

Let me first thank the Commission and the Chairman for inviting me to speak on this panel concerning a topic of such importance for my country.

I would also like to thank the other panelists for their remarks. Although we might not have the same judgments in regards to cooperation with The Hague Tribunal or the state of human rights in general in Serbia and Montenegro, let me assure you that the individuals that consist the Government of Serbia and Montenegro, as well as, me personally are highly devoted to the issue of human rights. Indeed human rights are one of the main reasons that we were involved for a decade in the overthrow of the Milosevic regime and have after that embarked on building a new society that will fit the standards set by developed and long standing democracies. The issue of human rights is highly related to the issue of war crimes committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia for the obvious reason –that the ultimate human right, the right to life was taken from the victims in atrocities defined as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Let me first address the issue of cooperation with the Tribunal. The progress that was made in the last two years a half years, since January 2001 in what was called Yugoslavia and since February 4th of this year Serbia and Montenegro, has been remarkable. Last month, our embassy submitted a non-paper in which the actions concerning cooperation with the Tribunal have been listed. Today, I can say that in the last couple of weeks three more important inductees have been processed: the Yugoslav Army Captain Miroslav Radic (the second of the “Vukovar three”) was transferred. The former high-ranking official of the State Security Service of the Ministry of the Interior of Serbia Franko Simatovic has been transferred and the transfer of the former Chief of the State Security Service Jovica Stanišić is under way and has been delayed for the sole reason that he had to undergo surgery. His transfer will occur as soon as his health so permits. I cannot but stress the importance of these arrests and transfers, as the latter two individuals were involved in the creation of the whole system of para-military forces and were close associates of Milosevic. They were the pillars of Milosevic’s rule for years and have only recently been indicted. They were also heavily connected over the years to the security structures that we inherited and had up to recently been at odds with.

Let me just point out and remind those present that the assassination of Prime minister of Serbia Zoran Djindjic was undertaken by the perpetrators under the code name “stop to Hague”. The documents found also showed that others were on the hit list, most importantly the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Goran Svilanovic, the President of the National Committee for Cooperation with The Hague”. The organizers of this hideous crime were convinced that this act would lead to the downfall of a government. They were wrong. Djindjic paid with his life for his beliefs in human rights and justice. The Government had to implement a State of Emergency under which it finally obtained the necessary tools required to purge the security structures and crack down on organized crime so related to war crimes.

The determination to pursue cooperation with the Hague Tribunal is manifested in the following public statements and commitments:

- The Minister of Defense Boris Tadic issued orders on 1 May to uniformed personnel and civilian employees of the Army to arrest and turn in any indicted war criminals they might encounter,
- The statement by the new Prime Minister of Serbia, Mr. Zoran Zivkovic after his meeting with the Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte on May 19 “that all those indicted found on the territory of Serbia will be transferred to the Hague,” and
- The statement by the new President of Serbia and Montenegro, Mr. Svetozar Marovic “that anyone who hinders cooperation with the Hague is hindering the future of Serbia and Montenegro” after his meeting with the Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte on May 19

also demonstrates the resolve and commitment at the highest level.

We are committed to cooperation with the Tribunal, we will fulfill our obligations and furthermore trials concerning atrocities committed during the wars have already begun in domestic courts. I share the view that more can be done and more will be done. The assassination of Prime minister Djindjic should be viewed as a turning point not only in terms of acquiring the means to do the job, but also in terms of public opinion and support. All inductees on the territory of Serbia and Montenegro will be arrested and transferred to The Hague.

On a more general level tremendous progress has been made concerning human rights in the past years. Over 50 laws related to human rights issues have been passed.

The importance that Serbia and Montenegro will continue to attribute to the human rights is proved by the fact that apart from the Ministry for Human rights, human and minority rights and freedoms are expanded and safeguarded by the Charter on Human rights and Minority rights adopted soon after the Constitutional Charter. The Charter of Human rights and Minority rights was welcomed and highly praised by both OSCE and Council of Europe.

Let me just point out that out of only five ministries at the level of the state union (what would be called the federal level) one ministry was founded solely for the protection of human rights.

The progress Yugoslavia achieved in protection of human rights and building democratic society was positively assessed in reports of the OSCE, Council of Europe, the special representative of the UN Human rights Commission Jose Cutilero, and government and non-government organizations in USA. According to the Freedom house latest survey on freedom in the world (due to be published by mid of 2003) Serbia and Montenegro (without Kosovo) has entered the ranks of free countries. For the first time in many years, the UN General Assembly did not adopt the Resolution on human rights in Yugoslavia in the course of its last, 57 sessions, which also reflects the general improvement of the situation in this field.

The results achieved so far in the overall situation in the field of human rights--indicated that the reasons for which the UN Commission for Human Rights ten years ago decided to introduce a mandate of a special rapporteur, no longer obtained. In conclusion the UN Commission in the course of its 59 session in April 2003 decided not to prolong the mandate of its special representative. In this we had the full support of the US Government.

And at last, I would like to stress that on April 3rd Serbia and Montenegro became a member of Council of Europe. In doing so it fully accepted the principles of the rule of law and of the enjoyment by all persons within its jurisdiction of human and minority rights and freedoms. For us, coming from the South East Europe, the membership in the Council of Europe is essential in the promotion of democracy, human and minority rights.

There are very precise commitments that Serbia and Montenegro by accession to the Council of Europe determined to honor, and they are contained in Opinion No 239 (2002) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe:

- To ratify the Dayton Peace Agreements, (that Serbia and Montenegro already did) and to cooperate fully and effectively in their implementation,
- To sign and ratify a number of conventions regulating the field of human rights,
- To continue co-operating with the ICTY,
- To cooperate in establishing the facts concerning the fate of missing people,
- To inform the people of Serbia about the crimes committed by the regime of Slobodan Milosevic against Serbs and other peoples in the region, and
- To continue the reforms initiated with regard to the independence and impartiality of the judiciary

are only some of them.

By acceding to Council of Europe, Serbia and Montenegro agreed to the monitoring procedures set by both Council of Europe's organs and accepted that the Committee's of Ministers Rapport Group for Democratic stability will have the task of monitoring the way in which Serbia and Montenegro and its two Republics are fulfilling their commitments. We are ready to fulfill all our commitments and obligations.

Finally, in closing let me say that respect for human rights is the essence of our civilization. We have done a great deal, much remains to be done. Laws are not enough, they need to be implemented. The public has to be educated. We want to live in a country in which people know and stand up for their rights and, perhaps more importantly for the rights of others. Given the history we have a long way to go, but certainly we are on the right road and there is no turning back.