

The Forum for International Relations Unique in Our Country

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Among the 83 members of the Forum today, there are three former Yugoslav Ministers of Foreign Affairs, ten former ambassadors and as many current ones, directors and analysts from leading Yugoslav institutes dealing with international policy issues, professors of international law and international economic relations, and editors-in-chief and foreign desk editors from the leading Yugoslav media

The Forum for International Relations was founded in 1992, originally as the Civic Alliance of Serbia's Commission for International Relations, assuming its present name as an independent body within the framework of the European Movement in Serbia in 1995. From the very beginning, the Forum has brought together some of the most prominent foreign policy analysts in Yugoslavia, and this has remained its most valuable asset.

During 2002 the Forum was complemented by a number of new personalities, partly to compensate for the departure of a significant number of its members who were, following the democratic changes in this country, sent into the diplomatic service abroad, but also to augment the Forum's membership with some promising young members.

In the introductory text to this Almanac, Živorad Kovačević, the president of the European Movement in Serbia, gives a quite detailed description of the Forum's activities in the first years after its foundation; therefore we shall dwell here on some more recent breakthroughs and plans for the future. Certain traditions from previous years, such as the regular meetings of Forum members every Wednesday at 6 p.m., have continued, and inspired and enlightened debates on the country's key foreign policy concerns as well as the state of affairs on the international political scene still take place there.

Apart from Forum members, keynote speakers at these gatherings have also included distinguished personalities from the international political scene. Let us mention just a few, such as Erhard Busek, Morton Abramovic, Daniel Serwer, Aleksandar Jakovlyev, and Johann Galtung, as well as the ambassadors of leading world powers in Belgrade, or our own ambassadors who, following the democratic changes in this country, have taken up posts in the capitals of leading world powers.

There have also been two open sessions of the Forum dedicated to current international policy issues. In the period between 1996 and 2000, eight editions of "Foreign Policy Papers" were published. The authors of these volumes, members of the



Forum, addressed the leading issues of the moment, particularly those referring to Yugoslavia's

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position in the world and events in its surroundings. Some of the "Papers" are listed among the textbooks used at the Diplomatic Academy of the Federal Secretariat for Foreign Affairs.

A Bright Tradition...

We intend to continue these traditions, all the more so because the democratic changes in the autumn of 2000 created the opportunity for the abundance of ideas offered by Forum members and their guests to reach the general public to a greater extent than ever before. As an illustration of the transformation that has, following the democratic changes in our country, occurred in this area as well, we may cite the Roundtable on "The Hague Tribunal and Yugoslavia – The Challenges of Cooperation", which took place at Belgrade's Sava Center on June 13, 2002, organized by the Forum for International Relations and with financial assistance from the Open Society Fund. This public discussion was opened by the Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs and President of the National Council for Cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, Goran Svilanović. The panelists were the deputy chief prosecutor of the Hague Tribunal, Graham Blewitt; Almiro Rodriguez, president of the Tribunal's judicial council in the trial of General Krstić, indicted for crimes in Srebrenica; the chairman of the Federal Constitutional Court, Dr Momčilo Grubač; professors Dr Milan Šahović and Dr Vojin Dimitrijević; and the director of the Belgrade Center for Antiwar Action, Ivan Janković.

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The fact that four TV networks – RTS, B92, BK TV and YU Info – taped this session and broadcast quite comprehensive reports on their prime-time information programs confirms the high level of interest in this gathering. The RTS crew also taped

special interviews with Prosecutor Blewitt and Judge Rodriguez, which were broadcast on the

program "The Hague Diaries". All the major daily newspapers reported on the Roundtable in detail, with the dailies "Politika" and "Danas" publishing interviews with Blewitt and Rodriguez given during breaks in the session.

...and New Obligations

Before October 2000 such publicity, particularly in "Politika" and on Serbian Radio & Television (RTS) would have been unimaginable, which only further proves that the situation since that time has brought the Forum far greater opportunities, as well as new obligations. We have dwelt on this gathering at some length because it indicates one of the directions the Forum for International Relations will be taking in addressing the general public.

On the basis of this experience, the Forum's Executive Committee suggested, and its members agreed, that in the future a similar debate should take place every two months. Financial limitations do not allow us to invite such distinguished foreign guests every time, but we shall try to assemble as pre-eminent a group of domestic participants as possible.

The second idea suggested by the Executive Committee is that, instead of the previous occasional publications such as "Foreign Policy Papers", we should start a regular publication under the name "Forum", which would be published monthly or bimonthly. Besides summaries of discussions at the Forum, this review would also contain contributions by renowned authors, and would be intended for

a wider circle of readers interested in national foreign policy issues and world movements. As the Almanac goes to print, this idea is still being elaborated in detail, and ways of financing it are being investigated, but first reactions indicate





that the Forum's prospects of presenting its new publication in the relatively near future are considerable.

One conclusion from the Forum's discussions of its future activity is that the current, relatively favorable constellation in our country and its surroundings should be used in other ways, too. First and foremost, visits and joint debates with similar bodies in the region, particularly in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, should increase. The first contact of this kind was realized in March 2001, when a two-member delegation from the Society for International Relations of Ljubljana,

consisting of Ambassador Marko Kosin and Dr Marijan Svetličič, visited Belgrade as guests of the Forum.

As we see from everything said above, the Forum has rather bold plans for the future, which will require additional efforts, and also depend on its material resources. However, we believe that these aims are achievable for a group with such knowledge, experience and high repute in foreign policy, probably unique in our country, as the members of the Forum for International Relations possess.

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