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THE CURRENT SECURITY SITUATION IN SERBIA AND THE AFTERMATH OF THE ASSASSINATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER

As you are well aware, the situation in Serbia in recent months was marred by the tragic murder of the Prime Minister, Zoran Djindjic.

I will be direct - the shot at Prime Minister Dr Zoran Djindjic was at the same time aimed at the young democracy, at our state Serbia.

This assassination was organised and perpetrated by a criminal organization – the so-called “Zemun band”, which represents the residue of the criminal heritage from the Milosevic period and which worked in the past for the leadership of the former State Security Service and former commander of the Special Operations Unit of that Service.

The goal of their conspiracy, that they called “Stop to The Hague”, was to use the assassination of the Prime Minister in order to provoke chaos in the country. They thought that such an act would prevent the election of the Council of ministers in the common state of Serbia and Montenegro. The assassination was performed at the time when this country was without a minister of defense. They also hoped that it would not be possible to elect the new Serbian Government. All this was supposed to trigger the fall of the administration and return of hostile forces to the same positions that they enjoyed under Milosevic.

The political background and platform of the conspirators was gathering the so-called “healthy patriotic forces”, while in reality it was a joint attempt of all those who rose to protect Milosevic’s criminal heritage.

Their plan had a boomerang effect. They got clear answers.

First of all, the citizens of Serbia, with their magnificent farewell to Dr. Djindjic during his funeral, which was attended by more than half a million citizens, clearly demonstrated that all the plans of these criminals had failed and that there were no chance of a return to the past.

The ruling coalition had not fallen apart. On the contrary, this tragedy unified it. The coalition understood the importance of this historical moment and it was aware of the responsibility that it had towards the citizens and the State. Elections for the Council of Ministers and the Government went on without a hitch.

Instead of disunity on which the terrorist were counting and instead of the disharmony between the Republican and Federal authorities that used to be the main problem in our fight against organised crime in the period after the democratic changes, we had full unity between the Government of Serbia and the Council of Ministers of the State Community.

At the urging of the Government of Serbia, the acting president of Serbia, Mrs. Natasa Micic, declared the state of emergency. The Supreme Defense Council passed a decision and ordered to the Yugoslav Army to provide full assistance to the Police of Serbia in the investigation and arrest of the perpetrators of this assassination and in the removal of all the conditions that caused the introduction of the state of emergency. So, for the first time we found ourselves in the position where the Army, the Police and security agencies were working together, with the same goal. The results are obvious.

The state of emergency was introduced in order to facilitate rapid arrest of the perpetrators, organizers, financial supporters and those who inspired the assassination of Prime Minister Djindjic, in order to fight organised crime throughout the country, as well as to fight against the individuals who used to be, for various reasons, untouchable by the law and who already had thick criminal records.

I want to clearly stress that the state of emergency was not imposed against the citizens, against their freedoms or rights and that it was not used in an abusive way. This was in general terms confirmed by the

delegation of the OSCE Mission in SAM that visited detained persons, although certain irregularities were noted with regard to the state of our prisons.

We enjoyed full understanding of the citizens and we had very good cooperation with them, in a way that by providing the public with certain information we located some members of this criminal organization or obtained other data relevant for the investigation.

When we talk about organised crime, I would like to use this opportunity just to repeat what Mr. Mihajlovic, Serbian Minister of Interior, said at the London Conference, whose conclusions are very good. Their relevance and significance, unfortunately, are confirmed also by this tragic event and enormous loss of our Prime Minister.

Organised crime gains its power from the ability to respond flexibly to every change in the environment in which it acts, as well as to adapt itself to all the repressive measures that the society is undertaking against it.

The existence of the “Zemun clan” is just another proof of this stand. This gang was, in reality, the biggest narcotics cartel in Serbia, and had exclusive rights for the distribution of cocaine and, connected with its partners throughout the world, a major supplier of heroin in the Serbian market. From Columbia and other countries whence the heroin was coming, up to the European countries where their bank accounts were.

All these activities significantly trespass national boundaries, so that the fight against them cannot be imagined exclusively within national jurisdictions. The organised crime that is today affecting both developed and underdeveloped countries has become international long ago and its actors, from different countries and regions, have been uniting and now act on a global scale. Arms dealers and drug traffickers, mercenaries and organised pirates, are laundering their profits through the well-established channels of financial crime, which is also taking its own part of the profits.

After coming to power Serbian authorities realized quickly how big and serious the criminal heritage of the Milosevic regime was. That criminal pyramid, at whose tip were the individuals from the state administration, had two faces. One face are war atrocities and the other is organised crime. We saw that terrorism is just a political aspect of organised crime and that it is financed from the revenues of criminal activities.

From these revenues the security details of some war criminals are also financed.

Also, we saw that criminals were behaving like real globalists as they established a real Balkan criminal brotherhood during the times of conflict and war in the area of the former Yugoslavia, while politicians and statesmen were divided and were trying to erect Berlin walls between new Balkan States.

But, after these wars the Balkans are again becoming a transit area, not only when we are talking about the Balkan heroin route, through which most of the heroin that is reaching the European Union's narcotics market is passing.

That is the reason why the countries of the European Union, if they want less drugs on the streets of their cities, if they want less false asylum seekers and less uncontrolled migrations, have to aid police, customs, tax and judiciary systems in the countries of South Eastern Europe. Such an orientation is also cheaper for the taxpayers of the countries of the European Union, than the expenses needed for the elimination of all these drugs and migrants from the streets of European capitals.

High level of violence in the previous regime in Serbia represented the main weapon of organised crime. Partners of organised crime were not protected from this violence even if they had high positions in the legal world. However, the consequences of this violence were not felt exclusively by partners of organised crime, but they were also felt by all citizens, who were victims of a feeling of personal insecurity and endangerment of life and property.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia has undertaken very clear and concrete measures in fighting organised crime.

The first step was a public recognition that organised crime does exist in Serbia, followed by the establishment, two years ago, of the Directorate for fight against organised crime, as a specialized organizational unit in the Ministry.

Unfortunately, too late, we got the Law on the fight against organised crime, which introduced in our legal system the necessary institutions - i.e. witness protection, etc. – so that we could reach the very core of the problem and to secure evidences on the activities of these criminal organizations. Up to then, police information did not have value.

Thanks to the moles in our own ranks and in the very system of prosecution – now we know that it was the deputy State Prosecutor, who was to be arrested – but there was a leak which reached this criminal group and they committed their desperate move by shooting the Prime Minister just days before we wanted to arrest them. The results are well known.

The killers of Prime Minister Djindjic are now in prison. The result of the undertaken police measures will be Serbia without unsolved crimes that used to disturb the public, without killers on the loose, without organised criminal groups and without war criminals.

Each one of the 105 criminal groups, which were detected at the beginning of 2001, was attacked. Each person with a personal criminal record with the Police was submitted for interrogation. Over 11600 persons were interviewed. The measure of detention lasted just for the period of time that was necessary to gather information and secure material evidences. As of last Monday (May 12), 3560 criminal charges were filed against 3946 persons, for 5671 crimes.

Although the biggest burden of this action lays upon the Belgrade Police and Directorate for fight against organised crime, it is important to note that this action is undertaken throughout Serbia. That was a chance for

the citizens throughout Serbia to be rid of the fear of local bands. Local police branches solved numerous killings, located big printing premises for counterfeiting money, seized significant quantities of narcotics, weapons and found many stolen vehicles.

Now we are witnessing the real effects of our decision to establish a Gendarmerie. This unit is providing strong support to the implementation of emergency measures and in providing security in Southern Serbia. With their assistance the assassin was arrested, and the decision on dismembering of Special Operations Unit was implemented peacefully. With that action the last contaminated part of the Serbian Police was removed.

The general state of security has improved, and the number of crimes has significantly dropped compared with the same period last year. So for the first time in recent history we had days in Belgrade when more cars were recovered than were stolen.

Simultaneously with the seizure of illegal weapons and explosive devices from the criminals, the voluntarily surrender of weapons and of legalization was underway. For example, the following quantities of weapons were seized from criminals: 593 pistols, 235 automatic rifles, 463 rifles, 14 machine guns, 347 hand grenades, 7 bazookas, 10 rocket launchers and great quantities of explosives.

During this action 73.5 kg of drugs were seized, out of which 28.2 kg of heroin, 463.5 grams of cocaine and 44.8 kg of marijuana, as well as 4960 tablets of synthetic drug Ecstasy. Also 688 stolen vehicles were recovered.

Citizens surrendered to the Police and to the Army 40438 parts of weapons and mine devices as well as 2 million pieces of ammunition. Also, 27392 applications for the legalization of weapons were submitted.

We are not living in the illusion that organised crime can be completely eradicated, but we do think that we can exterminate it and that we can reduce it to a tolerable level, from which it will not represent danger for the institutions of society and for the values that our citizens cherish.

We wanted to achieve this goal through the complete reform of our Ministry, and the conclusions of the London conference, as well as the readiness of the European Union and its member States to help not only us but also to the whole region in fighting this global evil, significantly encouraged us in our endeavor.

The tragedy of Dr. Zoran Djindjic on March 12 has its security, political and historical dimensions. From the security point of view these events have the same significance for Serbia as the events of September 11th have for the United States. In the political sense, March 12th is for us October 6th as it gave us a chance for a successful completion of political changes, which were late due to the impermissible divisions within the political forces that led to October 5th. But these divisions are over.

From the historical angle, this horrible tragedy is a unique chance for a historical change of the way of thinking, and I believe that this is the last attempt, in a long string of events, to change power violently in Serbia.

The EU and the US offered support to Serbia and Montenegro, which was manifested by pledging assistance for the elimination of the budget deficit, by admitting us in the Council of Europe, and by a chance to define, on the occasion of the forthcoming Thessaloniki Summit, our process of stabilization and association.

By finishing the tasks already undertaken in implementing the necessary reforms, we will provide citizens with a better living standard, and to our people and state it will facilitate becoming full members of the family of European peoples and states.

The end of the state of emergency was the end of the extraordinary authority of the police, but that was not the end of our decisive fight against organised crime in Serbia.

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