

CONVENTION 2004

Saturday Forum Report on 10/23/2004

Serbian Lands and Their Future

WASHINGTON – On Saturday, October 23, 2004, the Serbian Unity Congress held a forum at its 14th Annual Convention in Washington, DC. The panel discussion titled *Serbian Lands and Their Future*, was presented by the following guest speakers:

Dr. Steven Meyer, Professor of Political Science, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces at National Defense University. Prior to this he worked for the CIA for 25 years, the last five as a deputy Chief of the Interagency Balkan Task Force. He did his undergraduate work at the University of Wisconsin, received a Masters Degree from Fordham University and a PhD from Georgetown University. He also has studied political science in Europe. His last two publications are : “U.S. Policy Toward Yugoslavia”, published by the Woodrow Wilson Center and “The Carcass of Dead Policies: The Irrelevance of NATO”. Published in the journal *Parameters*.

During his presentation, Dr. Meyer noted that during the 1990’s the Balkans consumed the entire Bush and Clinton Administration’s foreign policy. This was not the result of a concern about lives and human rights, but about the reputation of the United States as a Super Power. Today however, the U.S. is becoming disengaged from the Balkans. Although the U.S. does not trust the Europeans, it will now rely on the European Union to deal more with the Balkans.

As for the future of the Balkans, Dr. Meyer concludes there will be problems in dealing with corruption and the economies, and that the EU will have many problems attempting to digest new states in addition to addressing its own problems. “Serbia today,” he concludes, “is confused and does not know what it is.” Dr. Meyer cited an example of this when recent comments by Serbia Montenegro’s Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic to Secretary of State Collin Powell: “The road to the EU is through Washington.” Dr. Meyer disagreed and stressed that Serbs should not be as concerned by what the U.S. tells her. The Balkans are not a priority to the United States. What Dr. Meyer does advise to Serbian policy makers is to not place such a priority on the US and NATO institutions but instead to look to Europe. He advises Serbia & Montenegro to work with its regional neighbors toward a regional position on resolving the security issues in the Balkans and to place more emphasis on cooperation with its neighbors such as Rumania and Greece. Elections in Kosovo were taking place the same time as Dr. Meyer’s presentation. Despite the International Community and Serbian President Boris Tadic’s opposition to a boycott of elections in Kosovo being encouraged by the Serbian Orthodox Church, Dr. Meyer took the side of the Church, “The elections in Kosovo are meant to satisfy the U.S. and EU, not for the better of the region.”

Obrad Kesich, Partner, TSM Consultants, Washington, DC.

Obrad Kesic is a senior partner with TSM Global Consultants LLC, a Washington, D.C., firm providing business consulting services and government affairs representation to American companies interested in doing business with Russia, Eastern Europe and the Balkans. TSM also offers the same services to international companies interested in doing business with the United States. A member of numerous task forces and working groups in his professional area, from 1994-2002 he was a member of the National Democratic Ethnic Coordinating Council of the National Democratic Committee and has participated as an advisor in over a dozen political campaigns both in the United States and abroad. Author of over three dozen published essays, articles, and research papers, Mr. Kesich has served as commentator and analyst for American and international media including CNN, 60 Minutes, BBC, NPR and The Lehrer News Hour.

Mr. Kesich pointed out the need for reconciliation in Serbia. He shared the example of Slovenia's simple but efficient approach to reconciliation. That country recognized the role of Chetniks during WWII, allowed the erection of monuments to General Draza Mihajlovic and offered pensions to Slovenian veterans who served with the Chetniks. Serbia on the other hand, has not put an end to the artificial divisions still in place in Serbia. Even groups with the same goals still remain divided amongst themselves.

Mr. Kesich also stressed what the Serbian Community in the Diaspora can do for the future of Serbs. This includes engaging more with other religious communities, and political life here in the United States. "We have created a culture of apathy," Kesich argued saying that Serbs need to take more responsibility.

In addition to keeping a presence in Washington, Mr. Kesich advised Serbs in the Diaspora to do the following:

- 1) The Serbian community must show it matters.
- 2) Challenge the push for independence of Kosovo in the U.S. Government.
- 3) Oppose the efforts to undermine Dayton which endangers the continued existence of Republika Srpska.

In regards to Montenegro, Mr. Kesich reminded the audience that the ruling government of Montenegro is resisting a referendum for independence because they have concluded that there is not majority support for it and are instead pushing for independence.

In conclusion, Mr. Kesich encouraged Serbs to pay more attention to our cultural and religious heritage in Kosovo: "I challenge you all to make pilgrimages to Kosovo."

His Excellency Dr. Ivan Vujacic, Ambassador, Embassy of Serbian & Montenegro

Before Dr. Ivan Vujacic took up his duties as an ambassador to the United States in 2002, he was previously Professor of Economics, Department of Economics, University of Belgrade, Serbia. He earned his PhD in economics in 1989 at the Department of Economics, University of Belgrade and did research at the London School Of Economics and Political Science that also included work under a Fulbright scholarship.

Dr. Vujacic began his presentation about the current state of the Balkans region noting that crime is prevalent across all borders throughout the Balkans region. The level of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), he stated, is less in the entire Balkans region (minus Slovenia) than the total GDP in Greece! The ambassador argued that there is a tendency to forget that the real problem is economic.

Dr. Vujacic also noted that resentment equals stagnation. His message was an economic one – prosperity in Serbia and in the region is a solution to the many problems. The ambassador concluded with the message, “Where do we want to go?”