

## BBC INTERVIEW WITH ŽARKO PUHOVSKI, TRANSCRIPT

### INTRODUCTION

A conference on lustration organized by the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe and the Belgrade Center for Anti-War Action was held in Belgrade last weekend. The most prominent experts in the region discussed experiences with lustration. The conference provided an occasion to invite Žarko Puhovski, a professor from Zagreb, to be a guest of the BBC.

Djordje Vlajić in the Belgrade studio.

BBC: Good afternoon, Mr. Puhovski, and welcome to the BBC program.

ŽP: Good afternoon.

BBC: A two day conference on lustration was held in Belgrade. Can we say that lustration, which otherwise is, or should be, one of important segments of transition and transformation in post-communist societies, was nowhere carried out in a good or thorough manner?

ŽP: There are more or less mixed experiences, ranging from those undertaken under international pressure, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, to the Bulgarian or Polish story, for instance. As controversial as the term itself might be due to its religious origins in the Middle Ages (although it has older Roman roots), in my opinion, in the countries of the post-Yugoslav region, it is important to attempt to do something in order to keep those people who participated and collaborated with organizations that committed crimes and serious violations of human rights, predominantly, but not exclusively in secret services, from doing what they used to, either in secret services, or in political life, and primarily in the judiciary and the state administration.

BBC: Speaking of the post-Yugoslav region, there was no serious lustration in any of those countries. For example, a law was passed in Serbia in 2003 on opening secret service files, and earlier, after the change of government, a decree. Secret service files are a very important element of lustration, and they were not opened either in Serbia, or in Croatia, or in Bosnia, as far as I know. Why was that avoided? That is to say, why did the new governments put various obstacles, or consciously leave that domain? Why did they leave the files untouched?

ŽP: The governments that took over the helm judged that it was more important for them to act according to the so-called 'state reason', that is, to keep themselves in power. Thus they needed old levers of power, including the people who knew how to handle, or who handled those levers earlier, meaning also – the people in secret services. They have always found it important that some people stay on the same post in Tito's time, in the post-Titoist Yugoslavia, because those people knew data by heart, because they knew who belongs where, because they knew which operational types of procedures are appropriate, etc. And in order to protect those people, they had to protect some other people around them, and the way it was interpreted, they wanted to protect their friends, family, members, themselves. Suddenly, it turned out that too many people are to be taken off the list of those whose files can be inspected. Thus, in fact, even when such

decisions were passed (in Croatia they were passed twice), each time it actually turned out that it was impossible to carry out these decisions, because files either disappeared, or no one knew what to do with them. Basically, it was a matter of governments wanting to protect themselves and their collaborators from services that often succeeded in surviving several changes of government.

BBC: You are listening to the BBC. Our guest is Professor Žarko Puhovski. Mr. Puhovski, what can we say about what happened after that first change of the communist regime? Did the new government try to change the system, or did it try to put the old system under control? Let us take two largest post-communist countries, Serbia and Croatia or Serbia and Montenegro and Croatia. In Serbia, the government didn't really change in essence in 1990 and 1991. Instead, it was democratically authorized under the new name of the Socialist Party. In Croatia, the government radically changed in terms of ideology – a nationalist party came to power, by the name of HDZ, as you know. Regardless of the fact that it was headed by a former general of the Yugoslav army, it had a new ideology. But it rather quickly came under attack of the forces in the Yugoslav Army, and in that situation it seemed logical, when you are at war, when you are under attack, that intelligence structures cannot be changed, but must be left as they are and must be placed under control, that some people obviously working for the other side must be fired, and all those who more or less coherently showed that they want to work for the Croatian side should be retained, and that one should be happy they exist. After another change of the regime at the beginning of 2000 in Croatia and in October in Serbia, it seemed again that there are new people who came to power from other tasks and that it is again very important to prevent the counterattack of former pro-Tudjman or pro-Milošević forces. Thus, again, some people wished to play soccer with Legija, if I may take that simply as a paradigm, in order to demonstrate the connection to them and in order to somehow tame them for their own purposes, and the price of all that was to leave them untouched. Serbia had a tragic situation in that the assassination of Djindjic showed that this cannot pass, that things had gone too far. In Croatia, there was no such cleansing, on the contrary – up to last year, entire last year, 2003, Croatia lived in a situation in which there was no control, not even official, over intelligence services, because no single manager or chief of any of those services was appointed, and the special security council that should have been established between the president of the state and the president of the government never started working. We know that even in democratic countries, where control exists, those services do all sorts of things, and in a country such as Croatia, in which there had never been any control, we can only imagine what they did. This placed us a couple of steps behind, instead of following the path of reason, replacing, let's say, people in the judiciary who participated in political professions. Instead, a sort of ethnic cleansing, so to speak, was carried out in the judiciary. People were fired because their name is Dušan, or because their father's name is Dušan, or because their wife's name is Dušanka, instead of those judges who should have been removed from their posts because they participated in political, that is, corrupted professions. Because of this, I'm afraid, it is already too late now, fifteen or fourteen years later, and we must simply try to learn a lesson from that about how and why these parts of the world are lagging behind in this important task.

BBC: You are listening to BBC. The guest of the program is Professor Žarko Puhovski. If you compared Serbia and Croatia in the level of democracy, what would that comparison be like?

ŽP: It would show that in the last several years both environments were developing similarly, with the exception that Croatia has been for, let's say, half a curve ahead in the last couple of years, that is, whatever goes on in Serbia is what was going on in Croatia a year or two, or six months earlier. Serbia is lagging a little behind Croatia. According to my opinion, there are three reasons for that. The first reason is that in Serbia the change of Milošević's government occurred several months later than the change of Tudjman's government. The second reason is that there was no war on the territory of Serbia, so that war was understood differently. Croatia was forced to see some things by having war on its territory. The third reason is that in Serbia there were no positive consequences of the fact that Serbia lost the war along with negative ones, there was no recognition of the numerous mistaken notions that led to the war that Serbia lost on several fronts in the last ten years or so.

BBC: Croatia is closer to Europe than Serbia and Montenegro. To what extent can this be an important driving force not only for Serbia and Montenegro, but also for the region? In other words, there are also Bosnia (which aspires to be a member of the European Union, but is a long way from that), Macedonia (which is slightly closer), and Albania.

ŽP: Croatia is in reality four or five years away from the European Union, unless a miracle happens. That could mean and should mean one or two things. Either that, when and if it enters the European Union, Croatia will take advantage of that in order to, at least for several years, act as the defence wall of Europe, again in relation to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the way Slovenians act as a defence wall in relation to Croatia, and don't forget that the Slovenian border is 25 kilometres from the nearest centre, Zagreb. It is really a serious problem for Croatia and maybe the Croatians will have a nationalist need, when they enter the European Union one day, to interpret their border with Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the same way. One should hope, and there aren't many good signs, but they can nevertheless be found here and there, that a reasonable position on collaboration will prevail. All international officials, primarily the officials of the European Union, insist that Croatia should collaborate with its geographical surroundings, that is, with the Balkans, no matter how unpopular this term might be in Croatia. If it wants to enter, it should enter as the forerunner of Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and, one day, Macedonia. As for Serbia and Montenegro, it is probably the only possible solution for the relations with Kosovo – namely, that both environments, territories, that is, enter the European Union at the same time. Without that, any talk of declaring the independence of Kosovo, or, on the other hand, the eventual forced attempt to reclaim it for Serbia and Montenegro, will provoke even deeper conflicts.

BBC: Thank you for this conversation. This was Žarko Puhovski, a professor at the University of Zagreb.