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Die Folgen der Bomben auf Jugoslawien

Während in den bürgerlichen Medien der NATO-Krieg gegen Jugoslawien kein Thema mehr ist, leidet die Bevölkerung in Serbien, im Kosovo und in Montenegro immer noch unter den Folgen von Krieg und Nationalismus. Um nicht nur immer von Außen über die Situation zu berichten führte für diese Nummer Thomas Schmidinger im Dezember ein Interview mit dem linken Oppositionellen und Antinationalisten Mihajlo Acimovic aus Belgrad.

■ THOMAS SCHMIDINGER

How was the situation for the ordinary people in Yugoslavia during the NATO-bombing?

Very difficult for the common people. The bombing caused more than 2000 registered civilian casualties. But that is only the number of dead civilians that the Yugoslav government had allowed us to know about. The real number could be bigger. The government has consistently tried to cover up the real consequences of the bombing. Possibly, they are afraid that if people knew how hard the real consequences were, there would be a lot more resistance against the government and a lot less people continuing to do their unpaid jobs, while the society falls apart around them.

A good example is the approach toward ecological damage. Normally, you could expect the Yugoslav government to try and use the serious ecological consequences, to apply media pressure on NATO countries and improve it's di-

plomatic position. What we had instead, was a government trying to prevent it's population and everybody else, from founding out what the real situation was.

Beside the direct consequences of the bombs, the people of Yugoslavia also suffered — or still suffer — under the ecological catastrophe the bombings caused. Can you tell us how you felt the destructions of the ecology in this war?

You mean how it influenced me personally? I was living in downtown Belgrade at the time of the bombing, so I probably didn't feel the ecological consequences so much. Unlike other areas, the center of Belgrade was mostly spared from the environmental mess during the bombing. During the first days of the bombing, NATO missiles did hit some very dangerous things in several Belgrade suburbs and entire neighbourhoods were evacuated because of that. The most dangerous place, which the government had allowed people to know about, was abig missile fuel depot, south of the city center. The night when that was hit, I was hiding in the apartment of a friend. I didn't want to be at home, because I thought somebody might come for me. I wasn't about to guess if it would happen or not. There was always a possibility of the military police breaking into people's apartments at night, like in '91 and '92, taking the military aged men to war. And there were also the organised nazis. I mean the Serb ones. There are generally two kinds off nazis in Serbia. One are big Serbs. They think Hitler was a smart guy, but unfortunately on the wrong side. The others think Hitler was their man. So, I thought it

was safer to be out of home, at least for a while. I was at this friend's apartment and we were listening to radio. First there were some explosions shaking the building, then the air alarm. Then more explosions. When the air alarm had just stopped, the radio started saying Belgrade should prepare for the heaviest bombing so far, because some radar had spotted a lot of planes coming our way. That night, they were coming in in waves. One hour of explosions, one hour of silence. After a while, the radio reported some dangerous things were hit in Zemun and Zeleznik (city areas). Some cousins of my friend called to say that they were being evacuated from some areas and a little later, the media were passing on the order for all people to close their windows and stop ventilation. They were telling us to be prepared for a possible evacuation. Late in the night, the radio said everyone is ordered to go to shelters, without explanation. Later I heard rumours about some other dangerous thing that was hit far from where I was, in the Zemun neighbourhood. I don't know about that, but it seems the rumours were not true. I remember around 2 am that night, the radio said the wind was blowing away the cloud from that southern place, away from Belgrade and dispersing it.

What about the drinking-water for the people in Belgrade?

Somewhere in the second half of May, the NATO bombed a chemical factory in Baric. They deliberately scratched a tank containing combat poison. The leak was stopped, but the factory management calculated the possible consequences if the tank was hit. If it was hit

directly, the poison, would make a cloud and the wind from Baric normally blows straight into most of Belgrade. They decided it was safer to dump it into the Sava river. Belgrade city gets almost its entire drinking water supply some 15 Km downriver and a few Km after that, the Sava goes into the Danube. I found out about it from my girlfriend. Her uncle, an army general, had called her family, to tell them that they should not drink or bath with the tap water, for a week. He told them to use mineral for drinking, instead. Nobody told the rest of the people about this. Even if they were told, I don't think the government could have responded properly. All the cistern trucks were being used for gasoline storage and there was not enough mineral water production, to sustain one million people for a week. That week, a lot of birds, fish and other pets suddenly died, while a lot of dogs and some people with more sensitive stomachs, had strong stomach aches and some of them also nausea. A few days after the one week had passed, some ruling party branch had a press release, saying that the claims of Belgrade water being poisoned were completely false and that they had a water analysis to prove it. Their press release said the water analysis was from a date after that one week had passed. Even so, the laboratory report wasn't published anywhere.

You spoke about Serbian Nazis? Are they strong and politically organised or just Skins who are only of a physical danger?

There are skinheads in Serbia, but not very many of them and they are not organised like in, say, Czechia. In Serbia, it is a bunch of people with no real ideological background, except violence for violence. There was an upsurge in their numbers in 96 and 97, but now, there aren't many left and a lot of those have changed their ideology, so they are skinheads only by name. I was really afraid of the Serb Radical Party people. This party still has a paramilitary of its own, the Serb *Cetnik* Movement. They have weapons and experience with eliminations, ethnic cleansing, etc. They are also in the government of Serbia, since 1997. The police tolerates or supports what they do. If they came for me, I don't think anybody would have

reacted to protect me.

Now it's winter in Belgrade. How are the living conditions for people in Yugoslavia after all the destruction?

The last I heard from Belgrade was two days ago. They had electricity every two hours and every two hours, no. NATO destroyed the electricity production and the government doesn't want to import it. There is no central heating, because there is no heating oil. Also, the NATO destroyed a water heating plant, which supplied almost 500.000 people in Belgrade with heating, so even if there was fuel, not all people would have it. In Nis city, the police have taken over the heating plant on their own and are using the heating fuel from the federal reserves. It has been snowing in the end of November and now I think it is snowing again. I am very worried how it is for the youngest children. If there was at least electricity, electric heating equipment could be used. I think it will not get better. There are some government people, who have a monopoly on oil imports. They are happy with the shortages, because everyone must buy in the black market then, at higher prices. Otherwise, it is not a problem to smuggle in all the fuel you need, if those people support the action.

During the war against Yugoslavia there were a lot of manifestations in Vienna. Most of them were dominated by Serbian nationalists. You could see a lot of Serbian flags. Some carried posters of Milosevic and some demonstrators were even seen in *Cetnik*-Uniforms. Also many groups of the Austrian left — from the RKL or the KOMAK to the KPÖ supported them. What do you think about such an „international solidarity“?

It sort of reminded me of the Chinese demonstrations in Belgrade, after the Chinese embassy was hit. I didn't get a chance to see those demonstrations in Vienna often, but I did speak to some of the people organising. The demonstrations seemed very uncreative. There was one person with a very loud megaphone, dominating the entire discourse and there were a lot of Serb and Yugoslav flags and some other symbols. It actually seemed rather like the spontaneous demonstrations of support to himself, which Milosevic sometimes or-

ganises, to spite the opposition. There was also the issue of the target sign. In Serbia, the target sign was printed en masse by the government and distributed around nationalist anti-NATO demonstrations. If you wore the target sign in Serbia, that meant you supported the government. I do not know what to think of these people. But I do know that Milosevic funds a lot of the organisations that support him, abroad. All of the emigrant organisations are under his economic controls, except for the *Cetnik* ones.

I also wanted to ask you about the opposition in Serbia. Is there only the pro-western-capitalist and the extreme-nationalist or monarchist opposition of Vuk Draskovic or is there also a leftist anti-national opposition?

Depends what you define as opposition. For one thing, Vuk Draskovic can hardly be called that, since he has publicly declared that his party is not in the opposition. He declared this through the television station *Studio B*. He controls this television thanks to the support his party gets from Milosevic's parties in the Belgrade city parliament. This television has a worse editorial conception, with more ethnic chauvinism, than the state television. As for other groups, there is the *Serb Radical Party*, which pretends that it is only in Milosevic's government, because it wants to save what can be saved of Serb ethnic territories. It was also this government that capitulated to NATO and surrendered Kosov@, but they keep telling the same story. The third big non-Milosevic political group is the *Alliance for Change*, but they are completely like you said, pro-western capitalist. There are no real alternative political parties, with public influence. People who want to do opposition work simply don't go to political parties. The real opposition over the last few years has mainly been concentrated around organisations like the *Antitar Campaign*, then for a short time, the *Otpor*. But then most people realised the *Otpor* is just another pro-American, neo-liberal thing, designated to confuse them. There are a lot of small groups, like *Kontrapunkt* in Kraljevo and Belgrade *Libertarian Group*, who have been doing something. The resistance scene is becoming very decentralized and that is good I think. People are

realising that they don't all have to be in one organisation to work together. I think small anarchist groups might grow a lot after the bombing and the Seattle things. When you hear that 200 people maximum come to the *Alliance for Change* demonstrations in Belgrade today. When you hear that the *Otpor*, which pretends to be a student movement, can not collect more than 500 students for its demonstration, it becomes clear that people are getting sick of the

neo-liberal, neo-nationalist opposition. I see a great chance in that, to revive the rebel spirits, to organise those people from the great protests in 1996 and 1997, for a different kind of rebellion, this time. Maybe one that doesn't have US-funded leaders. What I speak of is highly unlikely today, but in Yugoslavia, you can never tell what will happen in the next 12 months.

Thank you for this interview.

Thomas Schmidinger: Redaktionsmitglied von Context XXI von Juni 2000 bis 2006, koordinierender Redakteur von September 2000 bis April 2001.

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