

## **Milosevic Flatters to Deceive**

**Author:** IWPR

Slobodan Milosevic's twisted perception of recent history turns the anniversary of defeat in Kosovo into victory celebrations.

Two zillion performances throughout Serbia, thousands of folk-concerts, hundreds of spontaneously organised rallies. Two dozen round and square table discussions straight out of science fiction, addressing the "the New Anti-Serb Order". A marching band lauding our resounding victory in Kosovo. All to mark the much-vaunted 24 March, the first anniversary of the NATO bombing.

At the same time, our Supreme Commander Slobodan Milosevic decided - coincidentally of course - to embellish his Internet website with his colour photograph and a detailed personal biography. The same Internet, that is, that informs us of his indictment by the Hague Tribunal for war crimes, and tells us that any information on his movements would be welcome.

If Interpol had been watching our nightly news "TV Dnevnik" (and they don't, obviously), they would have found out exactly where the President was: at the grave of the Unknown Hero on Avala, honouring the memory of soldiers and policemen killed during the bombing. With his deadly serious expression, he looked just like a leading character in an Interpol movie - dedicated to the Motherland.

We won last year's war, he concluded. We kicked the West's ass. We triumphed. We kept our independence. We managed to keep Kosovo in Yugoslavia. We became the only free country in Europe or outside it. Every citizen, our president continued, should be singing from the top of his or her lungs at how lucky they are to live in Serbia.

Schizophrenia and collective madness were elsewhere, too. Earlier that morning, zombie-like workers in Belgrade's Nikola Pasic square had joined together in protest, signing a petition that the West - there and then! - lift the unjust and undeserved sanctions imposed against Serbia. Their banners featured pictures of Interpol's main star Slobodan Milosevic, as well as slogans reading "Serbs are not Indians", and "Kosovo is our domestic problem".

They blended in perfectly with the folk concert "Song kept us alive," going on in nearby Republic Square, where folk stars churned out their patriotic love songs to an audience of a couple of hundred lost citizens.

Everything was of course carefully recorded by Serbian State Television, ready to broadcast, at primetime the next day, the invisible spirit of the people: how we fight the F-16 criminals with songs, and how we stand together, united and firm, in defence of our motherland. (If we only knew how big that motherland was, where its borders were!)

The 24 March celebrations were rounded off with a TV Dvenik broadcast that seemed to last a couple of dozen hours. It featured all the usual indispensable performers: Serbian generals and colonels, guests from Russia, housewives from China, communists from Thailand, friends from Iraq, anarchists from Germany, Nobel prizewinners from Afghanistan, fellow Interpol enemies from Iran, frosty Kazakh women. Each and every one confirming that Serbia was the winner in last year's wargame. Each underlining that Serbia without Kosovo was not an option, and that the country led by Interpol's star attraction cannot possibly vanish just like that, after elections or by the so-called will of the people.

Our comrades from Burma said we should follow their example: they skillfully handled external and internal enemies, and dealt with enemy propaganda on huge billboards. Our comrades from Iraq disagreed about the billboards - executions, they said, were much better for boosting public morale.

The Cubans confirmed that hangings were very important, while the Chinese pointed to their experiences in 1989, when their clever use of tanks kept Tibet under their sovereignty. Russian comrades said Serbs hankering after communism should wait several centuries for Brehznev to rise from the grave. The Greeks sent a nice message to say the military Junta was not dead.

This went on until after midnight. And nobody mentioned the dead soldiers, dead civilians and dead land ruled by our cheery Interpol President.

Close your eyes, though, and you will see Kosovo lost forever from Serbia. You see hungry unemployed people celebrating 24 March by standing silently in queues. You hear echoes of folk songs and you can't remember what you're supposed to be celebrating - the Day of Bombing or the Day of Statehood?

You discover that over a thousand soldiers were killed during the bombing, and you find yourself waiting at the bridges in the evening to be beaten up by the Yugoslav left and the Yugoslav right. Suddenly you hear the national anthem "Hey, Sloveni," and you want to jump off the bridge into the water, to run away from this country which is so free, independent and commercially progressive that everybody wants to leave it.

Happy National Holiday!

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