



February 28, 2008

The Honorable Barack Obama
United States Senate
Washington, DC 25015

Dear Senator Obama:

Established in the USA, the Serbian Unity Congress (SUC) is a leading Serbian Diaspora organization. It represents a wide cross-section of the Serbian American community - the largest of the former Yugoslav ethnic groups in the US and world-wide. The largest concentration of our constituents is in the swing or "rust belt" states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan and in North Carolina, Florida, Nevada California and Arizona. They and others are advised on major political and other issues by our office in Washington DC.

In a few days the Serbian American community will go to the polls to vote in the Ohio primaries. We would like to take this opportunity to inform the presidential candidates about the Serbian American constituency and the pivotal issues that will influence their vote and invite you to communicate to them on your positions on these issues.

Serbian Americans share with other constituent groups concerns regarding the economy, the Iraq war, the environment, health, immigration etc. But there are other more unique concerns which will be the determining factors in whom they vote for in the primaries and in November, or if they vote at all. They arose out of the Balkan conflicts of the '90s and include legitimate apprehensions about:

1. **Violations of international laws** – US violations of guarantees under those laws that are intended to protect the rights of Serbs particularly in regard to Kosovo, Bosnia & Hercegovina and Croatia;
2. **EU** -- Obstructions and conditions for Serbia's entry into the EU.

Today Serb Americans are very worried for their families and friends in the homeland. They are afraid that our government will continue to violate international laws and the UN Chapter and thusly ignore and condone violations of human rights of Serbs in Kosovo, Bosnia & Hercegovina and Croatia. Moreover, they are concerned that Serbia's path into the EU will continue to be obstructed with unreasonable conditions.

In the last two elections Serb Americans voted overwhelmingly for President Bush as a protest vote against the Democrats and the Clinton Administration's flawed Balkan legacy, which devastated Serbian lands with a double standard and crippling sanctions that lasted over 10 years. The key states where the Serb American vote can be said to have made a difference in those elections were Ohio and Pennsylvania. In Ohio alone estimates are that they number over 200,000.

It is our goal for Serb Americans to vote. But they need to know that there is a candidate who appreciates their concerns, who will not "stay the course" and continue to sell out our legal and moral international obligations.

A brief summary of the key concerns is attached. There are only a few days in which you can address these concerns. We are at your disposal to communicate any statements you may like to make to the Serbian American community of Ohio immediately before the March 4 primaries. Please feel free to have your representatives contact me.

Very truly yours,

Mirjana Samardzija
President

THE SERBIAN AMERICAN CONSTITUENCY AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

KOSOVO

Currently and in the future, the most important issue that will affect the Serbian-American vote is Kosovo. The peace agreement that ended the NATO illegal bombing of Serbia in 1999, UN Security Council Resolution 1244 guarantees “a commitment of all member states to sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia” and reaffirms “the call for substantial autonomy and meaningful self-determination for Kosovo.”

Kosovo has always been the spiritual heartland of Serbs and Serbia -- its Jerusalem. Monasteries there date back to the 9th century. Demographic changes affected primarily by wars, illegal immigration from Albania condoned by the communist government during the Cold War and a high birth rate has changed the ethnic balance of Kosovo from majority Serb before World War II to majority Albanian today.

All Kosovo Albanians who left Kosovo during the bombing in 1999 were allowed to return. However, since that time the Kosovo Albanian majority has forced out more than half of the Serb population and more than that with other minorities. They have not been able to return. In the attempt to eradicate Serbian history in the province, the Kosovo Albanians have burned and destroyed more than 150 religious sites, dozens of towns and villages and forced the remaining minorities into small ghettos that have required the protection of international forces to survive. There has been virtually no accountability. Albanians in Kosovo have claimed a right to independence based on treatment during Milosevic's rule, not an issue since the 1999 bombing. The rights of minorities in today's Serbia are greater than in any of the other former republics of Yugoslavia.

Given these facts there was no legal basis for the declaration of independence on February 18 of this year. There was only the threat of repeated violence by the Albanians in the event independence was not granted. The tragic irony is that the conditions for the Serbs in Kosovo after 9 years as a UN protectorate have been and are worse than they ever were for the Albanians during the worst days under Milosevic. The US Government undermined negotiations between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians by apriori guaranteeing recognition of independence regardless of the outcome and then imposed a preconceived solution. And thus it only recognized the Albanian claims to Kosovo as legitimate and Serb claims to their own country as without legitimacy. That was dishonest brokering.

The US was a signatory of Resolution 1244 and by its unilateral recognition of Kosovo and circumvention of the UN, the required body for status decision making, it violated that agreement and its own corresponding obligations, and it violated Serbia's sovereign rights. It is a repeat of Iraq.

Kosovo is Europe's center for illegal trafficking in arms, drugs and sex slaves. It is an economic basket case and not a viable state. It is projected that no more than 40 countries are expected to recognize Kosovo. That leaves Kosovo unrecognized by a large majority of the close to 200 nations -- India, Brazil, Egypt, Israel, Russia, China, Spain, and so on -- because they have determined that it is not viable, that there is no legal basis for the recognition and because they do believe that it would set a dangerous precedent for groups with break-away aspirations elsewhere (notwithstanding the US State Department opinion that this is not a precedent). As such, Kosovo will not have a seat in the UN and related international organizations. It cannot become an EU member when a number of European countries refuse to recognize it. It will be a protectorate with international forces hopefully guaranteeing the safety of its minorities and the rule of law. Once again as with Iraq the Bush administration has opened a Pandora's Box with no contingency plans or solutions.

There is a plethora of arguments by international law experts regarding the legitimacy of US and others' recognition with the majority of legal opinions produced thus far weighing in against the US argument.

How to win the votes -- Are you willing to honor our legal obligations under UN Resolution 1244 and assist the parties to reach a mutually acceptable agreement for a negotiated and not an imposed settlement? Will you assure that Serbs can return to their homes, and will you exercise all available measures to see that Serb human rights, Serb religious sites and their right to live peaceably in Kosovo are protected as guaranteed by law? The candidate than can make this pledge will be the candidate whom the Serb American constituents of Ohio will go to the booths to vote for on March 4.

BOSNIA & HERCEGOVINA

The Dayton Peace Accord of 1995 ended the Bosnian conflict. It established two autonomous entities within Bosnia & Hercegovina -- Republic of Srpska (RS) and the Federation -- as a decentralized model with the intent and rules for protecting each of the three minorities' interests. The Office of the High Representative, OHR, while given broad interpretation powers was mandated to protect the law and spirit of the Dayton Accord. However, from the beginning to this very day, with support of the US, the OHR has continuously taken actions to in effect abrogate the Dayton Agreement by diluting the guaranteed autonomies, promoting a unitary Bosnia and contributing to discord among the three nationalities. The OHR has abused the intent of its mandate which is extended until June 2008. These practices, along with the recent recognition of Kosovo, have created pressures on the government of the Serb entity, to call for a referendum on independence from Bosnia & Hercegovina. Such development would further and dangerously destabilize the region.

How to win the votes -- Will you use your authority to protect the Dayton Accord guarantees for self-rule granted to the two autonomous entities of Bosnia?

CROATIA

During the Croatian conflict the Croatian army ethnically cleansed 90% of the Serb population with the help of the US. The terms of the Erdut Agreement guarantee returns and minority rights of Serbs of Croatia. However, in fact, Croatian practices and laws have prevented almost all but the very old from returning. The US supports and facilitates Croatia's preparation for entry into the EU without adequate pressure and conditions for these violations of the Erdut Agreement and international human rights laws to be honored.

How to win the votes -- Will you use your authority to protect the Erdut Agreement guarantees and hold Croatia accountable as a condition for US Croatia relations and aid?

SERBIA ENTRY INTO THE EU

It is imperative for stability in the region that Serbia enters the EU as soon as possible. According to our own National Security Council Serbia has been more accommodating on the war crimes conditions than any of the other former republics in satisfying requirements for the invitation to join. The current situation in Serbia has made it vulnerable to the rhetoric and influence by the radical nationalist element of Serbia and Russia. Serbia needs support and not more punishment from the West if it is to offset the growing strength of these reactionary elements. It needs to be put on a fast-track to Europe.

How to win the votes -- Will you change the focus from carrot to stick and give Serbia the political support it needs to move quickly into the EU?