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**Past and Present: Consequences for Democratisation
Belgrade, 2-4 July 2004**

The Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe and the Centre for Antiwar Action* jointly organised a seminar in Belgrade, which was attended by 40 experts (legal field, academics, journalists, NGOs) from 12 countries**. The seminar attracted significant local and international media attention.

The main questions for this seminar were - What is the relationship between the public debates on the past and the consolidation of democratic structures and institutions. What has worked and can be used as a positive example for other countries and what negative experiences should be avoided?

The first part of the seminar dealt with the experiences in East-Central Europe as well as in the Southeast European countries outside the Western Balkans. An overview of developments in the whole East-Central European region and case studies on the Czech Republic, Romania and Bulgaria showed different approaches towards the past. In general, the results pointed to a rather congruent conclusion: Weak efforts to deal with the past tended to coincide with problems of democratisation, whereas stronger efforts usually tended to strengthen democratisation.

The second part of the seminar looked at specific experiences of the countries of the Western Balkans. Individual case studies showed great differences within this region too: Ups and Downs (Albania), some improvement over the last 5-6 years (Croatia), some achievements in detail, but the big questions still open (Bosnia and Herzegovina), weak interest in public debates on the past, concentration on present institution building (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), nothing essential achieved (Serbia and Montenegro). The interest in lustration differs as well: in Albania interest is concentrated on the pre-1991 era, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Croatia and in Serbia and Montenegro, interest is focused on the 1990ies.

The third part of the seminar analysed the legal developments with respect to lustration and public access to the files of the secret services and their effects on politics and societies. In general, case studies showed that the Western Balkans countries are lagging behind in comparison to East-Central European countries. In most cases, no lustration laws have been passed; the opening of secret dossiers is hotly discussed but remains unresolved and some attempts to institutionalise Truth Commissions have not achieved effective results. All in all, most contributors and panellists emphasised that legal, political and social preconditions for the necessary catharsis still have to be created.

The concluding discussion focussed on various important results of this seminar. The starting point of lustration has to be the specific environment; i.e. the concrete history of the respective country. Lustration has to be adapted to the individual experience of each country. One "model" for all of them cannot work. Individual solutions for individual cases have to be found and implemented. The same is true for the question - which period of the past is most important when it comes to lustration and public debates.

The proceedings of the seminar will be published in an electronic book which will be posted on the project web page (www.lustration.net).

* in cooperation with the Albanian Human Rights Group in Tirana, the Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies of the University of Sarajevo, the Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Zagreb, the Foundation Open Society Institute Macedonia in Skopje

** (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Germany, Greece, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro and the USA)



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