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International Conference on Lustration in the Western Balkans
POLITICAL WILL MOST IMPORTANT

Belgrade. Participants in the conference “Past and Present: Impacts on Democracy” concluded that the process of lustration in the Western Balkans demands different country-specific approaches, and the basic difficulty is to establish the time frame for lustration. The two day international conference is the first gathering included in the project “Lustration in the Western Balkans”, introduced by the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe (CDRSEE) from Thessaloniki in collaboration with partner organizations from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro. The head of the project, the representative of CDRSEE Magardič Hačkijan said that the conclusion of the two day discussion was that it is impossible to come up with a general model of lustration valid for all countries of the Western Balkans, since the starting point is different for each one of them.

He said that the project “Lustration in the Western Balkans” will last a year and a half, involving the participation of a network of NGOs collaborating on the project, and that the end results will be presented to the EU. Summing up the participants’ presentations, Hačkijan pointed out that the stand each country will take regarding lustration is important for the process of lustration, emphasizing that decisive political will is still most important. According to him, it is very important to establish a clear procedure, in order to avoid obstinacy, regardless of whether lustration is put into effect by special commissions, such as the commission for peace and reconciliation, or through a legally defined procedure.

The participants in the conference agreed that in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, lustration did not happen due to different reasons. The Director of the Center for Human Rights based in Belgrade, Vojin Dimitrijević, stated that the process of lustration should be preceded by a process of truth and reconciliation, reminding the audience that Vojislav Koštunica as President of the FRY formed such a commission in March 2001, but it, however, produced no results. Dimitrijević said that there is a double need for reconciliation in Serbia, the need for reconciliation among the citizens themselves divided along many lines, and also the need for reconciliation with other nations.

According to the professor of the Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo, Dino Abazović, democratic structures do not exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is to say that, „ethnocracy has replaced democracy“. Citing the case of the High Commissioner of the International Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who fired 125 officials from public posts since 1997, he pointed out that international representatives have, nevertheless, not succeeded in settling the numerous ethnic and social divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The director of the Historical Archive in Belgrade, Branka Prpa, said that the participants in the round table „Past and Present: Historical Experience“, discussed the possibility of

creating a uniform model of lustration for the so-called area of post-communist countries. Prpa said that the participants disputed the idea that a uniform model is possible and added that the majority of participants advocated an individual approach to countries belonging to post-communist societies. The director of the Center for Antiwar Action, Aleksandar Resanović, reminded the participants that in June 2003 the Serbian Assembly passed the Lustration Act, which, according to his opinion, has serious defects, the key one being the absence of a deadline for applying the Act. He said that the Act prescribes forming a committee of nine members that should have made decisions about lustration in each individual case. He also stressed that, up to now, this commission has not been working, and all its members have not been appointed.

Puhovski: Ethnic Cleansing instead of Lustration

The professor of the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb, Žarko Puhovski, stated that a lustration act does not exist in Croatia, that there was no public discussion on this topic, and that lustration was replaced by ethnic cleansing. „In Croatia, lustration was replaced by ethnic cleansing, since ideological disqualification that occurred in the very beginning of democratic changes was replaced by ethnic disqualification“, Puhovski said.