. In addition, the weakness of the political elite and the close links between parts of it with tycoons of the Milošević regime (Lazić, 2011) as well as the widespread corruption and the power of organised crime, which ultimately led to Prime Minister Đindić's assassination, produced major disillusionment with politics. In the ensuing atmosphere of entrenched national and social frustrations, the new generation that grew up during the 1990s and reached adulthood after 2000 became easy prey both for the old and the newly emerging far-right movements such as *Obraz*, *Nacionalni stroj*, *Krv i čast*, *Srpski narodni pokret 1389*, *Srpski narodni pokret Naši*, and *Srbska akcija*.

However, the split in the SRS in 2008 dealt a major blow to the far-right milieu. At that time the majority of the party and its supporters turned to the duo Tomislav Nikolić and Aleksandar Vučić, who since then have made successful efforts to pragmatically re-profile the new Serbian Progressive Party (SNP) as a moderately conservative political party.² This development can be compared with Gianfranco Fini's political project in Italy, which evolved from a neo-fascist to a »normal« conservative party. Following the general elections and presidential elections of 2012 the SNP formed a coalition government together with the post-Milošević SPS and Tomislav Nikolic' who won the presidential election against the incumbent Boris Tadić from the Democratic Party (DP).

Given, however, that the focus of this study is the far-right political scene in Serbia, we should at this point return to the remainder of the SRS, which in 2008 was left in a vacuum, having lost its charismatic leader, (by that time, Seselj was already on trial in The Hague) and suffered from the political paranoia of an indomitable leader who perceived everybody as a potential »traitor«.³ Thus in the 2012 parliamentary elections, the SRS for the first time since its founding failed to pass the 5 percent threshold required to gain seats in parliament.

It is reasonable to assume that the Serbian Radical Party lost some of its votes to *Dveri*,⁴ a highly conservative but not, or at least not yet, a far-right ideological and political movement, instead espousing a turn-of-the-twentieth-century conservatism much like Joseph de Maistre's. This movement evidently enjoys the support of the more conservative parts of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) and expressly rejects the fascist tradition, anti-Semitism and the use of violence to achieve ideological aims. It does, however, foster extreme conservatism, promoting the family as the most important social institution and advocating a religious-moralistic outlook. As one might expect, this movement fosters an explicitly homophobic position, evident in its organisation of *Family Walks* on the day before the *Pride Parade*; but it

2. Some wrong turns have been taken, best illustrated by the signing of a cooperation agreement with the Austrian Freedom Party of Heinz-Christian Strache. If it wishes to unburden itself of the legacy of its far-right past, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNP) would need to sever its ties with the Serbian Radical Party and with the far-right parties of the EU and Russia (Bakić, 2007).

3. Vojislav Šešelj's spouse, Jadranka, stood as a presidential candidate for the SRS in 2012 and received 3.9 percent of the vote.

4. The movement *Dveri* also failed to pass the 5 percent threshold, so it has no representation in parliament.

does not incite its supporters to physically assault the LGBT population. Following the Russian model, in 2012 it called on the government to ban the Parade for the next 100 years.⁵ Serbian nationalism and anti-globalisation (expressed in an anti-American orientation and a reserved attitude to the EU) are clearly important components of Dveri ideology so that one can say that it exhibits certain symptoms of the far right but these are not sufficient to classify the movement as such.⁶

Its leaders, a secondary school teacher of Serbian literature called Boško Obradović and a jurist, Vladan Glišić,⁷ are civilised people who, unlike Vojislav Šešelj or the leader of *Obraz*, Mladen Obradović, do not insult their opponents, but direct their sharp criticism at the illegitimate oligarchic structure of the Serbian social system. War veterans, religious students, and the more conservative parts of the Serbian Orthodox Church as well as the armed forces and the police form *Dveri's* popular base.

Unlike *Dveri*, *Srpski narodni pokret 1389*, founded in 2004, is a movement that can definitely be classified as far right. It is characterised by Serbian nationalism and takes a particularly demagogic stance on the Kosovo issue. In addition, it does not shrink from violence to achieve its goals. The first »primary goal« is to »liberate and unite all of Serbian territory into a single Serbian state«; Serbian territories are deemed to be, in addition to those that the SRS also regards as Greater Serbia, the FYR of Macedonia and the »northern part of Albania«. The other »primary goal« is social justice, i. e. »confiscating and nationalising the property of tycoons and politicians who have got rich by stealing from the people and who have ruined the Serbian economy, leaving the workers to starve to death in the streets«. It also insists on the »nationalisation of Serbian firms acquired by foreign companies, which brought them to ruin and bankrupted them, and on the closure of foreign banks that rob the people«. The third »primary goal« is to fight the New World Order, i. e. the EU, the IMF and NATO. In addition to those already mentioned,

5. Dveri: *SPS ima jak gej lobi* (SPS has a strong gay lobby); <http://www.vesti-online.com/Vesti/Srbija/257328/Dveri-SPS-ima-jak-gej-lobi> (accessed on 18 October 2012).

6. Dveri: *Programska načela* (Program Principles); <http://www.dverisrpske.com/sr-CS/nasa-politika/programska-nacela/> (accessed on 28 July 2012).

7. As *Dveri* presidential candidate, he polled 2.7 percent of the votes at the 2012 election.

the main enemies listed are drug-addicts, »gay« and »other deviant movements«, sects and the Catholic Church, which, it is alleged, seeks to convert Orthodox believers to Catholicism. The movement is led by the non-charismatic figure of Miša Vacić,⁸ and the belligerent core is made up of fascistoid hooligan groups linked with organised crime in the guise of supporters of certain football clubs.

Another organisation that originated during the 2000s is *Srpski nacionalni pokret Naši*, under the leadership of Ivan M. Ivanović, who is not generally known to the broader public. He advocates »Euro-Asian integration« whereby Belgrade, along with Saint Petersburg, Kyiv and Alma Ata, would be one of the capitals of the »Euro-Asian Union«. Like *SNP 1389*, *SNP Naši* also advocates »liberating and uniting all Serbian territories« which were »occupied in the 1990s wars«, as well as Macedonia and Northern Albania, and it sees its main foes as the United States, NATO, the EU, the IMF, drug abuse and the »gay movement«. Moreover, it uses much the same language as *SNP 1389*⁹ to advocate the imprisonment of tycoons and the nationalisation of their property as well as the property of »foreign companies«.¹⁰

In addition to these relatively new organisations of the far-right – but not of neo-Nazi or fascist orientation – there are organisations like *Otačastveni pokret Obraz*, which was rightfully classified by the Serbian police as clerico-fascist, and which may also be termed as classically fascist, since it builds on the conceptual traditions of the Serbian fascist movement *Zbor* from the 1930s and 1940s. These are distinguished primarily by their ideology of »St. Sava nationalism«, as formulated in the interwar period by the Serbian Orthodox Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and also espoused by the leader of *Zbor*, Dimitrije Ljotić. It goes without saying that St. Sava (1175–1236), the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church, could not have been a Serbian nationalist, as the concept of nationalism stems from the nineteenth

8. *SNP 1389* intends to grow into a political party, and at the local election, according to the data on its portal, it received 2.8 percent of the vote in the municipality of New Belgrade. »*Mladi protiv režimske politike*« (Youth against regime politics); http://www.snp1389.rs/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=712%3A2012-05-31-11-58-14&catid=36%3Avesti&Itemid=69, accessed on 24 June 2012.

9. The use of the same words is no coincidence, since both movements were formed after the breakup of what had been a single movement, *SNP 1389*.

10. *SNP Naši*: *Program*; <http://nasisrbija.org/program-3/> (accessed on 24 June 2012).



century, but this fact is ignored by present-day nationalists.¹¹ Reactionary fascist ideology inspired by St. Sava envisages a »feudal« corporate government as a desirable form of social order.

Obraz originated in the Orthodox Missionary School of the temple of Saint Alexander Nevsky in Belgrade in the mid-1990s. The school was sponsored by the late Serbian Orthodox Bishop of Budapest, Danilo Krstić, and assumed the character of a political movement in 1999. The enemies of *Obraz* are the usual suspects: the Jews, referred to as »Zionists (anti-Christian Jewish racists)«, who according to anti-Semitic Serbian Orthodox Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović¹² »encouraged, organised and financed the largest and bloodiest world wars and revolutions where millions of people died«. The other group cast as the enemy in *Obraz* ideology is – not surprisingly – the Croats, whom they refer to as »Ustasas«. *Obraz* leaders tell them that »we (i. e. the Serbs) with the help of God, will take revenge for ›Bljesak‹ and ›Oluja‹ and liberate all the territories of the Serbian Fatherland that you have, with the support of foreign blackguards, temporarily taken away and defiled«. Similar rhetoric is directed at the Moslems, or in *Obraz*'s words »Moslem extremists«, who are promised that »Serbian Bosnia and Herzegovina« will also be »liberated«, and at the Albanians, referred to as »Shiptar terrorists« and »the disgrace of Europe« who, *Obraz* claims, are working »together with Euro-Atlantic occupiers« and committing »vile crimes against a handful of remaining Serbian martyrs«. Finally, *Obraz* promises faithfully that Kosovo will be avenged.

But *Obraz* has »inner enemies« too: »fake peace-lovers«, who should »get out« of Serbia; political parties that are »intruders into the Serbhood being« and »of use for Ser-

11. In his work Rastko Nemanjić made little mention of the Serbian people. Serbian land he generally defined as the territory ruled by the Nemanjić dynasty (Juhas-Georgieska, 2005), a rather fluid concept since this depended on the balance of power between the Nemanjić dynasty and its rivals at various points in history.

12. Elsewhere it is said that »Serbian children should from the very start feel and understand that they are, in the words of Bishop Saint Nikolaj Velimirović, »Arians by blood, Slavs by their surnames, Serbs by their names, and Christians in heart and spirit«. »Nacionalno vaspitanje« (National Upbringing); <http://www.obraz.rs/> (accessed on 24 June 2012). In the 1920s Nikolaj Velimirović founded the *Bogomoljački pokret – Narodnu hrišćansku zajednicu*, which was ideologically connected with Dimitrije Ljotić's Zbor and shared some of the same members. Moreover, Bishop Nikolaj was the person who gave a eulogy at the funeral service for Ljotić. More on the anti-Semitism of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, canonised by the Serbian Orthodox Church in 2003, may be found in Jovan Byford's paper (Byford, 2005).

bian enemies«; Protestant religious communities, whom they call »members of sects«; the LGBT population, classified as »perverts«, who are given the message that they will be »punished most severely and eradicated«; drug addicts, who are told that they cannot »go about unhindered tainting the purity of Serbian youth and the health of the Serbian nation«; and, finally, »criminals«, whose conduct is »alien to the spirit of St. Sava«.¹³

The first leader of *Obraz* was a sociologist and a theologian, Nebojša M. Krstić, who was killed in a traffic accident in 2001. After his death, the leadership was taken over by Mladen Obradović, a much less educated but plucky theology student who never got his degree. Unlike the previous, primarily Russophile and anti-Western far-right organisations that have ties only with Russian »patriotic« movements, *Obraz* fosters relations not only with similar Russian organisations, but also with similar far-right organisations from Romania, Slovakia, Poland, France, Italy and Spain.

Finally, there are also organisations of neo-Nazi character, *Nacionalni stroj* and *Krv i čast*, and the latest one, *Srbska akcija*.¹⁴ They gather skinheads of clearly recognisable neo-Nazi orientation who very often belong to the wider support and fan groups of football clubs, such as *United Force*¹⁵ (FC Rad), *Delije* (FC Crvena Zvezda – Red Star) and *Alcatraz* (FC Partizan). Membership in organised football fan groups serves as a front for far-right and criminal activities by some fan leaders and skinheads, who develop a particular subculture within these groups. Their members are most often recruited from the ranks of working-class youths who have lost all prospects for a future in post-socialist Serbia. These organisations are violent and hierarchical, structured according to a military model. Their violence is directed

13. »Srbskim neprijateljima« (To Enemies of Serbs); <http://www.obraz.rs/>; (accessed on 24 June 2012).

14. However, *Srbska akcija* is somewhere between *Obraz*, of which its founders were also members, and a neo-Nazi movement. It combines neo-Nazism with the classical fascism of the 1930s and 1940s, so it advocates the »Orthodox Feudal Estate Monarchy« relying on »fraternal Russia«, but also on »those Western powers who fight for the Europe of nations«, since »the more the non-European and Moslem factor is present in other European nations, the stronger it will be in ours, and vice versa«. »Ideološke osnove« (Ideological Basis); <http://www.srb-akcija.org/izdvajamo/198/ideologija/> (accessed on 28 June 2012).

15. A part of the lyrics for their song goes: We are of glorious Dušan's Arian blood/We don't like Bolsheviks nor the circumcised/We despise snitches who yap a lot/Our fists are hard, cops should know. »Sami protiv svih« (Alone against Everybody); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnukAwEPxrl&feature=autoplay&list=PLB9BAC46C1F99B6B2&playne xt=5> (accessed on 28 June 2012).



against the Roma, rival fans and black men who play in Serbian football clubs. They are also anti-Semitic and Islamophobic and regret that they have less opportunity to attack these groups.¹⁶ Like all the organisations mentioned here, they also glorify the ICTY indictees Vojislav Šešelj¹⁷, Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić. *Nacionalni stroj*, *Krv i čast*, and *Srbska akcija* are part of an international network of similar neo-Nazi movements and political parties in the EU, the United States and Russia.¹⁸

Obraz and the above-mentioned neo-Nazi organisations despise parliamentarism and political parties. They strive to bring Serbs back to their alleged roots – Arian in the case of the neo-Nazis, and St. Sava ones in the case of *Obraz*. Working-class youths, usually unemployed and generally not very educated, serve as their recruiting base, and their activities take place in stadiums and streets where they can insult black football players and get into fights with the fans of opposing teams and the police, knowing full well that corrupt judges will spare them longer sentences even if they commit grave criminal offences.

4. Action Potential of the Far-Right in Serbia

In discussing the potential of the far-right in Serbia to act we need to look both at its internal potential and at the external circumstances affecting this.

Currently the most capable far-right leader, Vojislav Šešelj, is not in Serbia at all but has spent the past nine years in custody, awaiting the conclusion of his trial. His only successors, Tomislav Nikolić and Aleksandar Vučić, have changed their political colour, leaving in their wake a complete vacuum and disarray.

16. Islamophobia is expressed when various Serbian football clubs play matches against FC *Novi Pazar*, a football club from the town of the same name which is the centre for Bosniaks in Serbia. On such occasions the extreme nationalists among Novi Pazar fans carry Turkish flags and cheer the name of Turkey, which additionally fuels the Islamophobia of their rivals.

17. In the past, on the international Internet portal of white racists, *Stormfront*, one of the activists of *Nacionalni stroj* called on the European and American neo-Nazi brethren to support Vojislav Šešelj »imprisoned by the ZOG« (Zionist Occupation Government) in the Hague (Bakić, 2007: 48).

18. »Srbski poredak, Glas srbskog nacional-socijalizma, Nacionalni stroj – program i statut« (Serbian order, Voice of Serbian national-socialism, *Nacionalni stroj* – Program and Statute), http://srbskiporedak.blogspot.com/2009/07/blog-post_21.html (accessed on 24 June 2012).

At present the most active far-right leaders are Mladen Obradović (*Obraz*) and Goran Davidović, nicknamed Führer (*Nacionalni stroj*). They are sufficiently fanatical to be prepared to sacrifice themselves, which, should they do so in any serious way, may endow them with the charisma of martyrs, which they currently lack. Other leaders of far-right movements, Miša Vacić and Ivan M. Ivanović, are not as fanatical and hence less prepared to make sacrifices. This will make it difficult for them to attract wider support, even though they have a large membership, among whom there are many dissatisfied young men ready to engage in violence and make a personal sacrifice. At any rate, unless Vojislav Šešelj returns from The Hague, there currently appears to be no leader with sufficient charisma to rally authoritarian far-rightists.

If we look at the membership figures for the different movements, it becomes clear that the largest is still the SRS, followed by *SNP 1389* and *SNP Naši*. Neo-Nazi and classically fascist groups are relatively small in number, but they compensate for their limited membership by their fanaticism and resulting willingness to engage in violence and sacrifice themselves. The most socially dangerous aspect of all the organisations mentioned is that they foster a culture of youth violence. In this context the various fan groups and skinheads, who have more or less close links with far-right organisations and provide them with the necessary »army personnel« to engage in clashes with the police or attacks on the Roma, the LGBT population, the far left and other potentially vulnerable social groups, should certainly not be ignored.

One of the chief elements motivating far-rightists to act is their perception of enemies. All of them perceive the West (i.e. the EU, NATO, USA, IMF), political parties in Serbia, the far left, and the LGBT population as their enemies,¹⁹ while they regard Russia not only as a friend, but as a Slav brother. However, since they are not powerful enough to inflict any harm on what they perceive as the uniform West, and since the LGBT population is the smallest and most vulnerable, they choose always to target the *Pride Parade* as their main arena for violent activity.²⁰ Such an event is ideally suited to showing off

19. The perception of Roma and Jews as enemies varies between different far-right groups. The neo- Nazis and fascists inevitably see them as such and rank them high up the list of their own enemies, while other far-rightists pay less attention to them, even if they do not object to having these groups on the list of people to attack.

20. In recent years beating up the few members of the far left has frequently served simply as a »warm up« for more serious clashes with the police.



their strength of numbers, since the very real differences between them are not evident in this context. Moreover, attacking the *Pride Parade* also serves to attract broader popular support, since homophobia is widespread among the Serbian population.²¹

Currently there is no powerful far-right party in Serbia that would unite the far right under one umbrella or attract a larger number of more affluent national or foreign funders. This significantly weakens the action potential of the far right. Moreover, after the defeat of the SRS in the 2012 elections and the SNP's evolution into a moderate national-conservative party, Serbia today is one of the countries in Europe with no far-right political party in parliament. While this may seem encouraging, it also poses the problem of monitoring developments on the far-right scene, which in times of crisis may slip out of state control. At this particular moment, however, the far-rightists lack both money (which they seek mainly in Russia) and a strong organisation and charismatic leader. It goes without saying that the return of a charismatic »martyr« from The Hague might significantly change this.

However, although the internal action potential of the far right at this time is relatively weak, external circumstances favour it. Should such circumstances last for a longer period of time, then the far right internal action potential may become stronger. For if it were to receive more internal or foreign funding, or were a strong, charismatic and demagogical personality to emerge as leader, this might simultaneously boost membership and make the organisation more effective.

The main problem may be said to lie with the Serbian judiciary. While the police have been fairly successful in defining and discovering far-right groups and their activists, the judiciary has contributed to the boom in the far right and criminals related to it through lengthy court proceedings that often result in acquittals or lenient sentences. Unfortunately, even the judiciary's recent attempts to ban organisations such as fan groups like *Alcatraz*, *Obraz*, *Nacionalni stroj*, and *SNP 1389* will probably turn out to

21. At the first *Pride Parade* in Serbia in 2001 participants were brutally beaten while the police looked on in silence. In 2010 the Parade took place with unprecedented security measures and there were major clashes between the far-rightists, who also included some secondary school students, and the police. Eventually, in 2011 and 2012, Minister of the Interior Ivica Dačić banned the *Pride Parade* considering it too great a security risk. In all instances the Serbian Orthodox Church actively condemned the Parade and both indirectly and directly aided those engaging in violence against the participants.

be counter-productive, because rather than disappearing, the far right will simply regroup to form new organisations, such as the recently formed *Srbska akcija*. Moreover, the police will find it more difficult to carry out surveillance of such groups, while disillusioned Serbian youth will probably be attracted by the »forbidden fruit« of organisations that are illegal. This situation is certainly aggravated by mass unemployment, which currently stands at 25.5 percent of the overall population of working age and 50 percent of people under 30 years of age. Hence there is an enormous potential of rage to be vented.

To make this grim situation even worse, a very special sort of capitalism reigns in Serbia in which connections with politicians are all-important for doing business. A class of oligarchs has evolved in which the wealthiest people have close links with the leaderships of political parties, and a career in politics is the most effective shortcut to getting rich quickly. The best illustration of the nature of Serbian capitalism is the fact that the anti-monopolies act (Law on Protection of Competition) was passed only in 2008. Under such circumstances, justified bitterness against the oligarchic economic and political system may easily turn into support for far-right or far-left political movements.

In addition, hurt national pride suffered after the defeats in the 1990s wars between the Yugoslav successor states, the bombing of the FR Yugoslavia by NATO and the *ipso facto* if not formal loss of Kosovo as the mythical »holy land« of the Serbs are also a very important factor. An unemployed young man may easily fall under the influence of anti-globalist, anti-Western, and even anti-pluralistic far-right demagogic which totally neglects the question of responsibility and guilt for the wars.

Finally, if the far right becomes stronger in the EU as a whole, then the Serbian far right would increase its chances of attracting stronger support. Moreover, should official Russia or powerful funders from this country start to provide more significant financial backing for such movements,²² looking for more capable leaders from their ranks, there could be a very dangerous strengthening of the Serbian far right. Thus, the power of the far right in the EU and the behaviour of official Russia are the two factors most likely to strengthen the action potential of the far right in Serbia.

22. Although there is some evidence that some financial assistance has been provided by various Russian organisations, as far as the author knows, no significant amounts have been donated to date.



5. Measures to Restrain the Far-Right

An easy and initial countermeasure could be a change in the election system designed to diminish the influence of political leaders and strengthen trust in the political system. This should consist of legally binding »bottom-up« processes for the selection of candidates, giving party members the right to choose which candidates should appear on the electoral list.

In terms of economic policy, efforts should be undertaken to introduce fairer market competition and to reduce unemployment in order to build trust in the whole economic system. Together with a developed, more efficient judiciary system and appropriate penal policies – sentences are currently too lenient, especially with respect to economic crime – this would rebuild trust in the political system as a whole.

In addition, instead of trying to ban the activities of far-right movements and political parties (which in the past has only led to their regrouping), the Serbian state should try to infiltrate them more efficiently using Security Intelligence Agency (BIA) agents. These efforts could include measures to divide far-right movements as well as close cooperation between the security and intelligence services of Serbia with their counterparts in the EU and Russia, in a bid to uncover the external ties of Serbian right-wing groups.

Communicating the historical failures of the far right to Serbian society via the mass media, in schools and together with NGOs as educational actors would be another way of restraining far-right attitudes. Educational campaigns to counter homophobia, Islamophobia, and all forms of racism (particularly anti-Semitism and anti-Ziganism), as well as to teach people about the use of »scapegoat« tactics in history are other measures that should be taken.



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