

Direct involvement of the Milosevic couple

86. The entire private press sector was then kept under close scrutiny by the regime, as announced more or less officially by Mira Markovic, ideologist and wife of president Milosevic, in her column published in the weekly newspaper *Duga* in early January 1995¹⁹⁷. The independent media and the professionals who worked for them were excoriated and, in keeping with classic propaganda, depicted as traitors of Serbia¹⁹⁸. *"We will know very quickly who participated in financing certain parties and certain information media in eastern Europe. However, by identifying the financiers, we will identify those who were financed, those who were paid to turn their countries into colonies (...) Dead or alive, it doesn't matter, the perpetrators of these acts will not avoid judgement by history. It is of course unfortunate that the mark of shame will inevitably be borne by their descendants (...). Those mercenaries and informers who, for hard currency, organise "democratic" parties and "independent" media naively believe that their activities will never come to light (...). Traitors have always attempted to present their treachery as an act which defends the highest interests of the Nation. Fortunately most of them did not succeed. Therefore politicians and journalists who are now serving as envoys to modern-day conquistadores in eastern Europe will not be successful either..."*¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ The magazine *Duga* came under the control of the authorities in spring 1987, when the editorial team was restructured. From that time on it published articles backing Milosevic's nationalist arguments. In her column - humorously described as a "horoscope" by her detractors - Mira Markovic would systematically announce in advance the decisions that the authorities would take. A close ally of Slobodan Milosevic, Borisav Jovic, wrote on this subject: *"This became evident in practice in the early 1990s. Milosevic's wife started to publish a series of articles in the Duga magazine in the form of her diary and thoughts, in which she touched on numerous political and social issues but also announced what could later happen or what should happen. Everything she announced really did happen. What she objected to would be publicly attacked. Those she criticised would be dismissed. All of this could happen only in one way, through the support of the state and the political machine, led by her husband, which put in practice what she only announced (...). Her texts even attracted huge attention. They often contained, between the lines, real intentions and hints as to whom the texts referred to. A phantom which could destroy one with a single sentence hovered above the people. After each new issue of Duga the main topic of analysis for the political public would be the new text by Milosevic's wife, with guesses as to what she wanted to say this time and what would happen afterwards"*. In *Book on Milosevic*, Belgrade, 2001 (draft translation by ICTY), pp. 23-24.

¹⁹⁸ Part of the column would also be published in the daily newspaper *Vecernje Novosti* which had the highest circulation figures in the FRY, with 230,000 copies sold (*BETA News Agency*, 10 January 1995).

¹⁹⁹ Quoted in *La lettre de Reporters sans frontières*, February 1995, p. 18.

87. With a view to launching the election campaign for the municipal elections of November 1996 and resorting to the same procedure as against *Borba* in December 1994 and against the weekly newspaper *Svetlost*²⁰⁰ in September 1995, the authorities entrusted the municipality of Belgrade with control of the private television channel NTV Studio B in February 1996, the main forum for the opposition parties at the time²⁰¹.

88. Using the same logic, Slobodan Milosevic had the last two radio stations – *B 92* and *Radio Index*, the Belgrade student station²⁰² – which reported on daily anti-government demonstrations, closed for 48 hours at the beginning of December 1996. From November 1996 to March 1997, the opposition demonstrations were however deliberately covered up by the state media²⁰³, like RTS which, during the huge new year's demonstration which brought 250,000 people together in Belgrade and thousands of others in the country's large cities, broadcast views of London and New York in its television news²⁰⁴.

89. The electronic media which had increased in all the towns in Serbia following the Dayton Accords would also be attacked by the authorities. Their vague legal structure would at the appropriate moment allow those authorities to hamper or stop the activity of municipal and private radio and television stations in spring 1997²⁰⁵. This was

²⁰⁰ The newspaper, published in Kragujevac some 120 kilometres south of Belgrade, was linked to twenty or so regional newspapers which advocated pluralism.

²⁰¹ *Correspondance de la Presse*, Monday 19 February 1996.

²⁰² *Correspondance de la Presse*, Wednesday 4 December 1996.

²⁰³ In its December edition, *AIM* writes in this regard: "The state-controlled media have totally ignored the mass protests in Serbia, but have given wide coverage to those in... Zagreb. Politika only informed its readers that opposition supporters had 'demolished' its building". In "The Struggle for the Cities", *AIM Review*, no. 43, December 1996, p. 5-6.

²⁰⁴ "Serbie: propagande, mode d'emploi", in *La lettre de Reporters sans frontières*, 13 January 1997.

²⁰⁵ Mirko S. Mandrino notes: "Most of the 'private', 'independent' or 'local' stations have no licenses and are therefore operating illegally according to the national and international norms. The only exceptions are those stations which belong to people close to the authorities (like the family members of high-ranking civil servants) or which are run by them. The others do not have the correct papers and so the authorities organise police raids on their premises from time to time and confiscate their equipment. The last police raid, which was better organised and on a scale the like of which we have never seen before, took place in May-June 1997. With police assistance, "official" State radio inspectors accompanied by engineers and technicians carrying provisional police i.d. carried out these lightning raids. Most of the time, not only was the building sealed off but the equipment confiscated too. More than 100 radio stations and fifty or so television stations were "visited" like this – including Radio Bum in Pozarevac, Radio Velinka Kikinda in Kikinda, Radio N in Nis, Radio 021 in Novi Sad, Independent TV in Pancevo, TV in Nis and many others". In *InteRadio*, Vol. 9, no. 2. Internet site of A.M.A.R.C.

http://www.amarc.org/interadio/Vol9_No2/Francais/html/europe/htm

instrumental in causing the opposition coalition to split. Many municipalities which had been won by the opposition in November 1996 were in fact to be taken over again by the authorities on this occasion. In the same way, through the annual procedure for giving out broadcasting licenses, a number of electronic media were be got rid off. "In June 1997, the authorities closed down 55 radio and television stations"²⁰⁶.

90. Milosevic was personally behind this general take-over. Very recently elected to the presidency of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on 15 July 1997, he was to publicly voice his aversion to independent media which were tiresome because they were outside his control and financed from outside²⁰⁷. On 23 July he declared before the Yugoslav Assembly that "*it is high time that we put some order into the media, swift action must be undertaken to this end*"²⁰⁸.

91. The political situation and climate in late 1997 was worsening: Milosevic's candidate, Milan Milutinovic, had difficulty in getting elected as the Serbian president; a coalition government with Vojislav Seselj's Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and Mira Markovic's Yugoslav Unified Left was formed; Montenegro experienced vague stirrings for independence; the first signs of the Kosovo conflict appeared. With this deterioration, the last remaining room for free expression was threatened. Here again, "*the propaganda methods would allow no doubt to remain as to the objectives of the regime; full control over the areas of possible opposition*"²⁰⁹. Employing a technique already seen, the external threat was to be systematically used as a pretext to silence the dissonant voices in the country.

See also "Independent media under pressure from all sides", *AIM Review*, no. 49, July 1997, p. 5.

²⁰⁶ Reporters sans frontières, *Dossiers et rapports de missions, RFY: un Etat de censure*.

²⁰⁷ A hate campaign would be launched against the media receiving subsidies from abroad who were described as "traitors to Serbia". *Politika* would publish a list of independent press organs who had received funding from the European Commission (*Vreme, Nasa Borba, AIM*, etc.). Certain of their editors were depicted as driving around in Mercedes and living in luxurious villas which they allegedly obtained through subversive activities undermining Serbia. Reported by Gordana Igric, "*The Regime's Operation 'Media'*" in *AIM Review*, no. 35, April 1996, p. 10.

²⁰⁸ Reported by Bénédicte Chesnelong, "*Serbie. Le trou noir des Balkans*", report of a fact-finding mission of the International Human Rights Federation (19-22 September 1977).

<http://www.fidh.imagenet.fr/rapports/r251-2.htm>

²⁰⁹ Anne Madelain, "*Les médias indépendants en RFY: Où se trouve la société civile?*" in *Le Courrier des Balkans*, 9 May 1999.

War propaganda and national cohesion during the Kosovo war

92. In the crisis which preceded the war and during the war itself, every effort by Slobodan Milosevic's regime went into strengthening national cohesion around an authoritarian power²¹⁰ discredited by its failure in previous wars - Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina - by its economic and social management of the country and by the personal enrichment of its leaders when the majority of the Serbian population was growing poorer. Belgrade again used a communication strategy already tried and tested in the past which was to work against independent journalists but also against the opposition. This was true for both foreign and Serbian journalists to whom all free access to information on what was really happening in Kosovo was denied. In the same way, the media controlled by the authorities, which was the great majority of media in the national landscape, were all busy denouncing the internal enemies (the political and media opposition to Milosevic) and the external ones (NATO and the western press). Serbian citizens were to be gradually classed into two categories, patriots or traitors according to whether they supported or criticised the authorities.

A set "reading list"

93. As regards the Yugoslav independent press - or at least what remained of it after Milosevic had personally imposed ten years of severe repression and brought it into line - the vice was tightened in early 1998 with intensified attacks on the media and divergent

²¹⁰ Nebojsa Popov, editor-in-chief of the magazine *Republika*, shows how, relying on an "authoritarian pluralism", the "new" Serbian authorities were completely focused on waging their war against the Serbian opposition. He explains, in particular, that "Two months before the NATO bombing, which began on 24 March 1999, a meeting starkly exposed the difficulties of democracy in Serbia. Three vice-Prime Ministers of Serbia who were also doctors and university professors - Mr Ratko Markovic (Serbian Socialist Party, SPS), Mr Vojislav Seselj (Serbian Radical Party, SRS) and Mr Milovan Bojic (Yugoslav United Left) - held a press conference at which they condemned the eight pillars of democracy: opposition, media, universities, students, trade unions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), judges and members of the future electoral commissions. In their opinion such a threat required the highest courts in the country to be mobilised. Thus an entire apparatus, initially ideological and propagandic but later administrative, was set in place to eliminate "the bogeyman of democracy". In "La voix étouffée des démocrates serbes", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 1999, p. 6.

<http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1999/06/POPOV/12121.html>

information sources. In the months before the start of air strikes on 24 March, four radio stations and one television channel were banned and *Nasa Borba*, a leading daily newspaper in Serbia, stopped publishing²¹¹. Refusing to bow to the “reading list” relating to events in Kosovo which the Minister for Information attempted to impose on journalists of the free press on 10 March 1998 - the date they were summoned to report to the police - *Nasa Borba* and later *Danas* or *Dnevni Telegraf* would not survive the adoption of a new law on information the following October providing for very high fines for dissonant voices²¹².

Punitive policy against the “traitors”

94. As of the first air strikes a *de facto* censorship would be imposed on all the media, which, because of the heavy penalties in force since the press law was passed in October 1998, would merely reproduce the official communiqués from the government and army general staff. Soldiers would be posted in the offices of each media company to ensure that the reports on Kosovo matched the ideology and official directives communicated to the press by the Ministry for Information. The first NATO strikes were to be the opportunity for the regime to close Belgrade’s *Radio B92*, the last independent media in Serbia. A few days later, on 11 April, the owner of *Dnevni Telegraf*, Slavko Curuvija, who had been close to the regime and “defected” some months earlier, was assassinated in the streets of Belgrade, shortly after being described by a local daily newspaper as a “traitor” who had “to be dealt with”²¹³. This was reiterated by *Serbian Radio Television*²¹⁴. In Kosovo itself, the local independent press also disappeared²¹⁵, like *Koha Ditore*, the main Albanian language newspaper which was to stop printing on 23 March.

²¹¹ Cf. Hélène Despic-Popovic, “Belgrade a décrété l’état de guerre: Milosevic muselle les médias indépendants” in *Libération*, 25 March 1999, p. 3.

²¹² *Nasa Borba* would be suspended for publishing on its front page the government letter setting out the instructions for “reading” events – that is for refusing to call the KLA a “band of terrorists” and describe their activities as “criminal” and for refusing to talk in terms of Serbian police “operations to maintain law and order” and “to keep the peace”. See Florence Amalou, “Comment Belgrade a progressivement muselé la presse libre” in *Le Monde*, 2-3 May 1999, p. 21.

²¹³ On the authorities’ political manipulation of the concept of treason see Aleksander Ciric, “Post-war Serbia. Hunting Traitors”, *AIM Podgorica*, 22 June 1999.

²¹⁴ Cf. Hélène Despic-Popovic, “Slavko Curuvija, l’homme qui en disait trop”, in *Libération*, 15 April 1999, p. 10.

95. Closing down or bringing into line the few independent media, none of which, it must be recalled, had national coverage, was to preclude any version differing from that of the propaganda media responsible for spreading the official truth. This unique press situation explains why Serbian citizens saw the massacres and pillage committed against the Kosovar population as the destruction of KLA bases during “pacification operations” and the exodus of that very population as unfortunates not fleeing the violent acts of politicians and soldiers but the “NATO bombing”²¹⁶.

Serbia as the victim of an umpteenth international plot

96. Serbian public opinion, which had not been informed of the violence committed in Kosovo or the evidence of refugees, was fed effective propaganda whose main support was *Serbian Radio Television*²¹⁷ which played on nationalist sentiment and reduced the air strikes to an international plot against Serbia. *The propaganda is intense* wrote Natalie Nougayrède, special envoy of *Le Monde* who was still in Belgrade the day after the first strikes. *The bulletins are quite frequent, interrupted with musical interludes, videos to the glory of the armed forces or films on the resistance of Serbian anti-Nazi fighters during the Second World War*²¹⁸. The connection made between Bill Clinton and Adolf Hitler and the showing of Charlie Chaplin’s cult film *The Dictator* allowed the Serbian public to believe, for example, that it was once again the victim of Nazi aggression and therefore threatened in its very being.

New war waged against the “Serbian people”

97. This war propaganda, based on hatred of an enemy with many faces, was the extension of the propaganda which accompanied the collapse of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Researcher Jacques Sémelin considers that the propaganda was directly

²¹⁵ Cf. “Kosovo: mort de l’information indépendante”, in *La lettre de Reporters sans frontières*, April 1999, no. 137, p. 1.

²¹⁶ *Le Monde*, editorial, 13 April 1999, p. 19.

²¹⁷ See Marc Semo’s review, “La RTS, télé haine” in *Libération*, 26 April 1999.

in keeping with the history of Serbia *at least since the Second World War*²¹⁹. The priority of Milosevic's regime was therefore *to convince public opinion that NATO was waging a war with the Serbian people and not with his regime and war machine*²²⁰.

98. That observation explains how the Serbian media continued to ignore the tragedy of the Kosovars and how the regime, which refused to allow NATO journalists to report on the war, expressly organised a convoy for them in order to show them the wreck of an American F-117 stealth bomber, which had either crashed because of a technical problem or had been shot down by anti-aircraft defence. The slightest "collateral damage" caused by NATO aircraft was exploited in the media for both external and internal consumption in order to try to substantiate the idea that it was indeed a war against the civilian population.

99. The regime's propaganda generally ignored the facts and constructed its own "reality", as demonstrated *inter alia* by the meeting broadcast by RTS between Slobodan Milosevic and the Kosovar leader Ibrahim Rugova, who was taken out of his monitored residence in Pristina for the occasion. The main purpose of this strange and surrealist meeting was to make people believe that the Serbs wanted to re-launch negotiations at a time when ethnic cleansing operations in the field were increasing.

100. Therefore, from the moment the first air strikes hit to the time the peace plan was announced, the Serbian media were to put out propaganda which replaced the simple truth of the facts²²¹, while the silencing of independent voices - which alone might have enlightened Serbian public opinion - made it impossible to process honestly and fairly any information on the Kosovo conflict and NATO's intervention.

²¹⁸ "La population est privée d'informations indépendantes", *Le Monde*, 28-29 March 1999.

²¹⁹ "Les médias dans la guerre au Kosovo" in *Le Monde*, 25 June 1999, p. 17.

²²⁰ Florence Hartmann, "Une semaine devant la télévision serbe" in *Le Monde Télévision*, 4-5 April 1999, p. 5.

²²¹ For a more precise and exhaustive insight into how the regime's main propaganda tool re-interpreted the facts, it can be helpful to refer to the column "Vu à la télévision serbe" written by the *Le Monde* journalist Hector Forest from early April until the moment the peace plan was announced the following June.

International press in quarantine

101. At the same time that the national press was being brought under control, foreign journalists were denied access, or at least full access, to information about what was happening on the ground in Kosovo and Serbia once the NATO air strikes began because the Serbs completely limited their ability to report on the news.

102. After the first air strikes, the Serbian police in Belgrade arrested about thirty western journalists who were interrogated and then expelled, mostly from Yugoslavia²²². This was the case of *inter alia* the correspondents from *Libération* and *Le Soir*, the ABC News producer and the journalist from the *Washington Post*.

103. Also at that time, the Serbian authorities attempted to block the free circulation of broadcast images by shutting down the satellite *European Union Radio Broadcasting Network* (EUR) and ordering that Serbian television not allow *CNN* to use its technical resources to distribute its reports²²³.

104. It was in Kosovo and its capital Pristina that repressive measures were applied against foreign correspondents the most strictly. This was done in accordance with the communiqué of the Serbian Ministry for Information dated 25 March which stated that “on the basis of article 8 of the Law on the Defence of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry for Information orders that journalists from the media of those countries participating in the NATO aggression against our country or allowing their territory to be used for the purposes of that aggression shall be expelled²²⁴.” Paul Watson of the *Los Angeles Times* was the only independent journalist who succeeded in slipping through the net. He was able to travel throughout Kosovo²²⁵ during the approximately 78 days of air strikes whereas the other foreign correspondents were forced to move to Macedonia,

²²² *Libération*, 22 March 1999, p. 5. See also *La lettre de Reporters sans frontières*, May 1999, no. 138, p.4.

²²³ *Le Monde*, 26 March 1999.

²²⁴ Quoted by Denis Hautin-Guiraut, *Le Monde*, 27 March 1999.

²²⁵ Cf. Paul Watson, *Témoin de guerre*, in *Les Cahiers de Médiologie, Croyances en guerre: l'effet Kosovo*, no. 8, second semester 1999, pp. 111-119.

Albania or even Montenegro from where they could report only about the refugee problem.

105. In practice, the conditions necessary for a minimum of transparency in respect of information were completely lacking. Freedom of movement was eliminated which made verifying facts or interviewing witnesses on-site impossible. Statements could not be cross-checked, investigations could not be carried out. The impact on the very essence of the journalist's work was tremendous: information could not be collected, facts could not be checked and cross-checked, processing could not take place. All this was denied to foreign journalists by the Milosevic regime. The fact that journalists were unable to gather and process information explains why they were forced to rely on second-hand sources with all the concomitant risks of error and imprecision. This was even more so when it came to reporting about the on-going ethnic cleansing since the journalists were made dependent on what they heard instead of what they saw with their own eyes in a Kosovo transformed into a session not open to the media²²⁶.

Reasons for the impact of propaganda on public opinion

106. An overview of how propaganda was used in the former Yugoslavia during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, and elsewhere as well, demonstrates how war is today more than ever before linked to the control of information and communications. The fact that controlling them is in itself a stake or an additional resource to be used to reach pre-set objectives again shows the importance of "informing" and "making others believe". The total or partial lack of alternative information, the locking out of the media and the enormous power of television are all factors which explain why the great majority of the Serbian population did not see things clearly and accepted the official version.

²²⁶ Jean-Paul Marthoz illustrates this when he writes: "we were thus exposed to a war in delayed time. The information about the situation in Kosovo arrived in drips and drabs through refugees interviewed by the representatives of the humanitarian organisations posted in Albania and Macedonia. Although valuable, the information provided only a partial and delayed view of the violence committed by the Serbian forces and the consequences of the bombings". See "*Une presse qui a refusé le garde-à-vous*" in *La guerre du Kosovo: éclairages et commentaires*, Bernard Adam, GRIP, Editions Complexe, Brussels, 1999, p. 141.

A population disoriented by a widespread crisis

107. In order to explain why the official propaganda was effective and to understand why it had a permanent impact on the population, it is necessary to keep in mind the conditions in the country which were exceptionally favourable for this in the late 1980s. In addition to the serious social and economic crisis affecting Yugoslavia, and Serbia in particular, which was unable to modernise its industrial infrastructure – not unlike the case almost everywhere else in eastern and central Europe – there was also the gradual rethinking of the regime’s ideological nature. The great transformations taking place within the social and economic structures had a direct effect on people’s daily lives as did the loss of reference points inherited from many years of Yugoslav communism. Disoriented within its collective beliefs, the Serbian population would be easy prey for nationalist propaganda. Like the critical situation in czarist Russia after 1910 or Germany in the 1930s, Serbia’s negative political, economic and social conditions in the late 1980s were fertile ground for the appearance and development of those preaching nationalism and xenophobia.

Support of the regime by the major opinion-formers

108. The propaganda processed by media like *Politika* or *Belgrade Radio and Television* (later known as *Serbian Radio and Television*) prepared and manipulated public opinion thus giving to the Milosevic regime the ability to garner a national political consensus for his policy. Obtaining this consensus was facilitated by the support for him of other opinion-formers: the intellectuals²²⁷, the unions, the educational institutions and especially the Orthodox Church. As an example, we point to the Church’s support for the regime’s 1989 celebrations of the six-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of the Field of Blackbirds which organised a travelling media exhibition throughout the republic during

²²⁷ Journalist Stanko Cerovic places great importance on the role of the intellectuals as a factor explaining the passivity of the masses. For him “*the role and betrayal of the intelligentsia are decisive in ideological systems. No totalitarian system can survive without the contribution of the intellectuals. In the case of the former Yugoslavia, at one time or another 90% of the intellectuals lined up behind Milosevic's power and supported the purifying nationalist project. This class had an immense influence on the people*”. In “*Is*

which mortuary relics of Prince Lazar were displayed and buried at that symbolic site. Such support convinced many Serbs to back the nationalist program. When we consider that most people tend to define themselves in relation to the opinions prevailing in the groups of which they are members, we can understand that opinion-formers like the Orthodox Church, the intelligentsia and others, helped the State media to forge a general consensus around the Serbian national question. In such a consensual atmosphere, nobody questioned the validity and possible dire consequences of such a plan, at least, nobody among the major opinion-formers to which the Serbian masses had access. The independent press itself found it very difficult not to give in to reflexes touching on issues of identity. As Anne Madelain writes: "*when collective identity is at stake, the 'independent' media often find it difficult to avoid reflexes based on identity and to ensure pluralism. War merely bolsters the phenomenon and although war feeds on propaganda, propaganda also feeds on war*"²²⁸.

Official press: sole source of information for 90% of the Serbs

109. The alternative information and opinions which did run through Serbian society were never made available to the majority of the population. The explanation for this can be found first in the fact that the only media covering all of Serbia were the State radio and television²²⁹. Although some independent electronic media were tolerated, they had only a limited, sometimes confidential, broadcast range. For example, Radio B92, which was the main provider of information challenging the regime and a podium for the opposition, could be heard only in Belgrade and several large urban centres but almost nowhere else in Serbia. Attempts to widen their broadcast range were all thwarted by the authorities: their transmitter was seized, they were not allowed to broadcast other radio programmes, and so forth.

Information Possible in the Face of Propaganda?" Foundation for the Advancement of Mankind, working document, no. 64, p. 191.

²²⁸ "Où se trouve la société civile?", *op. cit.*

²²⁹ "Milosevic veut serrer la vis aux médias privés", *Libération*, 11 March 1997.

110. The second factor is that the rest of the republic was carefully kept away from the independent media in the large cities – and Belgrade especially – which were the strongholds of the regime’s opposition because it was outside those cities that Milosevic found his greatest support. Belgrade did in fact have the best coverage by the independent media but “*Milosevic’s power relied on rural Serbia which was under the domination of the official press*”²³⁰. In this respect, State television occupied a significant position as the prime medium in the country²³¹. Official propaganda therefore reached more than 3.5 million people every evening and was the single source of information for 30% of the population that had not completed primary schooling²³²... The producer Lazar Lalic provides an example which captures the impact of the *RTS* propaganda on certain audiences. Questioned by the *RTS* on the reasons which had led her to volunteer to fight at Vukovar, a young Serbian woman in uniform, mother of two children, said: “*Well, when I watch Television, I see what’s going on and I want to help, and it’s worth sacrificing my life for this here Serbia of ours*”²³³.

Impossibility of a democratic changeover of political power

111. The State television monopoly over information, and to a lesser degree the national radio monopoly, was a guarantee that Slobodan Milosevic would cash in on extraordinary political royalties. The opposition’s voice was limited to the urban centres – that is to an audience it had already mostly captured – and reached rural Serbia only now and again. The media advantage would of course pay off in many elections. This was the case in the

²³⁰ Véronique Soulé, “*Serbie: la difficile survie de la presse indépendante*”, op. cit.

²³¹ *Alternativna Informativna Mreza* provides extremely interesting viewer statistics: “*Research shows that TV Belgrade was (...) the most significant information medium. In October 1990, the central information program of TV Belgrade, ‘Dnevnik 2’, (Daily News 2, at 7.30 p.m.) on the territory of Serbia with no provinces, was watched by 2.5 million people, i.e. more than 50 per cent of the population (Plavsic, P., Mavric, G., 1991). A year later, in full swing of the war in Croatia, this figure went up to 3 million or 60% of the inhabitants of Serbia over the age of 10 (Group of authors, 1992). Should about thousands spectators in Vojvodina be added to this (according to the data of the RTV Novi Sad), TV news were watched by at least 3.5 million spectators on the territory of Serbia towards the end of 1991*” [as printed]. *Situation of the Media in the Former Yugoslavia, Report to the Commission of the European Union, AIM, March 1995*, pp. 57-58.

²³² Reporters sans frontières, *La liberté de la presse dans le monde. Report, 1993*, p. 338.

²³³ *Op.cit.* p.92.

December 1990 elections²³⁴ and the December 1992 elections²³⁵ as well. Shortly before and during the electoral campaign, the official media doubled efforts to ensure victory for the incumbents, Slobodan Milosevic and the Serbian Socialist Party, even if the messages put out by the opposition had to be ignored or distorted²³⁶. The flagrant inequality of the campaign conditions was condemned in an official report drafted by 119 observers sent by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) which was particularly critical of the “*shameful propaganda of the State-controlled media and, in particular, television which ignored or altered the message of the opposition.*”²³⁷

112. The independent print media had barely any impact on the majority of the Serbian population. Hard-hit by the paper shortages caused by the international embargo during the war, written publications were reserved for a privileged urban elite. Although the print media were an important symbol for the democrats who saw the written word as the way to preserve their “mental health”, over a ten-year period, they watched their editions dwindle away under the weight of all sorts of obstacles created by those in power and their readers become bankrupt. This did not apply to Serbs living in the countryside and so it was, in fact, the urbanites who suffered the most from the international embargo and the consequences of the war in Kosovo.

²³⁴ Speaking of the first multi-party elections of December 1990, Dusan Mitevic, an ally of Milosevic and managing director of RTS, openly stated: “We must do everything within our power to ensure that the socialists win”. Reported by Rade Veljanovski, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

Shortly after the elections in December 1990, Predrag Vitas, the editor-in-chief for news at the RTS, stated publicly that the RTB had helped Milosevic’s party to accede to power (Milica Pesic, *op. cit.*; p.16).

²³⁵ Another example of the media’s bias: Milan Panic, a candidate for the presidency and an opponent of Milosevic, would be portrayed as being in league with the enemies of Serbia and as “a drunken sailor roaming the high seas to convince foreigners to support his policy” during the news programme of *Radio Belgrade’s* first channel, 1 December 1992. *Idem* p. 318.

²³⁶ Such a procedure was used as of 30 June 1990 during the first opposition rally of Milosevic’s régime: gathered in front of the main television studio and calling for the freedom of the press and multi-party elections, the demonstrators were violently dispersed by policemen who beat them with truncheons. That same evening no pictures of the broken up demonstration were to be seen on *TV Belgrade’s* news. Instead a statement from the Ministry of the Interior was read out: “*The rally is now over, leaving in its wake idle boasts about its “huge attendance”. It only served to show that the united Serbian opposition does not enjoy legitimate support of the Serbian people. Mud slinging at the government and primitive anti-communism proved to be of no avail. The united opposition clearly showed its readiness to sacrifice not only democracy on the altar of a power struggle but also our constitution and even territorial integrity. In their blind lust for power they would sacrifice even Kosovo. The rally only taught us that no opposition party, regardless of the ostensibly democratic face it puts on, can count on the support of the Serbian people if it disregards the country’s vital interests.*” See “*Images and Words of Hate: Year One*”, *Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words*, Lazar Lalic, B 92-ARHITEL, 1996.

Lack of any critical spirit

113. These characteristics of the Serbian media landscape help us to understand why the population was extremely vulnerable to the propaganda the regime put out, a regime which successfully destroyed any critical spirit. It was easier for it to achieve this end because the Yugoslav masses had already been conditioned by decades of communist propaganda. The lack of information, or availability of one-way information only, explains the docility of the Serbian masses in the face of a nationalist regime and policy whose criminal features they did not clearly discern. The people either did not wish to see what was happening or were content to receive their information from official sources only and so were kept ignorant of what was really going on in the federation and Serbia. They were psychologically disposed to believe any type of lie. In this regard, Florence Hartmann reported on the significant work of a team from the Belgrade Institute for Political Studies in July 1992. The team concluded that "only 20% of the persons interviewed correctly answered the question "Who shelled Sarajevo from the hills overlooking the city in May and June?"²³⁸. The remaining 80%, that is the overwhelming majority of those questioned, based their information on only the official sources and were misinformed by the regime's propaganda²³⁹. This serious situation which deprived the opposition of the chance to express its criticism and convince public opinion to hand over to it the reins of power was made possible by the overwhelming power of State television over all of Serbian society. The journalist from *Le Monde* wrote: *Television in Serbia is playing an increasingly important role in forming opinion. Its deliberate Manichaeism is projected over the entire society which has surrendered all critical spirit to television. The effects of this are disturbing according to the specialists who speak of viewers being hypnotised and of their unbelievable gullibility. Certain studies, they add,*

²³⁷ Reporters sans frontières, *La liberté de la presse dans le monde. Rapport*, p. 343.

²³⁸ "La presse serbe sous haute surveillance. M. Milosevic contrôle les médias officiels et fait pression sur les indépendants pour promouvoir ses buts de guerre", *Le Monde*, 21 November 1992.

²³⁹ In its report *Situation of the Media in the Former Yugoslavia, Report to the Commission of the European Union, Alternativna Informativna Mreza* writes about the populations' degree of trust in televised information: "The central information of TV Belgrade is distinguished by great credibility. According to data collected by TV itself, 33.7% of spectators absolutely believe its information, and only 13% express

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assert that 60% of the population 'blindly believe' in the information they get from television.²⁴⁰”

This particularly difficult context explains why clairvoyants of all kinds became more numerous and achieved success throughout the 1990s and why they were omnipresent in the Serbian media. Having perceived the potential value of the occult sciences, the Milosevic regime would exploit them as did Joseph Goebbels. In his personal diary, Goebbels noted “*the need to incorporate the occult sciences into our propaganda (...) we must put pressure on all the clairvoyants to get them to work for us*”²⁴¹. From 1994 onwards, the *Politika* press group, which then owned several magazines devoted to magic, served as a springboard for almost a hundred clairvoyants and fortune-tellers who, according to a Belgrade divination agency owner, had been asked by “*those in power not to speak ill of the government and to propagate positive energy*”²⁴². To cite one example amongst others: *The Third Eye*, one of the oldest magic magazines founded by the Yugoslav government, would assert in its “Horoscope” column that Slobodan Milosevic’s destiny was to lead Yugoslavia: “*The stars are favourable to Slobodan Milosevic. He has many enemies but this was to be expected. He is the best of all men and it is not unusual that many people wish to drive him from power. He was born a Leo and Yugoslavia under the sign of Taurus, which proves that they cannot be separated.*”²⁴³

Yet, it was again RTS that would push the use of parapsychology to its limits for propaganda purposes by broadcasting the messages of hate it conveyed during peak viewing hours. In early 1993, the weekly programme “*Milja’s Horoscope*”, presented by Milja Vujanovic who claimed to be an astrologist, historian and reporter (and was in addition a former actress and Miss Yugoslavia), would be rescheduled from its late evening slot on RTS’s Channel Three (3K) to peak viewing time - at 20:15 hours on Tuesdays. The researchers, Elena Popovic and Vladimir Badinovac, who studied the political astrology programmes from March to May 1993 summed up their role as follows: “*What Milja Vujanovic explains, regardless of the occasional invoking of*

disbelief (Timotic, M., 1991). Young spectators express much less trust in this medium (B. Dzuverovic et al., 1992)”, op. cit., p. 58.

²⁴⁰ *Idem.*

²⁴¹ Quoted by Jelena Grujic in “Milosevic brandit l’arme parapsychologique”, The Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 6 June 2000.

²⁴² *Idem.*

astrology symbols (...) easily translates into everyday political language. What we have here is the glorification of the Serb nation, the total negation of everything that is different and the justification for spreading the policies of this state authority. And so, astrology is usually found in the role of an instrument of hate speech."²⁴⁴ The women who depicted the Serbs as "a people chosen by Heaven" and who spoke of "the Satanism" of the western powers at a time when the Federal Army was shelling Vukovar in Autumn 1991 would officiate over such ceremonies for the Belgrade regime for a whole decade. The regime would find ways to express its gratitude to her. After her husband shot and wounded her in spring 2000, *Vecernje Novosti*, one of the regime's two leading newspapers, would publish a daily health update on the former Miss Yugoslavia for several weeks.

The blurred boundary between information, astrology and propaganda could not be better illustrated than by the 1993 New Year's message which was broadcast to Serbian television viewers on the *RTS 19:30 news* whilst war was raging in Croatia and Bosnia: "*The 'Dnevnik' magazine in its New Year issue reports on clairvoyant predictions for this year, Zorika Cvetkovic, astronomerologist from Belgrade, whose predictions about this war have come true, sees the boundaries of the third Yugoslavia expanding and the Serbs living in a confederate state*".²⁴⁵

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²⁴³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴⁴ "RTS Channel Three, *Astrology in the Function of Hatred*", in *Hate Speech, An Analysis of the Content of Domestic Media in the First Part of 1993*, Centre for Anti-War Action, Belgrade, 1994, p. 62.

²⁴⁵ "Images and Words of Hate: TV News at 7:30 P.M.", B92, Foundation for Right to Pictures and Words, Lazar Lalic, ARHITEL, 1998.