

R e p o r t

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SERBS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

PROJECT ON
ETHNIC
RELATIONS



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Belgrade, Serbia

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PREFACE

Southeastern Europe, including Serbia, is at a crucial juncture in its history. Following the crises of the 1990s, the countries of the region are making great efforts to join the European Union and, in fact, some have made the important step of becoming EU candidates. Serbia's pivotal location at the center of this region and its historic, political, economic and ethnic ties to its neighbors make the country's success an essential element for the success of the entire region. Moreover, Serbia's continued democratic development and its stability are key factors to broader regional stability. For these goals to be achieved, Serbia's path to European integration must be secured, and the feeling inside Serbia of being "left behind" must be dispelled.

With these considerations in mind, in 2005-2006, the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) carried out a major project in Serbia under the title "Serbs in the Twenty-First Century." This project was supported by the Balkan Trust for Democracy of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, the Romanian Government, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

In the first part of this initiative, PER organized a dialogue in Belgrade among Serb political leaders, both from within and outside of Serbia, on issues related to the interplay between identity and politics. During this meeting, participants analyzed the relationships between Serbia and the Serbs and their political representatives who live outside Serbia in states that emerged after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. They also discussed their relations with Serbia as a state, and models of cooperation between their "mother state" and their home countries. PER followed this first meeting with a dialogue in Novi Sad on multiethnicity and citizenship in Serbia, relations



Left to right: Zoran Loncar, Steven Burg, and Livia Plaks.



Left to right: Ksenija Milivojevic and Gordana Comic.

between minorities and the Serbian majority, and possibilities for how Serbia can redefine itself as a country of all its citizens. Minority representatives also took part in this dialogue. The last part of the “Serbs in the Twenty-First Century” initiative, held in Bucharest, brought to the table representatives of the Serbian government and parliament, representatives of Serbia’s neighbors, and participants from U.S. and international organizations to discuss the issue of Serbs and their neighbors. This discussion was conceived in the belief that everything that happens in Serbia and to Serbs has an impact on its neighbors, and everything that happens in the neighborhood has an impact on Serbia. Important topics in this discussion were the referendum on independence in Montenegro and the question of Kosovo’s future status, and how these developments will influence Serbia and its stability. Participants also considered how the international community could help Serbia in this difficult and uncertain period.

The consensus of the participants, Serbs and others, at the end of this project was that Serbia should strive to become a prosperous, successful country with a clear vision of its role in the region and in Europe as a whole, and a country that could serve as a good partner for its neighbors and the rest of Europe. PER’s initiative was a step toward helping Serbs and their neighbors better understand how to realize this vision.



Left to right: Milorad Todorovic, Susan Johnson (obscured from view), Osman Topcagic, Dan Sainz, Neven Mimica, and Claudia Luciani.

This project was a joint effort of the PER headquarters in Princeton, the PER Regional Center for Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe in Bucharest and the PER representation in Belgrade. The PER representative in Pristina was also of great help. I would like to extend my thanks for the hard work of my colleagues in these PER offices.

This report was written by Dr. Steven Burg, a member of the PER Council for Ethnic Accord, and it was not reviewed by the participants. Following the usual PER practice, participants have not been directly identified in the report, for which PER assumes full responsibility.

Livia Plaks, *President*

Princeton, New Jersey
May 2006



Left to right: Livia Plaks, Therese Sobieski, Zoran Loncar, and Allen Kassof.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

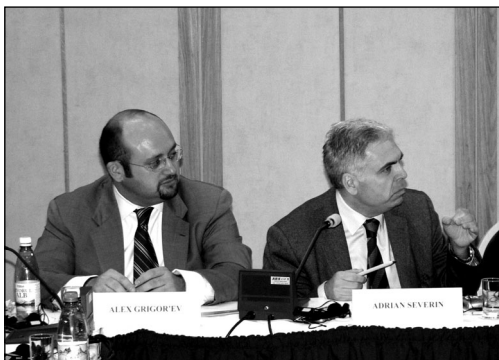
Following PER's practice, and in order to keep the discussions both frank and flexible, none of the participants spoke for attribution.

In this report, the spelling of the name "Kosovo" is used (rather than "Kosova," the spelling preferred by Albanians, or "Kosovo and Metohija" or "Kosmet," preferred by Serbs), because that is the spelling most commonly used in the English-speaking world. For the same reason, Serbian place names are used. For example, the report uses Pristina and not Prishtina. However, the spelling "Kosova" is used in the names of Kosovo Albanian political parties and organizations.

"Serb" and "Croat" are used as ethnic terms, whereas "Serbian" and "Croatian" are employed when referring to the Republics of Serbia and Croatia.



Left to right: Ardian Gjini, Hashim Thaci, Ferhat Dinosha, and Lulzim Peci.



Left to right: Alex Grigor'ev and Adrian Severin.

ROUNDTABLE I

SERBIA AND SERBS: IDENTITY AND POLITICS

**July 22-23, 2005
Belgrade, Serbia**

SERBIAN IDENTITY

In discussing the issue of Serbian identity, a senior Serbian official noted that it had been Serbian political elites who blocked progress on these issues in the past. He cited ten years of oppositional activity and mass demonstrations as evidence of popular support for a more democratic vision of Serbia and Serbian identity, including “recognition of the other and of differences.” Other participants questioned whether any such popular consensus existed in Serbia. A Serbian political activist, for example, suggested that “Serbia has no intellectual community or discourse. Books on Serbian identity are produced in Canada and the United States, not in Serbia.” But this view was quickly dismissed by another participant as “underestimating the intellectual resources of Serbia.”

A party leader from within Serbia suggested and that “civil society has an important role to play, in integrating Serbs across borders, and in leading change inside Serbia itself.” He argued that “there is no broad, common vision of Serbia as yet.” Therefore, “it is necessary to develop the civil society sector in order to develop the vision of democratic Serbia.” One of the challenges is “how to reconcile an internally complex, diverse society and a unitary state. The constitution is a good starting point for this.” The importance of civil society was underscored by the fact that while opinion polls suggest the Serbian population places more “trust” in traditional and authoritarian institutions such as the church, the military, and the police, than in democratic political institutions such as courts, the parliament, and the government, one participant reported that “many more citizens are active in NGOs than in traditional organizations like the church.”

Civil society has an important role to play, in integrating Serbs across borders, and in leading change inside Serbia itself.

SERBIA AND EUROPE

A Serbian government official suggested that integration into the EU represented the “highest priority” for Serbia. But he cautioned that it is necessary “to recognize certain specifics of Serbs, their national characteristics.” “We cannot simply accept the institutions of other countries or the EU without critical consideration.” A Serbian analyst suggested that the Serbian people “want to be in Europe, but do not believe they can be in Europe.” He pointed out that there is no serious public debate about “what Europe means”; instead, there are only personal “desires, hopes.”

The Serbian people want to be in Europe, but do not believe they can be in Europe.

Some participants suggested that recent events in the Balkans were an obstacle to developing closer Serbian-EU relations. A Serbian political activist reminded participants that Serbs “are viewed through negative stereotypes.” A representative of an international NGO agreed with this view. He argued that “a negative image of the Serbs is now emerging in popular culture in the West.” The Serbian activist suggested that this negative view of Serbs is reinforced by “instrumentalization of the Serbian national question, by manipulation of this issue by Serbian, neighboring, and international actors.” He characterized present-day Serbia as “an unfinished project.” He noted that a new constitutional process had begun, as well as an effort to resolve the status of Kosovo and of Montenegro. He called for development of Serbia as “a national state for Serbs,” and a “multicultural civil state for all its citizens.”

SERBIA IN SERBIAN PUBLIC OPINION

Participants discussed the impact of changes since 1991 on the composition of the Serbian population. Data were presented on the national composition of the population of Serbia in 2002 suggesting that, excluding Kosovo, the Serbian population was 83 percent ethnically Serb. For some participants, this called into question whether it made sense to think of Serbia as a multicultural or multinational state. In later comments, one participant questioned whether such data could be trusted, calling into question the accuracy of census counts. In light of

these data, however, one participant suggested the final status of Kosovo has extremely important implications for understanding the nature of the Serbian state, its constitutional definition, and its identity. It was noted that opinion polls suggest almost half the Serbian public (45 percent) expect Montenegro to become an independent state in the future, and 63 percent believe that the “realistic” final status of Kosovo will take the form of full or partial independence.

A Serbian analyst reported that, on most issues, “public opinion on political issues is created by the media.” Kosovo, however, “is an exceptional problem, because of the living ties of many Serbs to Kosovo...who live there, have relatives there, are refugees from there, etc.” A Serb party leader from outside Serbia, however, declared that he “questions the stability of public opinion” and asserted “it can change radically in a few days or weeks.” He attributed this to the fact that media outlets are “controlled by political actors” and to “the manipulative techniques of pollsters who seek to alter outcomes.”

SERBIA AND KOSOVO

A party leader from within Serbia warned “the status of Serbia will depend on the process by which the future status of Kosovo is determined.” A Serb from Kosovo responded to this by declaring that “without Kosovo and Metohija there is no Serbian national or state identity.” Another Serb from Kosovo called on the international community to “support local Serbs who are ready for negotiation and compromise, instead of those ready for conflict.”

A Serbian government official drew attention to “the similarity between the destinies of the Serb and Albanian people who are both scattered in four or five states.” He cautioned that it would be “unjust and dangerous...to grant the claims of one side only, and disregard the claims of the other.” “There is no successful solution to the Albanian issue without a simultaneous successful solution of the Serb issue,” he argued. A Serb party leader from outside of Serbia suggested that perhaps the Ohrid Framework Agreement, adopted in response to the outbreak of violence in Macedonia, might serve as a “model for Kosovo.”

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POLICY-ORIENTED DIALOGUE ON A COMMON VISION FOR SERBIA

Participants spoke about a possible common vision for Serbia and whether a national consensus over such a vision is possible. All participants agreed that there is an urgent need for such a policy-oriented dialogue among Serbs. “Reconciliation of Serbs with themselves is very important,” one of them said. They noted, however, that the Serbs would not have been able to organize such a discussion by themselves alone. For this reason, they saw the role played by an outsider (in this case PER) as important, timely, and helpful. This participant specifically cited PER’s six-year-old regional series on “Albanians and Their Neighbors” as a good example of such a dialogue.

All participants saw a future Serbia as prosperous and modern, and as a member of the European Union. Many also saw it also as a member of NATO. A representative of an opposition party, formerly a party in power, disagreed, however, over Serbia’s application to join NATO. The party does not see that step as appropriate in light of the recent history of NATO’s 1999 war in Kosovo. However, this official said that his party will be ready to accept any decision of the population if this question is put to a national referendum.

A member of the Serbian government said that Serbia can and must develop a consensus over a national program that has achieving prosperity for the country as its aim.

***Reconciliation of Serbs
with themselves is very
important.***

Absence of such a strategy, according to this participant, was partly the reason for the multitude of political problems that the country is experiencing during this

difficult transition period. According to him, among the issues of top national priority on which such consensus should be developed are Kosovo, the state union of Serbia and Montenegro, cooperation with The Hague Tribunal, EU integration, and a new Serbian Constitution. He also said that it would be important for Serbia to reach a consensus over realizing the rights of ethnic minorities in the country. So far, according to him, Serbia’s parliamentary parties have been unable to reach a consensus over Kosovo and over the state union with Montenegro.

According to several participants, absence of a broad consensus on these crucial issues indicates a significant lack of strong and visionary leadership in Serbia. A number of participants characterized Serbia as an “unfinished

country” with an incomplete institutional framework, deep social, economic, political, and demographic crises, and a damaged and not cohesive political elite. A senior Serb politician contrasted Serbia to Macedonia and Croatia, where both the government and the opposition agree on a joint vision for their countries. Serbia does not have such a vision.

The participants also called for help on the part of the international community to assist Serbia in implementing that vision once a consensus is reached. Many Serbs distrust the international community, one of them said, and fear international decisions for Serbia. Serbs still see the international community as applying double standards in the Balkans: one for the Serbs, and one for everyone else.

As for the role of the government in this process, many participants called on the government of Serbia to think about promoting Serbia and Serbia’s interests abroad. A positive image of Serbia is very important at a time when Serbia is trying to regain its place in Europe. It is an obligation of Serbia’s leadership to secure the international community’s support for achieving Serbia’s goal. The participants agreed that without such support no project in Serbia will succeed.

SERBIA AND SERBIAN COMMUNITIES OUTSIDE SERBIA

Participants also expressed concern about the fate of Serbs and Serb identity elsewhere.

A Serb from outside of Serbia suggested that Serb identity was being challenged in Montenegro by “national chauvinism about an artificial nation,” which was attempting to “negate the rights of others and to negate the historical reality of the relationship between Montenegro and the Serb nation.” The view that Serb identity was under pressure outside of Serbia was echoed in another participant’s description of

Absence of a broad consensus on crucial issues indicates a significant lack of strong and visionary leadership in Serbia.

the dilemma posed by reform efforts presently underway in Bosnia. He noted that Bosnian Serbs supported “reforms in the direction of centralization, but also preserving the distinctiveness of Republika Srpska.” “Serbs in Bosnia seek only institutions that will allow them to be equal, nothing more,” he declared. Yet, “despite strong support for reform” from Bosnian Serbs, “all efforts to preserve Republika Srpska identity are considered retrograde.” He criticized the continuing tendency in Bosnia to view Serbs through “the stereotype of Greater Serbia anti-integration,” which he argued is “incorrect, unrealistic.” He reported that the Serbs of Bosnia “fear the intention of others is to do away with Republika Srpska entirely.” A Serbian official echoed this view, acknowledging that “how to order relations with Republika Srpska without raising fears of ‘Greater Serbia’” was the “biggest problem” in bilateral relations between Serbia and neighboring states with Serb minorities.

Serbs still see the international community as applying double standards in the Balkans, one for the Serbs, and one for everyone else.

A Serbian official, posing the question whether “Serb cultural and political space” should coincide, argued that “Serbia may have a legitimate desire to assist Serb cultural institutions outside Serbia, but Serbia may not arrange political relations in other countries.”

He further argued that “the best political institutions for Serbs in countries where they are a minority” are “well known.” “The highest standards for minorities should be provided for all minorities in Serbia and for all Serbs living as minorities in other countries.” But a Serb activist from outside Serbia warned that while there might be some semblance of consensus on constitutional issues in neighboring countries, “there is no unity on the ethnic question.” In Croatia, for example, “without the question of the return of refugees, there would be no problem. But the right wing of Croats wants no return of Serbs to Croatia.”

In later remarks, he identified two fundamental elements necessary to resolve the status of Serb minorities in his own and other countries: First, “We need to seek truth regardless of outcome; this is a precondition for finding solutions to contemporary problems.” And, second, “Basic human rights are the basis for a solution to most problems.

They are a safeguard against the rise of extremism.” A Serb party leader from another neighboring country insisted, however, that “without a strong and stable Serbia, Serbian state, Serbs outside of Serbia would not have any rights.” Nonetheless, he acknowledged that “externally imposed solutions are always worse than solutions adopted from within.”

A leader of one of Serbia’s former ruling parties suggested that the “Serb national question” remained “unresolved.” He argued there is a contradiction between the way national claims are addressed inside Serbia and in neighboring countries. “Inside Serbia,” he argued, “the principle is ‘national self-determination’; but outside of Serbia the principle is territorial integrity, and not changing state borders.” He called for elections to a constitutional convention for Serbia, but at the same time cautioned “there is not a single question on which there is a political consensus.”

“Furthermore,” he argued, “there is no positive answer possible for any of the questions posed on the meeting agenda.” He warned of the possibility, in the event new elections are called, of the rise of a Berlusconi-like figure in Serbian politics, based on a network of TV, radio, and tabloid media under the influence of political forces. Some participants agreed that this might be possible. Another participant, however, questioned this scenario, pointing to the fact that only 10 to 40 percent of the population even buys a newspaper.

Serbia may have a legitimate desire to assist Serb cultural institutions outside Serbia, but Serbia may not arrange political relations in other countries.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

(English alphabetical order)

Vladimir Bilandzic, Political Adviser to the Head, Mission in Serbia and Montenegro, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Srdjan Bogosavljevic, Director, Strategic Marketing Agency

Steven Burg, Professor, Brandeis University; Rapporteur

Nicole Chirac, Program Officer, Balkan Trust for Democracy

Nebojsa Covic, President, Social Democratic Party; Head, Coordination Center for Kosovo and Metohija, Governments of Serbia and Serbia and Montenegro *(did not take part in person but submitted a text)*

Ivica Dacic, President, Main Board, Socialist Party of Serbia

Gordana Delic, Program Officer, Balkan Trust for Democracy

Nenad Djurdjevic, Representative in Serbia and Montenegro, Project on Ethnic Relations

Slobodan Gavrilovic, Vice President, Democratic Party

Alex Grigor'ev, Director, Western Balkans, Project on Ethnic Relations

David Hudson, Chargé d'Affaires, Delegation to Serbia and Montenegro, European Commission

Trivo Indjic, Ambassador, Foreign Policy Adviser to President of Serbia

Mladen Ivanic, President, Party of Democratic Progress of Republika Srpska; Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Milan Ivanovic, President, Serb National Council of Kosovo and Metohija

Oliver Ivanovic, Head, List for Kosovo and Metohija, Assembly of Kosovo; Vice President, Social Democratic Party

Dusan Janjic, Member, Council for Ethnic Accord, Project on Ethnic Relations; Coordinator, Forum for Ethnic Relations

Petar Ladjevic, Secretary, Council for National Minorities, Government of Serbia

Zoran Loncar, Minister for Public Administration and Local Self-Government of Serbia; Member, Main Board, Democratic Party of Serbia

Dragoljub Micunovic, President, Political Council, Democratic Party

Andrzej Mirga, Director, Roma Programs, Project on Ethnic Relations;
Chair, Specialist Group on Roma, Gypsies and Travellers, Council of Europe

Alan Moseley, Program Officer, Project on Ethnic Relations

Michael Papp, Political Officer, Embassy of the United States of America in Serbia and Montenegro

Livia Plaks, President, Project on Ethnic Relations

Predrag Popovic, President, People's Party (Montenegro)

Milorad Pupovac, Vice President, Independent Democratic Serb Party (Croatia)

Vojislav Stanovcic, Member, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts;
Member, Council for Ethnic Accord, Project on Ethnic Relations

Ivan Stojiljkovic, President, Democratic Party of Serbs in Macedonia

Radmila Trajkovic, Vice President, Serb Council of Kosovo and Metohija;
Vice President, Christian Democratic Party of Serbia

Natasa Vuckovic, Executive Director, Democratic Center Foundation



Left to right: Predrag Popovic, Rada Trajkovic, and Milan Ivanovic.



Left to right: Nagip Arifi and Laszlo Jozsa.

ROUNDTABLE II

CITIZENSHIP AND MULTIETHNICITY IN SERBIA

November 12-13, 2005

Novi Sad, Serbia

SERBIA AND ITS MINORITIES

A senior Vojvodina official began the discussion by pointing out that the rights extended to ethnic minorities in the province exceed European standards. Yet, “interethnic questions and questions of citizenship still require careful attention.” He called for “much more sensitivity and vigilance toward expressions of interethnic hostility,” and declared that “problems must be resolved collectively among groups and by all levels of government.”

A Serbian official attributed problems to the “unsatisfactory implementation of a legal framework that otherwise exceeds international standards.” He noted that “legislation on the rights of minorities adopted by the former federation was drafted with assistance from academic experts, and in consultation with the Council of Europe.” This official suggested that the first act of the new parliament convened in February 2004, to ensure recognition of the languages of MPs, was an indication of the continuing commitment to Serbia’s

Serbia is still more oriented toward inclusion in the EU than toward inclusion of minorities in Serbia.

minorities rights. The parliament also established national councils for Serbia’s minorities, and a republic-level Council on National Minorities. The establishment in September of an Ombudsman in Serbia “makes it possible to ensure

respect for rights in the whole republic.” An Ombudsman had been established two years earlier in Vojvodina. However, with respect to the question of internal relations within minority communities, this official suggested that “local self-administration is to be respected by the central government; it is not the place of the government to interfere.”

A Serbian political party leader noted that, with respect to minorities, “the basic story” is one of human rights. Serbia was in the process of “building a democratic culture” through respect for human rights. “A new constitution is necessary,” he suggested, to define “citizenship for all, ensure human rights.” He mentioned a series of other reforms also required: of the judiciary, of the legislative process, of the laws on discrimination, and of the police. He defined Serbia as “a largely homogeneous country with regional minorities” and suggested it should be guided by the principle of “cultural autonomy.”

MINORITIES AND THE SERBIAN STATE

A leader of an ethnic minority suggested that “with respect to Hungarians, the right of representation requires political parties as well as councils.” He wished to “avoid the question of whether national rights are individual or group rights.” What was important, he argued, is that “government recognize the fact that interethnic ‘incidents’ have social roots, and that the social problem is a problem of the majority, not a problem of the minority.” In his view, “the Serb people have been, in the current period, a ‘losing’ nation; it has lost territory, population, standard of living, war. The basic frustration of the Serbs is obvious.” Therefore, “we have to enter into a conscious process of eliminating the social sources of frustration.” He identified three areas in which action could be taken: First, reform of historiography in school texts published in Serbian, which now emphasize ethnic conflict between Serbs and others; second, ending ethnic exclusiveness and changing the Serb “mindset” from one in which opposition is defined in ethnic terms by encouraging interethnic communication and inclusiveness among young people; and third, opening the major media to minorities.

A leader of one of Serbia’s former ruling parties argued that the current dissatisfaction of minorities in Serbia can be attributed to the fact that “minorities became accustomed under Tito to a level of accommodation that does not exist anywhere in the world; an exceptionally high level of recognition and rights. The current problem is therefore not a problem of rights, but of the fall of the old system.” “How many members of minorities feel that Serbia is their state?” he asked. “How many feel the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia still has not been completed?” He noted that some people attribute the absence of support for Serbia to “Milosevic and violence.” But, he

suggested, the evidence of Albanian and Croat unrest before Milosevic argues otherwise. "The concept of citizenship in Serbia is paralleled and undermined by the concept of membership in a national community. This produces divided support, divided identity." "Rights," he argued, "imply obligations." In his view, "there cannot be any single right that derives from the fact that someone is not a Serb, or is a Serb."

Another Serbian party leader argued that "the problem is extremism among leaders of minorities, who use incidents to advance agendas. It is normal for problems to be resolved by internal processes, on the

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basis of agreement among domestic actors, and not immediately to go outside the country for support." He suggested that the "carriers of the interests of minorities are not exclusively the minority political parties." There is a stereo-

typical view of parties, in which "minority parties are seen as 'civil,' while Serb parties are seen as 'nationalist.'"

The views of these Serbian party leaders prompted the ethnic minority party leader from Vojvodina to respond by declaring, first, that "my earlier remarks were not aimed at the whole of Serbian society or the Serb nation." Nevertheless, he went on, "80 percent of the majority nation holds negative attitudes toward minorities." As far as standards in the Tito era are concerned, "formally, yes; but the system was created to limit minorities. Political organization of minorities was not permitted." He criticized the attempt to question the loyalty of minorities to Serbia. He asked, "what is loyalty?" He noted that many minorities in Vojvodina are "fleeing conflicts not their own—a phenomenon very close to expulsion." The most important issue is the "representativeness, inclusiveness of the public sphere." "We are tired of singing the same song. That is why we have changed our tune to the EU." An Albanian party leader from southern Serbia, speaking of the Albanian minority, declared "By paying taxes, etc., we are recognizing the state. Why do we have to prove our trust?"

The leader of the former Serbian ruling party then replied, "When I spoke of seeing Serbia as one's 'own' state, I had Kosovo Albanians in mind. You cannot convince me that Albanians in Kosovo ever viewed Serbia as their own state."

ALBANIANS IN SERBIA

A leader of an ethnic minority party in southern Serbia discussed the perspectives of Albanians in Serbia. In his view, Albanians are concerned with “long-term state discrimination and the negative consequences of armed conflict.” He noted the problem of ethnic segregation, and the fact that “Albanian participants in state institutions such as the police are viewed by the vast majority of Albanians as traitors.” He noted that Albanians have still not convened a national council of their own in Serbia, and that a multiethnic governing framework was undermined by Albanian leaders. In his view, “Albanians do not reject participating in state institutions, but those institutions must first be changed—organizationally and conceptually.” He pointed to certain problems with the electoral system in Serbia. “The size of electoral districts affects the outcome of elections. The threshold for securing representation is also a problem.” To overcome these problems, he called for parliamentary seats reserved for minorities. He also complained that Albanian leaders “keep repeating our demands and concerns, but to no avail.” He warned that “a return to violent conflict in the Presevo valley is still possible.”

A Serbian party leader expressed his agreement with much of the criticism voiced by ethnic minority party leaders. In his view, “the mistaken policies of the 1990s are the cause of contemporary problems, but we need to focus on the future, not the past.” In confronting the past, “we need to confront the past according to the same criteria for all groups.” He suggested that “all citizens want a peaceful existence,” which contradicts the “new stereotype of ‘intolerant Serbs.’”

This Serb’s criticism of past Serbian leadership was supported by a local official from southern Serbia, who declared “the political climate in Serbia is affected by the uncivilized nature of the former regime.” After the regime changed, new laws on minorities, use of languages, education, information and other issues were adopted. But, “Serbia is still more oriented toward inclusion in the EU than toward inclusion of minorities in Serbia.” Serbs still have “a stereotypical orientation toward minorities,

Albanians do not reject participating in state institutions, but those institutions must first be changed—organizationally and conceptually.

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including Albanians. Political parties and some NGOs promote antipathy toward minorities.” This local official characterized the Serbian constitution as “unsuccessful with respect to minorities” and called for “symmetrical principles of regionalization, not asymmetrical.” He, too, asserted that Albanians in Serbia “are interested in the exercise of rights within state institutions; the inclusion of Albanians in state institutions, including the police.”

A minority party leader from southern Serbia asked, “what is to be done about individual versus collective rights?” “Cultural autonomy,” he argued, “requires institutions.”

KOSOVO

A Serb political leader from Kosovo argued that the similarities between the situations of Albanians in southern Serbia and Serbs in Kosovo were “numerous.” “The feelings of Serbs in Kosovo,” he declared, “are the same as those of Albanians in southern Serbia.” They feel uncertainty, a lack of prospects for the future. “They lack a sense that a new, responsible elite is being created in Kosovo.” He criticized Belgrade for its lack of “will to establish new relations between Serbs and Albanians.” Because local Serbs in Kosovo are connected to different individuals in Belgrade, Serbs in Kosovo are “divided, deadlocked.” Yet, he argued, in many areas, such as economic development, the interests of Serbs, and of Serbs and Albanians, are the same. If decentralization is to be implemented in Kosovo, he argued, it must be “all encompassing, including reorganization of municipalities.” The international community, he suggested, “can provide pressure [on the Kosovo Albanians], exercise influence to make the process happen faster.”

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Another Serb political leader from Kosovo emphasized that “all non-Albanians in Kosovo feel very threatened.” Non-Albanians experience institutional discrimination and non-institutional discrimination. The latter often takes violent

form: murder, assault, etc. “There have been attacks on Serb cemeteries, including the digging up of graves and scattering of remains.” He noted a recent, threatening comment by a prominent Kosovo Albanian journalist, to the effect that “violence will escalate if independence is not granted” and that “there are nine thousand people ready to initiate violence.” Another Serb party leader from Kosovo with personal experience working within some of Kosovo’s institutions declared that, while the international community proposes institutions as solutions, “struggle within institutions is not a means of solving our problems. Serbs do not trust institutions as a result of our experience in them.” That experience amounted to “political terrorism against Serbs...which is completely ignored.” “The decision to give formal power to terrorists is a decision that remains today, to us, inexplicable.” Nonetheless, this participant went on to explain the decision: “The international community understands the Kosovo problem in terms of Slobodan Milosevic.” But, “the current leadership of Serbia is not associated with the Milosevic past. Kosovo is part of Serbia, and the international community should not require Serbia to give up its territory.”

Because local Serbs in Kosovo are connected to different individuals in Belgrade, Serbs in Kosovo are “divided, dead-locked.”

A leader of one of Serbia’s former ruling parties asked, “if Kosovo can be independent, why not Herzegovina?” Independence for Kosovo would be “opening Pandora’s box.” If claims to independence are to be recognized, “how are we to distinguish between them, or choose one over another when claims conflict?”

A Serbian government official observed that “the discussion here today has shown how one can use statutes in many ways.” The question for Serbia and its citizens, he suggested, is “are we in favor of the fundamental values of a liberal society?” In his view, “as soon as the state starts meeting the interests of groups, minorities will start articulating their views and demands more moderately. The absence of fear is a precondition for success.”

CONCLUSIONS OF THE NOVI SAD ROUNDTABLE

The discussions in Novi Sad produced the following conclusions:

- There is a clear inconsistency between formal legislation adopted in Serbia and implementation of government policies toward minorities. There is concern about implementation of legislation which in turn raises questions about the successful functioning of democratic institutions in Serbia.
- Participation and inclusion of minorities in Serbia in legislative and executive bodies is an important topic. Such participation should not only be a political effort, as in Vojvodina (for which it should be commended), but should be institutionalized so it will not depend on political good will. Lowering of the electoral threshold for the Serbian parliament alone would not likely produce meaningful representation of ethnic groups. The newly created national councils received attention but they are not an effective substitute for interaction or participation of ethnic groups in effective decision making.
- Interethnic problems will be difficult to resolve until the democratic Serbian state is defined (a new constitution; resolution of Kosovo's status; redefinition of relations with Montenegro).
- Democratic institutions need to address real interests. Prosperity is required for this process. Such prosperity should be ethnically inclusive.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

(English alphabetical order)

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ROUNDTABLE III

SERBS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS: PATHS TO EUROPE

**April 28-29, 2006
Bucharest, Romania**

THE SERBIAN POLITICAL AGENDA

Following the opening remarks of PER's president, who put the meeting in a regional context, a senior Serbian official, speaking "in the name of the government of Serbia," shared with the participants the perspectives of the government. He declared that the European perspective is the only path to the future, and that Serbia must continue on this path. Serbia must overcome all obstacles, which will require the support of all political forces that support European integration. The overarching single interest of Serbia is accession to Europe. The government, he declared, will do everything to complete the process of European integration. This includes, he continued, cooperation with the ICTY and the arrest of war criminals. All Serbian participants at the meeting supported this view. The Serbian official declared the status of Kosovo should be decided by a democratic method of dialogue, participation by multiple interested factors, and the shared responsibility of Belgrade, Pristina and the international community. He stressed that, from the perspective of Serbia, the time period in which agreement is reached on a constructive solution that is good for both Serbia and Kosovo is less important than the process and the quality of the outcome.

This official was confident that the referendum on independence in Montenegro would be decided democratically, and that Montenegro's independence would be achieved through a dialogue between Montenegro and Serbia. "Montenegrin and Serbian leaders," he declared, "are capable of negotiating implementation."

Serbia also needed to adopt a new constitution. Resolving the status of Vojvodina would necessarily be achieved as part of this process.

The Serbian official also emphasized the need for Serbia to improve relations with minorities in Serbia. In February 2004, a new electoral law was adopted. This law makes it easier for minorities to secure representation in the Serbian parliament. The already existing Council of National Minorities is composed of the prime minister and a number of ministers as well as the presidents of minority councils; in other words, the legitimate elected representatives of the minorities. The work of this council must be improved. And, there is a need to define the competencies and authority of the national councils of each minority. This and other issues affecting minorities and their relationship to Serbs and the Serbian state were the focus of extended discussion at the second roundtable in this series.

A participant from outside of Serbia offered a broader understanding of these tasks, suggesting that, in essence, Serbia needs to define itself as a state, thereby echoing a major theme of the first roundtable. Indeed, many of the tasks outlined in the initial discussion were also the subject of discussion during the first roundtable.

A Serbian parliamentarian added to the list of priorities that must be addressed by the government. She suggested that while there is clear political will to carry out reforms and bring Serbia into the EU as soon as possible, there are still significant obstacles to EU integration. The most important of these is the absence of a national political consensus on EU membership. This echoed a theme of comments by Serbian participants at the first roundtable in the series. There is also significant resistance to reforms, including popular resistance to the negative effects of reform on everyday life. The parliamentarian suggested that “people were not made aware of how difficult the process would be.” As a result, the difficulties created have generated considerable discontent with EU integration. Another parliamentarian suggested that “the Serbian people want the government to deal with problems in the standard of living, employment, income, part-time employment for young people, the lack of confidence/vision of the future (‘uncertainty’).” This view was also advanced by participants at the second roundtable.

This Serbian parliamentarian warned that policy issues arising out of the discontent of the populace over the quality of everyday life in Serbia, often characterized as “low politics,” may very well become “high politics” if ignored for too long. Indeed, another Serbian parlia-

The Serbian people want the government to deal with problems in the standard of living, employment, income, part-time employment for young people, the lack of confidence/vision of the future.

mentarian argued that “there is no difference between ‘high’ and ‘low’ politics. The standard of living is high politics.”

A Serbian participant added another dimension to this problem by suggesting the consequences of reform may be creating a conflict between “justice” and “rule of law” in the minds of the Serbian people.

At the mass level, the impact of the rule of law, rules of privatization, rules about territory, or international law, this participant argued, do not always seem “just” to those affected by them.

Participants raised a number of concerns about the strength of democratic institutions in Serbia. Some participants argued that the parliament of Serbia is “intolerably weak.” One participant suggested the parliament “sometimes seems to serve merely as a voting machine for the government, rather than as a forum for real opinions. It is the institution that has made the least progress in Serbia.” Part of the problem is the “lack of definition and differentiation of the parties in Serbia; there is no clearly defined left, right, or center.” As a result, elections are determined by personalities, not issues. The large number of abstentions from voting is a reflection of the fact that people do not see a rational choice being offered. In comparison to the turnout in September 2000, about 40 percent of the electorate, or some 1.5 million potential voters, are not voting in Serbia.

Several participants viewed the strength of the Serbian Radical Party as a potential threat to democratic stability in Serbia. One Serbian participant suggested that a more nuanced approach to dealing with the radicals is required. This participant, a Serbian parliamentarian, suggested it is a mistake to isolate cities in which radicals have taken power. It strengthens the “the West hates the Serbs” argument made by the radicals. Cutting support to such cities, she argued, only “damages the people, not the radicals.” Of course, this participant acknowledged, “such situations are primarily a domestic, internal issue, but the international community should certainly not make things more difficult for democrats.”

Several participants addressed the issue of cooperation with the Hague. One participant from Belgrade declared, in frustration, “there is no rational answer to the question why the Hague process has not moved faster since Milosevic. There is no rational answer why one would stall on an issue that is a real burden on the country.”

But another participant, a Serb from Kosovo, argued that “from the very outset, the ICTY has been perceived as an unjust and anti-Serb tribunal. This view of The Hague as anti-Serb has strengthened over time.” He acknowledged that “it was an erroneous assumption that the Milosevic extradition would fulfill requirements.” But he also argued that there are examples of lack of cooperation in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. The Haradinaj case, he argued, “destroyed any confidence in The Hague among the Serbs.” Now, however, Serbian leaders seem to have realized that obligations to The Hague are something that must be fulfilled, “and that life is not always just and fair.” Another participant, considering the impact of The Hague proceedings on the position of the radicals in Serbian politics, suggested that the ICTY should start the Seselj trial immediately and thereby discredit the radicals.

Another Serb participant pointed out that in 2002, only 36 percent of the population in Serbia supported cooperation with The Hague. Now over 70 percent support it. Cooperation is no longer, in his view, a political question; it is a “technical question” of better cooperation with security services. He reminded participants that Milosevic forces have not yet been defeated in the security sectors. All political forces in Serbia, except of course for the radicals, support increased cooperation with The Hague. “So,” he argued, “we need increased understanding on the part of the international community.”

A participant from a neighboring country suggested that the international community perform a comprehensive review and reform of The Hague processes, perhaps as a first step to move geographically to a locally based international court, then to a local juridical authority. He also declared, “when we approach the ethnic issue in Serbia, we should be less confrontational and more constructive.”

SERBIA, ITS NEIGHBORS, AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

In the view of one participant from a neighboring country with considerable experience in European institutions, “the whole international community would agree on two points: We all need a democratic and prosperous Serbia, and a Serbia integrated into European and Euro-Atlantic political/security systems. We should be concerned about an unstable, non-democratic Serbia, unable to integrate.” He argued that the EU is too reactive, “it is not proactive enough with respect to Serbian democracy.” He also warned that “we keep talking about The Hague, The Hague, The Hague. It is important, but we have to prioritize. Some problems are very difficult to swallow. We must help Serbian leaders achieve these.”

Many of the participants, from Serbia and neighboring countries, as well as international participants, agreed that there can be no real peace and stability in the region unless Serbian democracy is stabilized and strengthened. One participant from a neighboring country was a bit more cautious on this issue, however. He was “not sure that saying there can be no peace and stability in the region until Serbia achieves stable democracy is the right message to give either to Serbia or to the region. It makes the rest of the region hostage to Serbia. Of course, the situation in any country influences the situation in neighboring countries. But, this message can also give some retrograde forces in Serbia a feeling that they are in charge of the speed of development throughout the whole region.”

A Serb participant argued that the radicals have skillfully exploited The Hague issue, and the issue of Kosovo. A solution in Kosovo must be formulated, he suggested, with this in mind: “It is the perception of that solution that is important.” A Hungarian participant observed that Hungarians “know what it is to lose 2/3 of one’s territory and 1/3 of the nation. We know that the only solution to that is not to regain territory or to initiate conflicts, which was the manner of Serbia in the Milosevic period. The only remedy for such a loss is EU integration. This is the only solution, it is the view shared by all parts of the Hungarian nation throughout the Pannonian Basin for the last 20 years, and Hungary has been on this path for the past 15 years. This is proof that even the shocking experiences of the Serb nation—those that have happened and those which may be still be on

the way—can be cured in a proper way.” At the same time, he cautioned Serb participants that a long time is necessary to achieve such a solution; “even we Hungarians were not immune to unconstructive feelings,” he observed. He also agreed that, in this context, radicalism is still dangerous in Serbia; “it cannot be ignored.”

An international participant reminded Serbian participants that Serbia must take political action to reduce uncertainties. He demanded Hague compliance. He suggested that differences between democratic parties in Serbia, including differences between parties over whether to hold early elections, served as an obstacle to deeper cooperation with the international community. “Democratic parties have to do a better job of explaining to the Serbian people how present problems are due to the Milosevic legacy.” Some Serbian participants, however, suggested that “blaming the past” was no longer an option; responsibility for the failure to make progress on current tasks belongs to the current leadership. This insistence by democratic actors in contemporary Serbia on taking responsibility for conditions in Serbia was also articulated during discussion of minority-related issues at the second roundtable in this series.

A participant from a neighboring country suggested several constructive actions that Europe can take to assist Serbia. “Every nation must take responsibility for its own history,” he argued, “but Europe should establish special channels for Serbs at border control points, give out free visas, simplify procedures for visas. ‘Euroregions’ need to be coordinated between the Council of Europe and the EU, transcending Hungarian, Romanian, and Serbian borders to allow easier cooperation and commerce across borders.” It was noted that this, in effect, would simply restore the easy cross-border interactions that already existed with the former Yugoslavia. This participant went on to suggest “inclusion of Serbian political parties in the European trans-border party systems and a natural gas pipeline project to help address European energy security issues by diversifying the delivery routes to Europe and at the same time help integrate Serbia into the European economic system.” Improving cross-border communica-

We all need a democratic and prosperous Serbia, and a Serbia integrated into European and Euro-Atlantic political/security systems.

tion was also the focus of a participant from a minority population in a neighboring state, who suggested it might be useful to establish a mechanism for contact and communication of minorities across the region, in order to share experiences and, perhaps, achieve similar solutions.

Another participant agreed that establishment of Euroregions is very important for communications among Serbs and their neighbors. He reported that “ten days ago we had a meeting of ministers of foreign affairs in Novi Sad, dedicated to this issue. There are several such Euroregions in development/discussion that will provide linkages among neighbors. These activities contribute to better mutual understanding, while remaining off the front pages of newspapers.” He also pointed out that it is important to control rhetoric, to avoid inflammatory language, when discussing minority issues. “Serbia has 26 minorities and Romania has 18. All of us are interwoven in this region, and intermingling of minorities across the Balkans is a sign of this interrelatedness among neighbors.” In the end, he agreed that EU and NATO integration processes are the only path, but he warned that there should be no illusions about how difficult and protracted these processes are.

A participant from Kosovo declared that “we in Kosovo believe Serbia will be democratic; our whole position is based on the assumption that Serbia will be democratic; if not, then our priorities would be different. It is important for neighbors to make this clear to Serbia. All neighbors feel this about Serbia.” Another Albanian participant

from Kosovo acknowledged that “no one can deny the progress that Serbia has achieved in the past 6 years, especially in light of the Milosevic regime and the much greater difficulty Serbia experienced in comparison to neighbors.” And, while he cautioned

The international community and neighbors must provide more help to Serbia in its democratization.

participants that “we still have to see how effective democratic institutions will be in Serbia,” he argued that it is important that there is a great willingness to pursue democracy. He suggested that the international community and neighbors must provide more help to Serbia in its democratization. Neighbors provide good examples of coopera-

tion with The Hague, he argued, pointing to Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. "They may provide lessons for Serbia," he declared. "If 2000 was the beginning of a new process of democratization in Serbia," he suggested, "2006 will be the beginning of the process of integration into Europe and NATO."

An international participant offered some cautionary comments with respect to the impact of democracy on interethnic relations. On the basis of experience elsewhere in the region, this participant suggested democracy sometimes makes ethnic relations more difficult, not less. It is equally, if not more important, to focus on economic development and security issues. At the same time, however, this participant suggested that "force doesn't work." It is more effective to engage extremists than to attempt simply to suppress them. Another international participant agreed, suggesting that free and fair elections by themselves "do not guarantee good governance." A certain change in culture is required for democracy to work: "The population of a place must perceive that the elected leadership is there to serve the interests of the people, and the leadership must perceive that that is its role."

A participant from a neighboring country pointed out that other, earlier East European transition countries were lucky because there was a consensus among all the relevant countries about both the need for a transition to democracy and integration into the EU. At present, such a consensus does not appear to be present. His concerns were later supported by another participant, who pointed out that the level of financial support for transition, on a per capita basis, is significantly lower now than in the earlier period.

The absence of a consensus and the lower levels of support for Serbia and other Balkan states was viewed by participants as a significant problem. "How can neighbors help?" one participant from a neighboring country asked. "Regionally, and bilaterally," he answered. "The Szeged process that assisted democratic opposition parties should be revived. After October 2000 the focus became assistance in transition, and Szeged became a training center. The Visegrad countries and Austria and Slovenia devoted themselves to helping speed up the accession process. There is a need for a similar process for Serbia, including member states of the EU, Hungary and Slovenia, and near-members Romania and Bulgaria, and Croatia."

SERBIA AND KOSOVO

Kosovo Albanian and Serbian participants differed in their views of the negotiations taking place in Vienna, and over the question of security for Serbs in Kosovo.

One Kosovo Albanian participant argued that “there is still a lot to do with respect to standards, but much progress has been made, even in comparison to some independent countries in the region. The international community must play a direct role in regional security issues,” he argued. “There must be an international presence on the ground, a NATO presence.” He reported that “in Pristina, there is a willingness to build a cooperative relationship with Serbia and to ensure rights, integration of Serbs in Kosovo; dual citizenship, if necessary. The interest of Serbia in Serbs of Kosovo is legitimate but must work through Kosovo institutions. There must be full security for everyone living in the region.” However, according to this participant, “the Kosovo delegation in Vienna is constructive and united on the status question. But, there is no willingness or goodwill on the part of Serbia to find a sustainable solution.” In his view, Serbia is motivated by ethnic factors and “is not interested in a solution that would work for all.” A participant from a neighboring state, however, suggested “we must also say to Kosovo that until they establish a multiethnic, multi-linguistic, multicultural, multireligious society, they cannot have any final status.”

Another participant from Kosovo cited the difficulty of addressing the question of Albanian victims inside Serbia as an example of how difficult the Serb-Albanian relationship is. He suggested that relations today are at the same level as under Milosevic. After reciting a litany of accusations against the Serbs, he asked for “positive steps from Belgrade toward Kosovo.” At the same time, however, he accused Serbia of posing as “victims of the peace.” Serbia, in his view, wants all solutions imposed.

An American participant responded to these remarks by observing that he detected “a note of disbelief or frustration in the comments of the Albanians from Kosovo over the failure of Belgrade to cooperate fully at the Vienna talks.” He went on to suggest that this should not be a big surprise. “It’s not fun to have your country dismembered,” he reminded everyone, “which is what is taking place. There is no reason to expect that anyone in that position should be a good

sport about it, no matter what the original reasons for it were. It seems more appropriate for Serbia to go kicking and screaming until the very end.” While acknowledging the importance of negotiations, and the desirability that they succeed, this participant did not think “you are ever going to get the Serbs to agree that it is a good idea to have their country taken apart, that’s going too far.”

To the Kosovar participants, this speaker suggested, “It’s not really fair to say it’s their problem, because you happen to be sitting on a piece of their land, or what they consider to be a piece of their land, and your problems are very much interlocked: you get it, they don’t. They did not simply create the problem all on their own and have to manage it all on their own. You are part of the problem. Despite professions of intent about treating the Serbs and other minorities properly, you really haven’t done it yet. Serbs still do not feel safe walking on the streets and until or unless that happens, professions of high intent will not do the job. The reality is Belgrade will have to worry about that, it has the right to worry about it, and it should.”

To the participants from Serbia, he declared, “It is no fun being dismembered, but on the other hand what did you expect? The reasons for it are clear and there is no going back. Nor is there any reason to expect the Albanians, who have, we think, independence just within their grasp, to be any nicer to you than they absolutely need to be. Their job is to convince the international community to give them independence.” In the view of this participant, there is no possibility for the two sides to reach an agreement that is more than a cosmetic one on details. Even that will have to come from the outside, and “it will not be fair, it will to some extent be arbitrary, and it is going to be dressed up as a new principle that is going to violate several old principles.”

He admonished participants that “now is the time to consider what that outcome will look like, and whether it will contribute to stability or instability. It is time to think about what is necessary to ensure stability and make peoples’ lives better. This problem of dismemberment also extends to Montenegro, even though it has never been part of Serbia. You can make the Serbs lie down, but you cannot expect them to enjoy it.”

This participant continued, “There will be a trauma to the Serbs, and we have to worry what that will be, and what consequences will be.

The answer will not be found in any quick forms of reconciliation. That is probably decades away. These wounds are too deep, and the deaths are too recent for any easy formula for reconciliation. Reconciliation comes after the problems are solved; it is not a means of solving problems—it is a by-product of having outlived the problems. We need to create stability and prosperity.” A participant from a neighboring country added that, while agreeing that the international community should not attempt to make the Serbs enjoy the current situation, it should try to identify and help them pursue common interests. “Without solidarity of interests,” he declared, “there are no common projects. Without common projects, past difficulties and past conflicts cannot be overcome.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of specific recommendations for action by Serbia, its neighbors, and the international community emerged during the Bucharest discussions.

Within Serbia:

- Establish a cross-party dialogue among democratic parties to develop policies that address the real problems of the populace. People want the government to deal with the problems of everyday life in Serbia.
- Strengthen democratic institutions, beginning with an effort to improve the performance of the Serbian parliament.
- Take steps to increase the level of citizen participation in elections.

The international community:

- Direct economic assistance toward improving living standards in Serbia. Focus on social problems in local communities rather than the political identity of local leaderships.
- While continuing to demand compliance, consider reforming the prosecution of suspected war criminals to permit local trials.
- Support strengthened bilateral relations between Serbia and Hungary, from which Serbia and Serbs may draw important historical lessons.

- Accelerate the easing of visa restrictions, a particularly sensitive issue among Serbian participants. Lifting such restrictions would provide a positive benefit to precisely those segments of society most likely to support further democratic change in Serbia.
- A European participant in the meeting responded to challenges to the EU visa regime by citing concerns about controlling borders against organized crime, human trafficking and other activities, and asserting the need for a step-by-step approach, in which “not everything can be done at once.” This restrictive and stereotyped view of Serbian and other Balkan applicants for visas should be addressed on an expedited basis.
- Renew the financial and political commitment of the EU to easing the transition of Serbia and its neighbors to EU membership.

The international community and neighbors:

- Facilitate the establishment of cross-border commerce and communication between Serbia and neighboring states. Lay the foundations for the establishment of future “Euroregions” in the EU.
- Establish an expanded “Szeged process” to assist Serbia with the tasks of transition.



Left to right: Livia Plaks and Bojan Pajtic.

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Left to right: Lutfi Haziri, Miodrag Vlahovic, Livia Plaks, Steven Burg, and Oliver Ivanovic.



Left to right: Susan Johnson, Gordana Comic, and Michael Einik.

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