

Face to face

WHITE BOOK ON ALBANIAN TERRORISM AND ORGANIZED CRIME IN KOSOVO AND METOHIJA - WHAT DOES IT SAY -

STRICTLY CONTROLLED CRIMINALS

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Material inaccuracies, wrong interpretations and propaganda clichés diminish the value of even those few correct facts

When at the beginning of March this year Agim Cheku became Kosovo's Prime Minister, the already overstrung relations between Belgrade and Pristine threatened to develop into a crisis. Had the Albanians wanted to find among themselves a person which was to anger the Serbs the most, they could have hardly found a better candidate. In Serbian eyes Cheku is a triple criminal: first, as a brigadier in the Croatian army he participated in operations against Krajina Serbs in 1995; he was Chief of Staff of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) from March 1999 until 2000, during the bombardment and ethnic cleansing of Serbs from the province; and finally, prior to taking over the chair of the Prime Minister, he was the commander of the Kosovo Protection Corps, a paramilitary organization which gathers UCK veterans and is seen as a source of terrorism and crime in Kosovo.

A Very Similar Development

Like on some earlier occasions, protests and hard words from Belgrade had no effect. Not only did Hans Jesen Petersen, Head of the UN mission in Kosovo, refuse coldly the official invitation of the Government of Serbia to prevent Cheku's nomination, but Interpol also rubbed salt into the wound by suspending the wanted list issued in 2003 upon criminal charges from Belgrade, on the basis of which Cheku was already twice arrested abroad. The Minister of Justice of Serbia, Zoran Stojkovic, called this a "direct call for the dissolution of Interpol", and the Serb National Council asked the UN Secretary General to urgently dismiss Petersen. And once again, nobody in the international community seemed to be very upset. We already have seen something very similar prior to Cheku's nomination, when somewhat less than two years ago Ramush Haradinaj became Kosovo's Prime Minister, and afterwards when Hashim Tachi was appointed as the Head of Kosovo's negotiating team. Then, too, protests of Serbs were ignored, although Haradinaj was later accused by The Hague Tribunal – but after he resigned and surrendered, he was allowed to wait for the beginning of the trial in freedom. Belgrade protested without effect also when Bajram Rexhepi became Kosovo's Prime Minister (claiming that, as a physician in UCK, he had participated in torturing Serbs), and as well when his successor Bajram Kosumi was appointed, who before the war in Kosovo spent many years in prison because of hostile activities.

Racial Crime

There are also thesis which do seriously smell after racism. "Albanians, particularly those from Kosovo and Metohija, have developed a system of collective identity which is a precondition for organized crime. It is exactly this element, based upon affiliation to a certain group, which has linked Albanian organized crime with pan-Albanian ideals, politics, military activities and terrorism (page 8). Do the authors of the White Book see Serbs, Romas, Americans etc. as people without "a feeling of collective identity" who therefore do not have the "basic premise" for involving in organized crime?

Before we start lamenting double standards of the unjust world, the twilight of the Interpol and justice in general, it would not be bad to ask oneself whether Serbia's state organs did not also have their share in having the main perpetrators of crimes over Kosovo Serbs remain out of the reach of justice. Namely, a closer look at the "Cheku case", as well as at some other examples, gives rise to some confusing conclusions.

First, on March 2nd, as soon as Cheku was appointed, the Head of the Office of the Government of Serbia Srdjan Djuric stated that "the Prosecutor for War Crimes has raised an indictment against Agim Cheku because of war crimes". A few days later, it turned out that there was no indictment. Bruno Vekaric, Spokesperson of the Prosecutor's Office, explained that there was an ongoing investigation against Cheku, opened upon criminal charges in 2003. If even the Government, i.e. its official spokesperson, do not know whether or not Cheku is indicted, then it is hard to expect the foreigners to

take Belgrade's argumentation seriously. But, well, let us say this is just an ordinary oversight, and let us see what is written in this famous indictment.

According to Vekaric, the District Attorney from Pristine demanded an investigation against Cheku, and it was decided to start it in February 2000. He said that the decision to start the investigation included also Hashim Tachi and the first Head of UNMIK Bernard Kouchner, and that they were charged with the crime of genocide. Cheku, so Vekaric, is accused of murder of 661 persons, and the abduction of 574 non-Albanian persons.

After these accusations the first question one has to ask oneself is what happened with the investigation against Kouchner. Was he, too, on an international wanted list? If there is reliable evidence that this physician and diplomat was involved in such serious a case as genocide, then this is a first class international scandal. If, however, it would turn out that the investigation against Kouchner was part of Slobodan Milosevic's (who at that time was still in power) political propaganda, what justifies today's claims that with Cheku this is not the case? And if evidence against Cheku is stronger, why then, after six years of investigation, there is still no indictment? Let us remind, in its last days Milosevic's regime accused, and sentenced in absentia, Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schroeder and a number of NATO functionaries. These proceedings were dealt with by the very same District Attorney's Office from Pristine which after war was displaced to Nis.

Devastating Synthesis

Let us proceed: up to now not one relevant international organization, legal or political alike, has concluded that there was genocide committed in Kosovo, either from the Serbian, or the Albanian side, although nobody denies that there were other serious crimes. If what has happened to Serbs in Kosovo since March 1999 until today was genocide, what is then everything that happened to the Albanians from 1998 to 1999? The indictment for genocide, as we know, is a serious matter.

Finally, Serbian authorities claim to have reliable evidence regarding those 661 executed persons, but not a single fact was offered to the public which would relate their deaths directly with Cheku. This number is obviously the total number of non-Albanians who were killed at the time when Cheku was leading the UCK (March 1999 until 2000). It is, of course, possible, that this is a case of command responsibility, but our legislation until recently did not recognize this category, at least not in regard to Serbian officers accused for crime in Ovchara and in other places. Anyway, let us see what is written in the White book on Albanian terrorism and organized crime in Kosovo and Metohija, which the Government of Serbia issued in 2003. Already in the introduction, on page 13, it is written that the units of UCK during NATO bombardment and later on "acted without significant mutual coordination". If there was no coordination, there was also no effective supreme command, so it is not possible to speak of Cheku's command responsibility.

The mentioned White book, by the way, is full with material inaccuracies, wrong interpretations and propaganda clichés, which diminishes the value of even those few correct facts that can be found in it.

Having in mind that the White Book should be a synthesis of all what the state organs, and particularly the security agencies, collected on terrorist and other criminal activities in Kosovo, the logical question is whether these agencies are so incapable and ideologically hidebound that they cannot get even the simplest information, in which case it becomes clear not only why we have lost Kosovo, but also that our national security is seriously jeopardized. The other explanation is that the security and intelligence agencies actually do have relevant facts, but that they hide them from the public, the judicial system, and also the Government, in order to use this information for their own needs through blackmail and manipulation. Nobody knows which of these two explanations is more devastating.

As Needed

It is, for instance, claimed that Cheku was the head of UCK since 1998. It is very easy to establish that during entire 1988 Cheku was in Croatia, and that he was appointed to the commanding position of UCK only after failed negotiations in Rambouillet, on the eve of the bombing campaign, so to say. Further, it is said the Edhem Cheku, Minister in Kosovo's government, is his own brother, although they are only distant cousins. The same crimes described in the book, among which some are very serious, are attributed to separately to Tachi, Haradinaj and Cheku, as the need comes. So it is said for each one of the three to have been "ordering and was the mastermind" of the slaughter of Serbs and Roma on the Radonjic Lake, whose immediate perpetrator was Idriz Baljaj, indicted anyway by The Hague. However, it is known that Tachi and Haradinaj were active in different zones of operation, and that at the time when the crime on the Radonjic Lake was committed Cheku was not at all in Kosovo.

There are formulations which could provoke laughter if it were not about serious matters. It is said, for

instance, that after the war “there was no adequate implementation of the revitalization of economic activities as the only legal source of income for the population, so that by engaging in crime a significant number of terrorists continued to produce violence”.