

Milosevic Wields Psychic Weapon

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Serbia's popular clairvoyants have become part of the Belgrade propaganda machine.

For the past two weeks, one of Belgrade's official newspapers "Vecernje Novosti" has published a daily medical bulletin on the progress of former actress and Miss Yugoslavia Milja Vujanovic, after she was shot and wounded by her ex-husband. Miss Vujanovic's ability to command the kind of official media attention once reserved for former Yugoslav President Tito, is a testament to the status of her current profession - she is a fortune-teller.

Fuelled by primetime television programmes, clairvoyants have enjoyed huge celebrity ever since the conflict began in the former Yugoslavia. In short, they have become part of the propaganda machine. During 1991 when the Yugoslav Army was shelling Vukovar, Milja Vujanovic used her popular television programme to describe Serbs as "a celestial chosen people" and to uncover "evidence" about the "satanic nature" of world powers. In the last three years alone, the number of fortune-tellers with access to the media in Serbia has risen to around 150. The number of clairvoyants is estimated to be at least four times higher. Actors, writers and painters have also engaged in prophecies as a way of enhancing their popularity.

The fee for a "fortune-telling" consultation is around 500 German marks - five times the average monthly salary, but the self-appointed "queen of clairvoyants", psychic and transvestite Kleo Patra charges double that amount. Her talents have bought her a villa in Dedinje, the exclusive residential neighborhood where the Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic lives. "I have daily contact with the highest circles of power. They rarely make a move without consulting me first," she says. "They call me and I guide them. That's how they stay in power." As yet, no one has seen fit to refute her claims.

Of course, the Serbian regime is not the first to recognise the potential value of the paranormal - in May 1942 Joseph Goebbels noted in his diary "the need to incorporate the occult into our propaganda . . . we must pressure all occultists to come into our service". Claims by the independent media that the regime uses clairvoyants for its own purposes, are confirmed by the owner of a popular Belgrade astrological agency, who told the Belgrade magazine "Vreme", "Most clairvoyants I know say they have been warned by people in power not to speak badly of the current government and to concentrate on spreading positive energy."

"The Third Eye", longest-running of four specialised magic magazines, was even founded by the Yugoslav government. Headlines such as "American Army admits use of Black Magic" grace the front page and in the latest issue, the magazine published the astrological charts of Yugoslav President, Slobodan Milosevic and his extreme nationalist coalition partner Vojislav Seselj.

Not surprisingly, the charts find that Milosevic is destined to rule Yugoslavia. "The stars smile on Slobodan Milosevic. He has many enemies, but that's only to be expected. He is the best of men, so it's normal that many wish to remove him from office. His birth chart is Leo and the chart of Yugoslavia is Taurus, which shows that they cannot be separated. There are difficult years ahead," the magazine adds prudently.

The state publishing house "Politika" owns three other magic magazines. Infamous for its pre-war fuelling of hatred, since 1994 Politika has launched over 80 clairvoyants and fortune-tellers who are unanimous in lauding the superior qualities of Slobodan Milosevic and predicting that he will remain in power until 2010. "I don't want people to misunderstand, but of all of those in power and fighting for power, the only worthy man is Milosevic. Only he can deal with the devil. He must not fall, if he lost power Serbia would be finished," warns one of the most popular fortune-tellers, Grandfather Miloje.

Clairvoyants certainly enjoy a receptive audience in Serbia. Sociologists who conducted research in Belgrade immediately after the bombardment of Yugoslavia in June 1999, found that the majority of Belgraders are superstitious. When asked: "Do you believe in clairvoyants and their prediction that all members of NATO will soon be punished by natural catastrophes and epidemics?" over 50 per cent of respondents answered "Yes" and only 11 percent described the question as "stupid".

"Insecurity, worry, feelings of fear, helplessness and personal weakness all encourage people to abandon the path of rational control" explains professor of psychology Dragan Popadic, commenting on the findings. "The authoritarian climate here certainly encourages the spread of superstition."

A short memory helps the population to maintain its faith in predictions. Only a year ago, the popular clairvoyant "Zorka" predicted that the party of President Slobodan Milosevic would be triumphant in new elections this year, that US president Bill Clinton would commit suicide, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan would be hanged and that Russia and the United States would be involved in a limited conflict which would result in Serbia reclaiming some lost territory. She also predicted a second bombardment of Yugoslavia, in which the Serbs would triumph leaving their attackers to be "avenged by great evil".

Indeed, such premonitions of a second bombardment entered the public debate earlier this year, but as soon as the Yugoslav Army issued a statement stating that "enemies of the State are spreading an atmosphere of fear by speaking about a new attack," the predictions suddenly melted away.

As the country endures a devastating economic and political crisis, optimism becomes ever more important for the regime. Little surprise then, that last week the prophet and shaman doctor Vuk published an essay about the future of Yugoslavia, predicting that George Bush Junior will win the US presidency and Serbia will flourish thereafter.

"Sanctions will be unconditionally lifted," he continued. "Serbs will become the good guys again, and our neighbours will be seen for what they really are - bad people and insignificant players. Kosovo will be returned to us on the condition that they keep their base in Urosevac. They will ask our permission to use the Danube again and they will be prepared to pay dearly for that privilege..." Less a prediction than a summary of the regime's wildest dreams.

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