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Serbian Unity Congress

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October 8, 2004

George Kivork, Ethnic Community Relations
Marko Trbovich, Labor Relations
Kerry Edwards Campaign
September 18, 2004

Subject: Letter "John Kerry: Working Together with Serbian-Americans"

Gentlemen:

It was good to have the opportunity to speak to you last month regarding the Kerry Edward campaign letter to the Serbian American community.

We were pleased to see that much of the letter showed an appreciation of the Serbian American community's value and its concerns. However, we believe that where the most critical issue of Kosovo is concerned, the letter communicates a position that runs counter to that adopted by the general international community, our allies, our own Senate as expressed in Senate Resolution 326 adopted unanimously, as well as the essence of the UN Resolution 1244.

Just yesterday, Congressmen Hyde and Lantos failed to get enough support for House Resolution 28 supporting the independence of Kosovo in the House Committee on International Relations. There is no support in our US Congress for the independence of Kosovo because, in spite of a strong Albanian lobby and no lack of funds, it is clear that moving to an independent Kosovo at this time would be the most destabilizing policy for that region, prevent the withdrawal of our troops, and further alienate our allies. It is also a position that will lose the Kerry Edwards campaign the critical Serbian American votes in the most important states.

The issue of Kosovo remains a problem today not because the Albanian majority in Kosovo is abused and their rights violated. To the contrary. They are not in any way threatened or victimized. The political situation in Serbia has completely changed and today's government in Serbia is probably the most democratic of the governments in the new countries formed out of the old Yugoslavia. In fact, the problem in Kosovo today is that the Albanian majority itself has for five years since the 1999 bombing of Serbia, ethnically cleansed, murdered and taken away all freedoms of the Kosovo minority populations in order to create the conditions for a separate Albanian-pure country of Kosovo. Albanians in Kosovo have NO LEGITIMATE basis today for demanding independence from Serbia and Montenegro.

Granting independence to a territory where the worst human rights violations in Europe are commonplace and ethnic cleansing a state-condoned practice defies all the principles we hold dear as Americans and on the basis of which our own country was created.

For the above stated reasons, we would like to recommend adjustments to specific policies in the subject letter. The two part attachment herein:

1. Addresses the points in your letter that cite principles we find unrealistic, inconsistent with our own country's values and principles and that we are certain will lose you the Serbian American votes
2. Provides recommended modifications to positions outlined in points 3 and 4 of page two of your letter.

We hope to discuss this further with you after you have had a chance to review the attached

Very sincerely yours,

Mirjana Samardzija
Vice President, Washington Affairs

I. Problematic Policy Positions Vis-à-vis Kosovo

Points three and four of the “immediate actions” section on page 2 are unclear and problematic in that they imply Senator Kerry’s unconditional support for Albanian aspirations for an independent Kosovo.

We believe the positions implied in these points run counter to the principles of liberty and safeguards to a democratic process required to guarantee the rights of all the people of a nation. If pursued they would perpetuate the tragically flawed foreign policy that has created the mess in Kosovo. Please consider the implications below.

Point Three:

Kosovo’s future status should be decided as soon as possible.

How is this to happen? Are there to be any conditions for this event? By not stating that conditions have to be met before a status is determined, such as the fulfilling of the internationally adopted principle of “standards before status” this paragraph allows for independence of Kosovo before conditions of rule of law, human rights protections etc. are achieved, and effectively allows for the continuation of the purification of Kosovo of its minorities started in March. Such an acceptance of an absence of any standards runs contrary to our allies’ positions, the UN, and our own Senate Res.326.

The people of Kosovo must be able to determine their own future, including how they want to be governed.

How are they to determine this? By majority vote? A majority that does not tolerate the rights of minorities nor the existence of those minorities in the midst of the majority and does everything to eliminate that existence and all vestiges of the cultural and religious heritage of those minorities? This would promote the end of the non-Albanian populations in Kosovo either because their culture wouldn’t be allowed to continue or they would be given no choice but to leave.

Point Four:

..My administration will insist on full guarantees for the political, cultural and human rights of all people in Kosovo.

The international community has already insisted on this and even with tens of thousands of troops as overseers, the Albanian extremists have managed the disappearance of over 2,000 Serbs, Roma and other minorities since the NATO bombing, the Albanian leadership has held no one accountable, and the March violence has presented a most honest picture of the respect for those rights that could be expected from the Albanian majority and its leadership.

Does this refer to the post-independence period or before? If the reference is to the former, with what rationale does the Kerry campaign team believe that the same leadership and extremists would respect these rights once they achieved independence? What leverage would we have to see these protections implemented?

....Otherwise, it will be more difficult, if not impossible, to achieve a solution that fulfills the legitimate aspirations of the Albanian majority.

The Albanian majority’s aspiration is an independent Kosovo. Your statement clearly considers those aspirations **legitimate** and therefore supports them. It bemoans the possibility of Albanians not being able to achieve this aspiration.

If the aspiration of the majority is to ethnically cleanse and otherwise violate the rights of minorities, is it legitimate? Or, if the majority institutes laws that discriminate against minorities and curtail their freedom, is that legitimate? Once the majority’s aspiration of independence is granted who is to monitor its treatment of the minorities? Is it legitimate even if it means the changing of borders and the setting of a precedent with negative implications for many regions around the world (including Europe) that face similar ethnic problems?

If the aspirations for independence are legitimate because they are aspirations of a majority is such a principle also valid for the Serbs of Bosnia & Herzegovina in Republika Srpska, as well as the Croats in Herzegovina, the Basques of Spain, the Kurds of Turkey and Iraq, the Muslims in Kashmir, etc? Does Senator Kerry then support the aspirations of the majorities in these provinces to separate from the country in which they constitute one part? Or, do we not apply this principle equally?

Kosovo is a province of Serbia. It is not a country in itself. Albanians are a minority in the country of Serbia and Montenegro. Albanians have their own country in which they are a majority -- Albania. When the Hispanic population becomes the majority in Southern California, would majority aspirations for independence of Southern California be a legitimate aspiration?

II. Recommendations for Modifications To Policy Positions

Point 3: “*Kosovo’s future should be decided as soon as possible....violence.*”

Kosovo’s future needs to be addressed seriously. The international community has clearly stipulated with UN Resolution 1244 and more recently the Standards before Status principles the conditions that must be met and the environment created where human rights and other protections are real and the rule of law exists before the future status of the region of Kosovo Metohija in the Republic of Serbia can be addressed. The sooner such conditions are created the sooner the issue can be resolved. Kosovo is an integral part of the Republic of Serbia in the sovereign state of Serbia and Montenegro. The rights of all its citizens must be protected. Any decisions for a change in the borders of that sovereign state must be mutually agreed to between the state and its people. As Serbia and Montenegro pursue solutions to the problems of Kosovo, we want to work closely with the government of Serbia and Montenegro and others in the region in that process.

Point 4: “*Kosovo Serbs and other minorities must be able.....*”

Kosovo’s Serbs and other minority communities must be able to live normal lives, wherever they want to live. The magnificent Serbian churches and monuments must be protected and preserved. My administration will insist on full guarantees for the political, cultural, and human rights of all people in Kosovo and demand that all perpetrators of human rights violations against any of the people of Kosovo must be prosecuted and authorities condoning such violations held accountable. Otherwise, it will be more difficult, if not impossible, to achieve a solution that fulfills the legitimate aspirations of all the peoples of Kosovo.