

The Repression of Religious Minorities in Serbia:

**The role played by the European Federation of
Centres of Research and Information on
Sectarianism
(FECRIS)**

27 April 2005

The attacks against religious minorities in Serbia have unceasingly increased during the last years, mainly due to widespread campaigns portraying them as “sects”.

The campaign against these groups has been, and still is, led by Colonel Petrovic, the representative in Serbia of FECRIS, a European organization that has been created to forward the purpose of fighting against religious minorities at European level.

Colonel Bratislav Petrovic of the Yugoslav Army is also a neuropsychiatrist. During the Milosevic regime, he headed the Institute for Mental Health and Military Psychology of the Military Academy in Belgrade. From that position, he specialised in the selection and psychological preparation of the soldiers of Milosevic’s army before they were sent to war.

Colonel Petrovic was also instrumental in forwarding Milosevic’s propaganda that the Serbs were the victims and not the perpetrators of genocide in Bosnia, contrary to all reliable UN reports on the subject. In an attempt to accuse others of the crimes he is charged with before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, Slobodan Milosevic cites a report by Colonel Petrovic.

Petrovic is now applying his psychological techniques of indoctrination to target religious minorities. Yet this is not new. In 1993, while ethnic and religious cleansing was underway in Croatia and Bosnia, Petrovic used that same ideology to condemn religious minorities within Serbia, accusing them of being terrorist organizations and conveniently labelling them “sects.”

Today, together with Zoran Lukovic, a police Captain from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Serbia, Petrovic accuses religious minorities of being criminals, terrorists, drug dealers and murderers. Working with sensationalist media in Serbia, they have been organizing round tables and talk shows with the Serbian Orthodox Church in order to denigrate and fuel prejudice against religious minorities in the country.

As a result of the hatred Petrovic and Lukovic have spread, stones and Molotov cocktails have been thrown at different religious houses around Serbia. Forum 18 News Service reported on 9 June 2005:

“Last year saw an upsurge in attacks on religious minorities, ranging from slander and vilification in the media to physical attacks on places of worship and individuals, with such attacks continuing at a high level into this year... More than

100 attacks took place on Protestant, Catholic, Jehovah's Witness, Jewish, Muslim and Romanian Orthodox targets in 2004, with more than 25 such attacks between January and May this year. Religious minorities complain the authorities are failing to take action to punish the perpetrators. Incidents range from an attack on a mosque in Presevo with a hand-held rocket launcher last February to graffiti 'Death to Adventists' written on the walls of the Adventist theological college in Belgrade in March. Numerous Catholic graveyards have been desecrated, while the media constantly speak of Protestants, Old Calendarist Orthodox and Mormons as 'dangerous sects'."

The NGO Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Serbia has filed a complaint against Captain Zoran Lukovic for statements inciting hatred and religious intolerance, statements FECRIS representative Petrovic has endorsed.

Youth Initiative's complaint states that the creation of an "atmosphere of recoil and fear among the citizens" and the "stirring up of religious hatred and intolerance" have been instrumental in the "300 incidents with a religious basis in Serbia from 2001 to 2005".

I. FECRIS representative in Serbia supported ethnic and religious cleansing

The representative of FECRIS in Serbia is Colonel Bratislav Petrovic, neuropsychiatrist, formerly the Head of the Department of Mental Health and Military Psychology of the Military Academy of Yugoslavia (VMA) throughout the war in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo¹.

He retired from the army and VMA in 2002, when he became a member of FECRIS.

The Military Academy or Military Medical Academy (VMA) is a large facility comprising 25 clinics with a 1,200-bed capacity and 17 diagnostic and research institutes in the centre of Belgrade. It is subordinate to the Army of the Federation of Serbia and Montenegro (VJ).



The Military Medical Academy

As a primary function, the VMA is responsible for medical training and original research relevant to the needs and activities of the armed forces².

The Department of Mental Health and Military Psychology is part of the Clinic of Psychiatry of the VMA. It is devoted to psychological testing, researching and training in connection with military psychology.

Colonel neuropsychiatrist Gojko Kapor, who used to be the head of the Clinic of Psychiatry (1975-1983)³ and chief of Bratislav Petrovic, wrote in his book "Military Psychiatry"⁴:

¹ See his report to the UN dated 18 December 1992, signed as "Head of the Institute for Mental Health and Military Psychology"

² http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/Yugoslavia/Chemical/4340_4382.html: Key Sources: Official website of the Military Medical Academy, <http://www.vj.yu/VMA>

³ formerly called "Clinic for mental and neurology illnesses" - http://www.vj.yu/VMA/Sr/Psijatrija_Index.htm

⁴ Military Psychiatry, Belgrade 1987, page 17

“In the contemporary army, men are included in the process of educational work. This process is performed through training, education and indoctrination. Ideology of every social establishment requires the development of the so-called model type of personality.”

“The awareness of the goals of the combat is always related to the values which represent the ideology and indicate the degree of indoctrination of the personality of the combatant.”



Colonel Bratislav Petrovic

Lieutenant Colonel Petrovic acknowledges Professor Gojko Kapor in his medical thesis as neuropsychiatrist which he wrote on the subject of the selection and psychological preparation of army pilots⁵.

Later, as head of the Department of Mental Health and Military Psychology, Petrovic became the specialist for the selection and psychological preparation of the soldiers of Milosevic army before they were sent to war.

He published several articles on this subject in the “Vojni informator”⁶. This magazine’s purpose is “building and preserving of combat morale, strengthening of military collectives’ resistance to enemy’s propaganda”, as stated on the web site of the Department of the Serbian and Montenegrin Armed Forces General Headquarters for Information and Morale.

In the May-June 2000 publication of this magazine, Colonel Petrovic published an article⁷ where he stressed the importance of “appropriate selection in certain, particularly highly unsafe activities, adequate military advanced training, clearly defined battle goals, followed by anticipated process and outcome of battle activities”.

In the December 2000 issue of this magazine, he published an article entitled “Officers and soldiers mental preparation for combat”.

These two articles were published little time after the implementation of Milosevic’s policy of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.

The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) explained in her act of indictment what this policy was about:

“53. Following the commencement of the joint criminal enterprise, beginning on or about 1 January 1999 and continuing until 20 June 1999, Slobodan Milosevic,

⁵ “History of the problem of psychological and psychiatric selection of pilots” – Lieutenant Colonel Bratislav Petrovic, 1983

⁶ “Military Informer”

⁷ “Soldier in the maelstrom of events”, May-June 2000

(...) and others known and unknown, planned, instigated, ordered, committed or otherwise aided and abetted in a deliberate and widespread or systematic campaign of terror and violence directed at Kosovo Albanian civilians living in Kosovo in the FRY [*Federal republic of Yugoslavia*].

54. The deliberate and widespread or systematic campaign of terror and violence directed at the Kosovo Albanian population was executed by forces of the FRY and Serbia, acting at the direction, with the encouragement, or with the support of Slobodan Milosevic, (...) and others known and unknown. Forces of the FRY and Serbia undertook the operations targeting the Kosovo Albanians with the objective of expelling a substantial portion of the Kosovo Albanian population from Kosovo in an effort to ensure continued Serbian control over the province.”

It must be underlined here that Milosevic had “cleansed” the commands of the army and ministries back in 1990 in order to retain only those staff who were supporting his policy in order to implement his plans for a Greater Serbia. Those who remained at command posts after that date were *de facto* supporting Milosevic policy, if not actively participating to it.

Actually, not only was Milosevic indicted for what happened in Kosovo as the President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), but also high ranking officials have been, including Colonel General Dragoljub Ojdanic as Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the FRY (“VJ”).

As previously mentioned, the Military Medical Academy is subordinate to the high command of the VJ, especially to its head, the Chief of the General Staff of the VJ.

The Prosecutor indicted the head of the VJ for the following motives⁸:

“41. As Chief of the General Staff of the VJ, Colonel General Dragoljub Ojdanic determined the organisation, plan of development and formation of commands, units and institutions of the VJ, in conformity with the nature and needs of the VJ and pursuant to acts rendered by the President of the FRY.

42. In his position of authority, Colonel General Dragoljub Ojdanic also determined the plan for recruiting and filling vacancies within the VJ and the distribution of recruits therein; issued regulations concerning training of the VJ; determined the educational plan and advanced training of professional and reserve military officers; and performed other tasks stipulated by law.”

Colonel Petrovic, in his capacity of Colonel, was part of the High Command of Milosevic’s Army, and was the specialist of the selection and mental preparation of the officers of the VJ. Therefore he has, at the least, supported the implementation of Milosevic’s policy of ethnic and religious cleansing.

⁸ Case No. IT-99-37-PT, second amended indictment, 29 October 2001, <http://www.un.org/icty/indictment/english/mil-2ai011029e.htm>

Colonel Petrovic was particularly involved in implementing Milosevic's strategy as he submitted a report to the United Nations as part of Milosevic's propaganda. The report was about alleged rapes of Serbian women and concentration camps for Serbs in Bosnia. This report was dated 18 December 1992 and was established by him in his capacity of "Head of the Institute for Mental Health and Military Psychology, Colonel, Professor Bratislav Petrovic"⁹.

At that time, ethnic cleansing had started in order to create an ethnically and religiously pure Greater Serbia, first in the territories of eastern Croatia with the cleansing of Vukovar in 1991 and in Bosnia Herzegovina in 1992.

Several reports had been published by Tador Mazowiecki, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, especially his report dated 6 November 1992, in which he stated, inter alia, that "ethnic cleansing" undertaken by the Serbian forces did not appear to be the consequence of the war, but rather its goal¹⁰.

Colonel Petrovic submitted his report at the 47th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in an attempt to document that the Serbs were the ones being aggressed, not the aggressors.

His report was alleging the rapes of Serbian women in 15 brothels held by Muslim and Croat Armed Forces in Bosnia, 6 of them supposedly located in Sarajevo.

This report appears to be total fantasy when compared to the real situation in Sarajevo at the time. All the reports of the UN and the media have long since evidenced that Sarajevo was a city of civilians besieged by the Serbian Armed Forces of Karadzic.

In her indictment for genocide of Radovan Karadzic, leader of the Serbian forces in Bosnia, the Prosecutor of ICTY Carla del Ponte stated:

44. On or about 20 May 1992, after a partial withdrawal of JNA [*Yugoslav Army*] forces from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the JNA forces surrounding Sarajevo were effectively transformed into the Sarajevo Romanija Corps of the Army of the Serbian republic.
45. For forty-four months, the Sarajevo Romanija Corps implemented a military strategy that used shelling and sniping to kill, maim, wound and terrorise the civilian inhabitants of Sarajevo. The shelling and sniping killed and wounded thousands of civilians of both sexes and all ages, including children and the elderly.

⁹ <http://www.srpska-mreza.com/library/facts/raped-serbs.html>

¹⁰ see United Nations web site <http://lib-unique.un.org/lib/unique.nsf>

46. The Sarajevo Romanija Corps directed shelling and sniping at civilians who were tending vegetable plots, queuing for and collecting water or bread, attending funerals, playing and watching football, shopping in markets, riding on trams, gathering wood, or simply walking with their children or friends. People were injured and killed, even inside their own homes, hit by bullets targeted through their windows. The attacks on Sarajevo civilians were often unrelated to military actions and were designed to keep the inhabitants in a constant state of terror.
47. Because of the shelling and sniping against civilians, the life of every Sarajevo inhabitant became a daily struggle to survive. Without gas, electricity or running water, people were forced to venture outside to find basic living necessities. Each time they did, whether to collect wood, fetch water or buy some bread, they risked death. In addition to the sheer human carnage that the shelling and sniping caused, the endless threat of death and maiming caused extensive trauma and psychological damage to the inhabitants of Sarajevo.”

Milosevic’s constant propaganda during the war consisted in fuelling false information to cover up the genocide that was being perpetrated. It is only recently that the population in Serbia realised that Sarajevo was besieged by Serbian forces and not by the Muslims as the Serbian media had made them believe for years.

Colonel Petrovic, when he established his report in December 1992, very well knew what the real situation was in Sarajevo. He nevertheless made a report to the UN alleging the existence of 6 brothels for Serbian women supposedly held by Muslim and Croat Armed Forces in Sarajevo.

But Colonel Petrovic did not only make this allegation, he also asserted that a genocide was being perpetrated against the Serbs by alleging the existence of concentration camps for Serbs. He stated in the same report that « Apart from these 15 brothels, on which we have gathered information and where about 800 women of Serbian nationality are being raped by members of the Moslem TD of BH and Croatian Army, an unprecedented terror of women and girls of Serbian nationality is carried out in all concentration camps for Serbs. »¹¹

Both the reports of the UN and the indictments of the ICTY have long since demonstrated that the policy of holding concentration camps and perpetrating systematic raping was implemented by the Serbian forces in Bosnia and Croatia as a means of ethnic cleansing.

Hence, in spite of Petrovic’s attempt to spread confusion, the General Assembly issued a Resolution on the same day as his report stating that it was “Gravely concerned about the deterioration of the situation in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina owing to intensified aggressive acts by the Serbian and

¹¹ Rapport A/47/813 S/24991 18 décembre 1992

Montenegrin forces to acquire more territories by force, characterized by a consistent pattern of gross and systematic violations of human rights, a burgeoning refugee population resulting from mass expulsions of defenceless civilians from their homes and the existence in Serbian and Montenegrin controlled areas of concentration camps and detention centres, in pursuit of the abhorrent policy of "ethnic cleansing", which is a form of genocide"¹².

In this Resolution dated 18 December 1992, the General Assembly demanded that "Serbia and Montenegro and Serbian forces in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina immediately cease their aggressive acts and hostility and comply fully and unconditionally with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council".

The technique of accusing others of what the Serbian forces were actually doing, i.e. rapes, ethnic cleansing, was a substantial part of Milosevic's propaganda.

As stated by the Prosecutor of the ICTY in her indictment¹³ for Bosnia, Slobodan Milosevic "controlled, manipulated or otherwise utilized Serbian state-run media to spread exaggerated and false messages of ethnically based attacks by Bosnian Muslims and Croats against Serb people intended to create an atmosphere of fear and hatred among Serbs living in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina which contributed to the forcible removal of the majority of non-Serbs, principally Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats, from large areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina".

This propaganda and false information on the Serbs was strategy, elaborated by a group of psychiatrists at the VMA, as Dr Psychiatrist Mladen Loncar stated in a report he made for the ICTY in 1993¹⁴.

Dr Loncar was a psychiatrist in Serbia before the war. He named a few of these army psychiatrists who researched and published on the subject of special warfare. Their books can be found at the library of the VMA. For example on the spreading of rumours: "The creation and propagation of rumours is a very strong weapon in the activity of psychological propaganda"¹⁵, and hatred: "Hatred finds fertile ground in environments overloaded with prejudice concerning another nation or group. Hatred conditioned by prejudice provokes, in most cases, aggressive behaviour directed towards the other nation, which is blamed for all of the misfortunes and problems of society"¹⁶.

Colonel Petrovic was, at the time, the Head of the Institute of Mental Health and Military Psychology of the Military Academy and, as such, was heading the team of military psychiatrists working to support Milosevic. It is in this capacity that he

¹² Resolution A/RES/47/121, 91st plenary meeting, 18 December 1992

¹³ The Prosecutor of the Tribunal against Slobodan Milosevic, Case No. IT-02-54-T, indictment 22 November 2002

¹⁴ Report of Dr Mladen Loncar, Croatian Medical Center, for the ICTY, 1993.

¹⁵ Lieutenant-Colonel Dr Jovan Omacjev, psychiatrist, The informer

¹⁶ Dr Zeljko Martinovic, psychiatrist, The politico-military informer, July-August 1990

sent a team of psychiatrists to do an expertise during an exchange of prisoners, expertise on which he then based his 18 December 1992 report to the UN.

Slobodan Milosevic himself referred to Colonel Petrovic and to his report in an attempt to accuse others of the crimes he is liable for before the ICTY.

At his hearing of 4th October 2002, Milosevic, while doing a cross examination of a witness, stated:

“Since I have a report here which, based on the examination of a number of prisoners who were exchanged, and these examinations were conducted by the institute for mental health of the military hospital in Belgrade, and it was signed by Colonel Dr. Bratislav Petrovic himself.”

ICTY Judge May interrupted him at this point, stressing that “there comes a limit to the amount of cross-examination we can allow on the -- what you know now is called the -- or is referred to as the tu quoque basis, that means attacking the other side for the crimes they committed.”

The Judge added: “Now, you're on trial here for various crimes and evidence is being given against you. Now, if you challenge any of the evidence which this witness gave, such as what I've described already, then you must do so, because it's your duty to challenge his evidence rather than put your own case accusing the others of various other crimes, which may not be relevant in the trial.”

Colonel Petrovic was a reliable high ranked Army Executive for Milosevic who refers to him with deference as “Colonel Dr. Bratislav Petrovic himself”, and on whom he bases his defence.

As part of the propaganda, Petrovic was the one who, as Head of the Institute of Mental Health and Military Psychology of the Military Academy, was the specialist of the “Officers and soldiers mental preparation for combat”.

This combat consisted actually in the destruction of certain ethnical and religious groups, as stated by the Prosecutor of the ICTY in her indictment of Slobodan Milosevic:

“From on or about 1 March 1992 until 31 December 1995, Slobodan Milosevic, acting alone or in concert with other members of the joint criminal enterprise, planned, instigated, ordered, committed or otherwise aided and abetted the planning, preparation and execution of the destruction, in whole or in part, of Bosnian Muslim national, ethnical, racial or religious groups, as such, in territories within Bosnia and Herzegovina”.

In order to plan and execute this extermination of religious groups, Milosevic “effectively controlled or substantially influenced the actions of (...) the Yugoslav

Army ("VJ") ..., as well as Serb paramilitary groups", in particular he "exerted effective control over elements of the (...) VJ which participated in the planning, preparation, facilitation and execution of the forcible removal of the majority of non-Serbs, principally Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats, from large areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina."¹⁷

This ethnic and religious cleansing was justified by Milosevic command by accusing the Muslims of being fundamentalist terrorists. This latter accusation allowed the siege of Sarajevo and snipers killing women and children daily for 3 to 4 years, and the genocide of 7.000 Muslim civilians in Srebrenica in 1995, as ICTY Prosecutor Carla del Ponte has reminded recently.

The intention was to create a Greater Serbia, by taking over and creating ethnically and religiously pure Orthodox Serb zones in eastern Croatia and Bosnia Herzegovina which could be tied to the actual territory of Serbia.

It is on the same ideological basis that Colonel Petrovic initiated in 1993, whilst ethnic and religious cleansing was underway in Croatia and Bosnia, his fight against religious minorities within Serbia he labelled as "sects", accusing them, like the Muslims, of being terrorist organizations.

¹⁷ <http://www.un.org/icty/indictment/english/mil-ai040421-e.htm>

II. FECRIS representative in Serbia fights for a pure Orthodox Serbia

Colonel Petrovic claimed at a conference organised by FECRIS in Barcelona in 2002 that from the time he started to fight “sects” in 1993, he has trained medical doctors, psychologists and teachers on this subject¹⁸.

As a matter of fact, numerous conferences have been held against religious minorities in Serbia in the last years, mostly given by army psychiatrists or psychologists from the VMA, police officers and representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Most of the conferences involve Colonel neuropsychiatrist Petrovic, Captain Zoran Lukovic, from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Serbia, and the Archbishop of Belgrade or bishops or priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Conferences are now also given by two additional specialists in military psychology from the Military Academy, Vljako Panovic and Slobodan Spasic¹⁹.

Captain Zoran Luković wrote a book entitled "Religious sects and Orthodoxy"²⁰. In this book, Lukovic devoted a chapter to each group he labels as a “sect”.

The first grouping he addresses is that of “Pseudo Christian sects”, among which he places the Reformists as “a source of contemporary sects”. He lists there the Baptists, the Nazareens, the Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Mormons, the Pentacostals, God’s Church, God’s Children, Family of Love, Free Church, Christ Church, New Apostolic Church, Christ Church of Small Baptizing, Christ Church of Evangelist Brothers, the Western Orthodox Church, the Word of Life, Universal Life.

Then comes the grouping of “Occult and magical” sects, in which Lukovic places astrology, theosophy, anthroposophy, alchemy, kabala, extra sensory perception, numerology,



Captain Zoran Lukovic

¹⁸ <http://www.fecris.org>

¹⁹ <http://www.danas.co.yu/20050207/kultural.html>, <http://www.nin.co.yu/cgi-bin/printpage?filename=/2003-08/01/30074.html>, http://www.vj.yu/english/en_aktuelno/vesti/septembar2001/v0927-e.htm

²⁰ “Verske Sekte: Prirucnik za samoodbranu”, Zoran D. Lukovic, Draganic publishing house, Belgrade 2000

spiritualism, superstition, occult phenomena techniques, para-psychic phenomena, prophet phenomena.

After this comes the group of pseudo-Hindu sects, with a special chapter on Yoga and meditation where he describes all sorts of yoga, the Yoga centres, Transcendental Meditation, Karma Center, Shri Chimnoy, Sai Baba, Hare Krishna, Falun Gong.

Then come what he calls syncretistic sects, with the Rosicrucians, the Masons, the Theosophical and Anthroposical Society, the New Age, the White Gnostic Church, Scientology, the Church of Unification.

It is finalized by the grouping of Satanic sects.

Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Serbia filed a criminal complaint for incitement to religious hatred based on this book. They stated in their suit:

“Zoran Luković is using the term “sect” as a synonym for religious organizations which he considers to be a danger for human life, health and dignity. He calls sects religious organizations that belong to a corps of Christian religious organizations, which have been registered in Serbia for decades and recognized by the State. Some of these religious organizations are in most of the Western countries not only legitimate and recognized, but also majority Churches.”

“Then he describes those organizations and their members as **mental manipulators²¹, mentally ill people²², alcoholics and drug addicts who finish up in psychiatric institutions or in cemeteries²³, authors of the worst criminal acts like murder, robbery and rape²⁴, as people who deal in prostitution²⁵, as people who chaff at religious holidays and church services²⁶**”.

This book “Religious Sects and Orthodoxy” was endorsed on the back cover by Bishop Porfirije, from the Serbian Orthodox Church, and by Colonel Petrovic, the representative of FECRIS. Bishop Profirije wrote that “This book is full of authentic data in exposing sects one by one as groups which are spreading spiritual terror and violence”. He added “This book is worthy of attention because it is of a surprisingly high theological level while the profession of the writer is not theological”.

The book has been widely promoted, since it came out in 2000, by Colonel Petrovic and Zoran Lukovic as part of their crusade for a pure Orthodox Serbia.

²¹ Page 34 book „Sects – self defense manual“

²² Page 37 book „Sects – self defense manual“

²³ Page 37 book „Sects – self defense manual“

²⁴ Page 37 book „Sects – self defense manual“

²⁵ Page 37 book „Sects – self defense manual“

²⁶ Page 69 book „Sects – self defense manual“

As an example, the book was presented on the stand of the Orthodox Church at a book fair on 26 October 2003²⁷.



The Info Service of the Serbian Orthodox Church²⁸ reported on 26 October 2003: “In order to be able to protect oneself and recognize the mortal influence of sects, expert help is needed. This is why the following people participated to the presentation of this book, which subtitle is “Self Defence Manual”: a bishop and a priest, a doctor and the author, a police Major, Zoran Lukovic. Only with the cooperation of the Church and the State it is possible to stop these evil called sects, which have many faces. At the promotion of the book, the speakers were: His Highness Bishop Jegarski Porfirije, priest Vajo Jovic, Patriarch of Saint Aleksandar Nevskog temple in Belgrade, Prof. Dr Bratislav D. Petrovic, specialist in psychiatry and psychotherapy, and the author Zoran Lukovic.”

²⁷ http://www.spc.yu/Vesti-2003/10/22-10-03_11.html

²⁸ http://www.spc.yu/Vesti-2003/10/26-10-03_11.html

Captain Lukovic, who claims to have been dealing with this issue for 20 years, stressed in an interview given to the Orthodox Church that "the problem of sects has evolved into some sort of psychosocial religiosity that offers people a chance of a career and an increase in their intellectual potential through special programmes made for every age groups. He also commented that their extraordinary marketing approach is excellent, as it offers 'quick solutions' to all life problems and attracts many people"²⁹.

He added that the "Fight against this evil will be easier when the Law on religious organizations comes", referring to a bill that he and Petrovic tried to get amended. The amendment they filed (but which was rejected) was aiming at reducing the rights of minority faiths in Serbia.

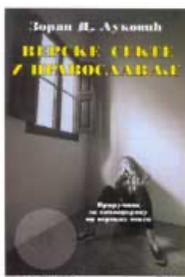
More recently, a three hour lecture was given at Vranje's library, beginning of April 2005³⁰, by Colonel Petrovic and Captain Lukovic.

Lukovic started the conference by asserting that "the only true religions have emerged in the time of Christ", so "the exclusive inheritors of Christ's teaching can only be the Orthodox religion, the Catholic religion and Judaism" as well as "the Lutherans, the Methodists" who were in the meantime granted the Church status. He concluded that "a religion can not be created 2,000 years after Christ".

Lukovic complained that Serbia's "bookstores are full of sectarian literature, in all media they freely advertise themselves, and the state does not consider legally stopping this".

Colonel Petrovic said that "sects often operate under the mantle of humanitarian and non-government organizations that offer all kinds of help". He gave the example of the Mayor of Belgrade Radmile Hrustanović "who is present at every occasion when humanitarian packages get dispensed to people", concluding that "she is most probably a Pentecostal".

The last conference to date was a round table held in May 2005 at a meeting of the Serbian Liberal Party, where Colonel Petrovic and Captain Lukovic spoke, together with Deacon Vladan Vicentic of the Serbian Orthodox Church³¹.



²⁹ http://www.spc.yu/Vesti-2003/06/30-6-03_13.html

³⁰ <http://www.vranjske.co.yu/255/6.htm>: Report from Sladana Veljković, 6 April 2005

³¹ <http://www.svedok.co.yu/index.asp?show=45215>



Prof. Bratislav Petrovic said that cults are an international problem and that specialists of the European Federation of Centres of Information and Research on Sectarianism (FECRIS) talk about cults as international criminals.

Deacon Vicentic stated that "the most important is to first recognize that there is a problem, as it is all about spiritual hell in the country of Saint Sava. The SPC (Serb Orthodox Church), through magazines, papers, tribunes and acts of Serbian young believers, always draws attention to the problems of cults; also it is much needed that priests go through a special training so they too can become competently able to stop their influence in our environment. It is very important that cooperation exists between priests, psychotherapists and psychiatrists, because it happens very often that someone who has left some cult organization, does not want to return to his church anymore".



The cooperation of Colonel Petrovic with the Orthodox Church is instrumental in his fight against religious minorities in his attempt to maintain a pure Orthodox Serbia. He therefore conducts his conferences with extreme Orthodox Church leaders during which prejudice and fear are instilled against new religions.

Back in 2001 for example, the Student Association "Sveti Justin Filozof" (Saint Justin Philosopher), an Orthodox student group, organized a tribune at the University of Philosophy on the subject of "Sects – phenomenon of mental manipulations", at which Bishop Lazar Milin spoke on the theological aspect, and Colonel Bratislav Petrović spoke on the psychological and neuropsychiatric aspects³².

The first speaker Father Lazar Milin illustrated his lecture with many quotes from the Bible. He stated that, "First, the Church can only be One, Sacred, Basilica and Apostle which was established by our Lord Jesus Christ sending his Holy Spirit to the Apostles after his resurrection. In no way can additional 'Churches' exist as sectarians try to convince us".

"Second, the Church was established by our Lord Christ, and he is the head of the Church, and no farmer from America can establish a church in the 19th century, like it was the case with the pseudo Christian sects such as Pentacostals, Adventists, Baptists or Jehovah's Witnesses; old man Kleopa [*Bible*] said 'These are against authority, nation and Church. Run away from them like from the devil, like from Satan! Not only are they not Christians, they are worse than all the pagans.' He added 'Guard yourselves from the sects, stay the children of the Christ Church, like your fathers and grandfathers were through the centuries!'"

After this enflamed diatribe, Dr. Bratislav Petrović spoke and warned the people on the many psychological deformations that are supposedly caused to members of sects.

The media made by Petrovic, the FECRIS representative, and Lukovic are obviously part of an 'anti-heresy' campaign designed to fight those groups that they want to see eliminated from Serbia on the basis of their creeds or philosophies.

Petrovic is very blunt on this point. His motto is "Spiritual assassination is more terrible than physical assassination", as he stated in the title of his speech at the FECRIS conference in Barcelona in 2002³³.

In his opinion: " 'The new beliefs of sects and an acceptance of all that comes from the West, as well as the absence of religious education during the

³² <http://www.geocities.com/svetijustin/pocetna.htm>

³³ Conference "Minor's Prevention", Barcelona, 10-12 May 2002

communist regime, is at the origin of the success of sectarian manipulators".

New creeds are considered by him to be a psychic drug. He rationalizes his fight against spiritual and religious minorities by stating:

"Our point of view is that the sectarian phenomenon is a new sociopathological and psychopathological entity, a new form of psychological and even physical dependency, to a degree of sectarian addiction with a real syndrome of withdrawal crisis."

Such criterion is sufficient for him in order to characterize "totalitarian sects" and to legitimize State repression of minority religions with justifications such as "The State is obliged to defend the rights of individuals and of society"³⁴.

³⁴ Conference "The impact of cults on health in society", Marseille, 27-28 March 2004

III. FECRIS representative is perpetrating a climate of hatred in Serbia

Colonel Petrovic classified as totalitarian organizations such spiritual movements as the Transcendental Meditation and another Hinduist group called Sanatan, that he claimed to have closed down at a FECRIS conference held last year in Marseille, France³⁵.

Transcendental Meditation (TM), he accused of being "a cult infiltrating all levels of life, acting as a healing cult with a range of different activities which, in our opinion, are dangerous for the individual's physical, mental and social health. It is based on a huge deceit, and at the same time involves an attempt to infiltrate the public authorities through sophisticated marketing techniques. TM is a harmful "healing" cult, which will probably present itself as an alternative to traditional medicine". He asserted that "Doctors are no strangers to the success and proliferation of TM".

With regards to Sanatan, he explained that it is a cult which "promotes itself to the outside world as: 'A Society for Scientific Spirituality'" and "has its origins in Pakistan, the USA, Great Britain, France, etc".

He stated that the group had a yellow house in Beli Potok and that they made "a great deal of noise every night. Day and night, little songs with incomprehensible words have concerned local people – above all the parents of children who are obliged to walk near this vivid-yellow colored house. Some children have even been invited to take part in the chants. Local people therefore demanded a police inquiry into what was happening at the yellow house. The night following this request, an unknown person or group threw stones at this house- the Sanatan-ashram headquarters. This "unknown person" hurled a Molotov cocktail at the house."



Burned house of Dragana Bukumirovic

The house was completely burnt down. The Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) demanded that "the Serbian authorities conduct an energetic investigation aimed at finding the perpetrators of the series of attacks on the house of the chairwoman of the 'Sanatan-sansta' Association for Spiritual

³⁵ <http://www.fecris.org>

Learning, Dragana Bukumirovi, which culminated on May 24, 2003, when unknown perpetrators threw Molotov cocktails at the house in which Ms. Bukumirovi lived with her son and daughter-in-law”³⁶.

Fortunately, neither she nor her family were in the house during that night. After their investigation, the police told Mrs Bukumirovi that around 15 bottles containing a flammable liquid had been thrown at the house, with evidence suggesting that at least 20 people had participated in the arson attack.

The Human Rights Committee in Helsinki immediately reacted, strenuously defending the rights of "Sanatan humanitarian organization – an organization for human spirituality". They claimed that this humanitarian and spiritual organization was being harassed by "a mob of xenophobes, chauvinists and criminals from reactionary groups", because the Sanatan people had "different opinions and different beliefs". The Helsinki Committee immediately requested the intervention of the State authorities in order to “protect this humanitarian organization and enable it to freely express its opinions, its beliefs and its spiritual practices”.

In spite of the human rights organizations’ opposition, Petrovic stated³⁷ that he "gave two interviews to the media, explaining calmly in simple terms that not only was Sanatan a pseudo-psychological spiritual cult, but that it was also engaged in highly damaging mental manipulation, presenting grave danger for people’s mental health, their dignity and their fundamental rights, exploiting people’s weaknesses and ignorance”.

He added that “Sanatan lies dangerously through its mask of the promise of spiritual and mental development. With its "spiritual practices", this cult in fact prepares its victim followers for antisocial and terrorist acts. While praising the Lord, they train themselves up for assassinating "criminals" chosen through "their inner feelings and subtle signs" under the guidance of the guru”.

As a result of such terrible accusations made by Petrovic, the life and belongings of the leader of the spiritual group Sanatan were endangered.

HLC reported that following the incident “Dragana Bukumirovi met with a group of citizens of Beli Potok. Around one hundred residents took part in the meeting. They told Ms. Bukumirovi that both she and her family should move out of Beli Potok within ten days, and that they would arrange everything connected with the sale of her house. Ms. Bukumirovi was occasionally heckled by the crowd. Among the comments heard were: ‘Hey, give us some rope and an axe!’ and ‘We’re the Balkans and that’s how we’ll stay, don’t you try and change us!’.” (though Mrs Bukumirovi is Serbian)

³⁶ http://www.hlc.org.yu/english/Other/Small_Religious_Communities/index.php?file=118.html

³⁷ During the speech he made at the Conference on the Impact of Cults on Health in Society, Marseille, 27-28 March 2004

After this “meeting” with the inhabitants of Beli Potok, whose manners were reminiscent of the methods used for expelling the Muslims from Bosnia and Kosovo, Dragana Bukumirovi could not leave the village for another 15 minutes, as residents had surrounded her car and begun to rock it. According to her, the two policemen who were present did not react at all, and Ms. Bukumirovi and her companions only succeeded to leave the village thanks to the fact that a crew from B92 Television was covering the incident.

Several residents of Beli Potok told an HLC investigator that Dragana Bukumirovi was not wanted in their village, saying that “she and her sect have got to go”.

HLC released a declaration calling “attention to the fact that Dragana Bukumirovi has been deprived of her basic human rights, such as the right to own property, freedom of movement and abode, and freedom of thought, conscience and religious belief. The Republic of Serbia is obliged to protect all these rights, which are guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, the International Pact on Civil and Political Rights, and the Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civic Freedoms of Serbia and Montenegro.”

Eventually, due to Petrovic’s actions, as he himself claimed at the FECRIS conference in Marseille “for the first time in Serbia, an obviously anti-social pseudo-psychological cult was banned. The Minister for Human Rights and Minorities banned Sanatan, Spiritual Science.”

The propaganda made against groups labelled as “sects” has resulted in numerous instances of violence against religious minorities in Serbia.

Youth Initiative for Human Rights concluded in their criminal suit that the creation of an “atmosphere of recoil and fear in the citizens” and the “stirring up of religious hatred and intolerance” through the publication of Lukovic’s book and the media made around it, has resulted in “300 incidents on a religious basis in Serbia from 2001 to 2005”.³⁸

One of the latest instances of violence is Seventh-day Adventist pastor Josip Tikvicki who was seriously beaten, on 15 April 2005³⁹, in front of the Adventist Church in the city of Zrenjanin, 40 miles northeast of Belgrade. As reported by Religious News Online, just before midnight on April 15, Tikvicki and his wife heard glass breaking. He went outside to investigate and confronted a group of three men who were throwing stones at the windows and vandalizing the church. He was then attacked. According to church sources, Tikvicki was kicked, hit, and then fell to the ground, losing consciousness. Church sources say he was found unconscious by the police, and was taken to the city hospital by an ambulance. Tikvicki remained hospitalized, in a very serious state.

³⁸ Magazine “Religion and tolerance“ issues 1, 2 and 3. This is the magazine of the Centre for empirical research on religion. All three numbers can be downloaded from the: www.cejr.co.yu web site.

³⁹ <http://www.sweenytod.com/rno/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=601>

Dr. Radisa Antic, President of the Adventist Church for South-East Europe declared to the media that this, unfortunately, was “not an isolated incident”. “I am deeply concerned about what is happening to our churches across the country” he said, “In the last 10 days our central church in Belgrade was stoned twice, along with the church in the cities of Kragujevac, Negotin, Smederevo, and Backa Palanka. Obviously these are not coincidences, but rather orchestrated attacks by some organizations targeting religious minorities”.

The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia issued a statement on April 17, calling for “the attention of the public to the regular acts of hatred, xenophobia and aggression towards any kind of minorities” and asking the “government officials to take adequate action in protecting the rights of all citizens, including the freedom of religion”.

The thousands of Adventists in Serbia are highly concerned about these latest attacks and feel threatened and insecure. “Despite our regular reports to the authorities of these and similar incidents, measures taken were not adequate nor were we protected appropriately,” says Miodrag Zivanovic, communication director of the Adventist Church in Serbia.

Zivanovic also added that statements and articles in the media “are often a cause of hostility and antagonism that turns people against the church. This is because they show a ‘finger of hate’ pointed at us, [and] even though we are a recognized church, we are very often called a sect,” he said.

The situation in Serbia is very serious and requires international attention since attacks on religious and spiritual minorities have risen at an alarming rate during the last years, since Petrovic and Lukovic started their media campaigns.

As Forum 18 News Service reported on 9 June 2005⁴⁰:

“Last year saw an upsurge in attacks on religious minorities, ranging from slander and vilification in the media to physical attacks on places of worship and individuals, with such attacks continuing at a high level into this year”.

“More than 100 attacks took place on Protestant, Catholic, Jehovah's Witness, Jewish, Muslim and Romanian Orthodox targets in 2004, with more than 25 such attacks between January and May this year. Religious minorities complain the authorities are failing to take action to punish the perpetrators. Incidents range from an attack on a mosque in Presevo with a hand-held rocket launcher last February to graffiti “Death to Adventists” written on the walls of the Adventist theological college in Belgrade in March. Numerous Catholic graveyards have been desecrated, while the media constantly speak of Protestants, Old Calendarist Orthodox and Mormons as “dangerous sects”.

⁴⁰ Report available on the web site http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=581

IV. The representative of FECRIS is working against European values in Serbia

Serbia is in the process of confronting the crimes committed under the Milosevic regime, and this happens thanks to the work of human rights organizations in Serbia, which raise the awareness level of the population and bring human rights violations to Court. As an example, Youth Initiative for Human Rights's main project is called "Dealing with the Past Program", and one of their main objectives is to make people understand that the ICTY as well as domestic courts are not "anti-Serb" instruments.

This sensitizing of the people in Serbia is done little by little, with sudden rises of awareness, such as the one recently created by the release of a video on the massacre at Srebrenica. The Serbian people saw for the first time on their TV live recordings of the killings of Muslim men and teenagers. This created a great deal of emotion, talk, conferences and media which is still at a peak at the time of the tenth anniversary of this massacre.

Humanitarian organizations and democrats have a difficult time making the political scene evolve in the country, firstly due to the propaganda that has been flooded to the people during all the years of the Milosevic regime, and secondly, due to the fact that a great number of people involved directly or indirectly in war crimes are still holding positions of authority or have simply returned to their homes after the war.



IMA LI OPROSTA: "Frenkijevci",
5. oktobra 2000.

Meanwhile, people like the FECRIS representative in Serbia, Colonel Petrovic, or his right-hand man Captain Lukovic, are working in the opposite direction, effectively keeping extremism alive in the country.

It is well known in Serbia that the Orthodox Church had been pushing the idea of an ethnically and religiously pure Serbia throughout the whole war.

Sonia Biserko, Head of the Helsinki Committee in Serbia, stated in her report for 2004⁴¹:

⁴¹ "Serbia 2004: Human rights and collective identity", Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia

“A sophisticated strategy of the construction of a new identity has been elaborated, which not only bypasses the recent past, war and war crimes, but also pushes Serbia away from contemporary European values and norms. In his public appearances, the Patriarch Pavle condemns the crimes in general, but always bypasses the concrete crimes committed by the Serbs. Even more, the SOC [*Serbian Orthodox Church*] bookshop windows in Belgrade display the photographs of Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic. Not a single Serbian priest ever mentioned any of the Serbian crimes, not even those already proven by The Hague. The SOC and Patriarch Pavle have even been the initiators of two declarations in 1996 and 1997 asking that the proceedings before The Hague tribunal against Radovan Karadzic be dropped. The declarations were signed by the most prominent Serbian intellectuals and other high profile individuals. Besides, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church awarded a medal to Radovan Karadzic for the defence of the Orthodox faith. There was even a proposal that Radovan Karadzic become a saint of the SOC.”

In this context, the collaboration of Colonel Petrovic and Captain Lukovic with extreme Serbian Orthodox Church leaders to fight religious minorities is symptomatic of the direction they want Serbia to evolve.

They are pushing it in the opposite direction to the standards of the United Nations and the Council of Europe.

The support that Petrovic receives for his fight against religious minorities is also of concern.

The round table on sects previously mentioned, was organized by the Serbian Liberal Party. This party is known in Serbia as being ultra-nationalist. It was founded by Kosta Cavoski⁴², a Professor at Law from the Belgrade University, who is the President of the “Committee for truth about Karadzic”⁴³ and who also supports the Committee for the defence of Milosevic⁴⁴.

This round table with Petrovic was reported by the weekly “Svedok”, an ultra-nationalist magazine, which supported the “Red Berets”, the Unit for Special Operations used by Milosevic for killing journalists, politicians and committing many other murders in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo⁴⁵. The magazine was prohibited by the government after the assassination of the Prime Minister Djindjic since they published an interview of the head of the “Red Berets”, who was searched for this murder⁴⁶. The assassination of Djindjic was considered by ultra-nationalists as a patriotic act, as Djindjic was the one who sent Milosevic to

⁴² http://www.dsomladina.org.yu/forum/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=1921

⁴³ <http://www.suc.org/culture/library/karadzic/istina.html>

⁴⁴ <http://www.pcn-nep.com/PIH/pih-050208.htm>

⁴⁵ http://www.vreme.com/arhiva_html/511/03.html

⁴⁶ http://216.239.59.104/search?q=cache:rHopLQ5bFzcJ:www.politika.co.yu/2003/0725/01_27.htm+svedok+zabrana&hl=en

The Hague. The Red Berets are currently under several criminal proceedings for the murder or attempted murder of political figures in Serbia⁴⁷.

With this kind of extremist support, Colonel Petrovic feels free to continue with his persecution of religious minorities.

According to the 2004 Helsinki Committee's report, "The SOC recognises only seven churches as is the same under the Law. This attitude towards religious freedom (although guaranteed by the Constitution) often results in practice in the treatment of other religious communities as sects, with the unconcealed support of the SOC. Taking into account that sects, due to a continuous campaign, have a rather negative connotation, the operation of churches and religious communities not recognised by the SOC and the Law is severely impeded."

The report quotes the definition of a "sect" given by Captain Zoran Lukovic:

"A sect is a social group that, regardless of its way of registration, its form of organization and the number of members, treacherously abuses knowledge, ignorance or a situation of weakness of individuals, resulting in physical or psychological consequences for the individual. This means that sects take advantage of someone's ignorance, illness, weakness, loneliness, old age, youth, etc."

The Helsinki Committee concludes:

"The definition of sects is very wide and is often applied to other groups that the ruling circles disfavour. For example, in 2002, a graffiti saying 'Sectarians, get out of Serbia' appeared on the door of the Helsinki Committee."

In the specific context of social and political unrest in Serbia, the activities of the FECRIS representative there bring about severe consequences for the targeted religious minorities, as well as for the evolution of the country towards international human rights standards and democracy.

⁴⁷ <http://www.yucom.org.yu/EnglishVersion/LawyersCommittee.asp>

CONCLUSION

The activities of the representative of FECRIS in Serbia are in total contravention of human rights and the rights of religious and spiritual minorities in this country.

At a time when Serbia ratified in 2004 the European Convention on Human Rights, Colonel Petrovic's collaboration with the Serbian Orthodox Church for the persecution of religious minorities is an insult to the hard work of democrats and human rights organizations to bring Serbia to the required level outlined in international standards.

Colonel Petrovic participated to the FECRIS conference in Barcelona in May 2002 where he declared:

“Our opinion is that we should create a strong cooperation with the European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism (FECRIS).”

He was a speaker at the next FECRIS conference two years later in Marseille, where he presented his work about the elimination of two religious minority groups, publicly exposing that one of these groups had been the subject of violent aggressions and justifying it (without foundation) by the “exceptionally dangerous doctrine” of the group.

All the members of FECRIS who were present at these conferences endorsed his activities, despite the fact that he used to be a Colonel of Milosevic's Army and that he opened his speech at the 2002 Barcelona conference alleging that the NATO air strikes had caused a “real humanitarian catastrophe for the peoples of Serbia and Montenegro”. Of course he did not mention that the NATO air strikes against Milosevic's strategic points of command were aimed at stopping the ethnic cleansing of Muslims being perpetrated in Kosovo.

FECRIS members did not react because they adhere to the same ideology of intolerance and repression of minorities.

The FECRIS organization clearly reveals through this case its true purposes and activities, which are incompatible with the values of freedom of conscience and religious pluralism that are protected by the Council of Europe.

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