

Discrimination of Minorities in Serbia

Serbian transcript:

Прво, прво, да ли говоримо о националним мањинама, да ли говоримо о сексуалним, и тако даље, и тако... Има, има пуно мањина сад, откако је... Постоје те неке слободе. Пуно мањина се створило у читавом региону с једне стране, а са друге стране, овај, ето, постоје. Имамо Роме, имамо инвалиде, имамо, не знам, овај, Јевреје, имамо гејеве, имамо лезбејке, овај... Знаш да ће се Шаран наљутити сад, јер се не говори "имамо и то" него „постоје“ [и Муслимани], то намерно говорим, а сетићу се, у ствари рећи ћу му касније зашто сам то рекао, овај.

Али, ако говоримо о њиховим правима, то дефинитивно не постоји. И то је оксиморон. То се види из приложеног, то се види, најпростији, пластични пример је онај од прошле или претпрошле године, сад се не сећам, прошле године, овај. Ако говоримо о правима сексуалних мањина, знамо шта се десило 2003. када је први пут у Београду, овај, био покушај организовања "Геј прајда", знамо да су буквално криво, овај, активисти и припадници ЛГБТ популације настрадали; што од навијача, што од присталица некаквих националистичких организација.

Па, онда девет година касније, односно осам или седам... Прошле или претпрошле године, када је било толико приче о томе да је то, не знам, догађај високог ризика, када је, овај, једноставно држава, сама држава забранила одржавање геј параде, сматрајући да је то нешто опасно, да то изискује пре свега пуно пара, сад треба да плаћају, овај, пуно обезбеђења, односно полиције... И на крају је испало да, овај, да је црква и да су те неке националистичке организације јаче од државе. То је један, један од најбољих примера који осликава заправо положај мањина у Србији, а кроз њих можемо гледати и на националне мањине, пре свега на Роме, и њихов положај у Србији.

English translation:

To clarify things first, are we talking about national minorities or sexual [minorities]? Since there are many minorities, now that... there are these freedoms¹. A large number of minorities have surfaced in the entire region; although they did actually exist [before]. We have Roma, we have the disabled, we have, I don't know, Jews, we have gays and lesbians... I know that Sharan will get upset at me, because we don't say "we have", but

¹ The speaker here refers to the fact that, although national minorities, or "nationalities", were officially recognized in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, homosexuality was only decriminalized in the mid-1970s, and the recognition of the LGBT population as a minority with its rights through the application of anti-discriminatory legislation only came later – in the late 1990s (Croatia) or early 2000s (Serbia).

“there are” [Muslims] – I’m intentionally saying this, and I’ll remember to explain this later².

But, if we’re talking about their rights, they are definitely non-existent. “Rights of minorities” is an oxymoron. This is clearly visible; the most basic, plastic example is the one from last year³ or the year before that, I can’t remember the exact... It was last year. Speaking of rights of sexual minorities, we know what happened in 2003⁴, when the first attempt at organizing a Gay Pride [parade] took place – they were brutally drowned in blood, with activists and members of the LGBT population injured by [those who identified as] football hooligans or members of nationalist organizations.

So, to get back to the event nine years after... Eight or seven... Either last year, or the year before last, there was so much talk about it [the Gay Pride parade] being a high-risk event, and the state itself then simply banned the parade from taking place, justifying it as something dangerous and expensive, because they now had to fund all that security and

² The speaker here jokingly refers to the position of Muslims in Serbia by referring to a friend who is Muslim as someone “who exists” rather than “is”. Serbian policies of the 1990s made it very difficult for Muslims to even exist in the country, due to the ethnic tensions during the Bosnian War (1992-1995) and the Kosovo War (1997-1999). At that time, arrests, persecution and attacks on mosques and other cultural landmarks in Serbia were occasional but present enough to create a sense of a systematic anti-Muslim sentiment during those years.

In addition, Serbia (then a part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) was implicitly involved in several massacres of Muslim population, the most well known case being the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, where approximately 8,000 Muslims of all gender and age groups were executed within several days after the fall of the United Nations-enforced free zone in the town of Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was confirmed by the Serbian war crimes court in 2007, when it established that a Serbian paramilitary unit known as *Škorpioni* (“The Scorpions”) executed six Bosnian Muslim prisoners of war immediately after the fall of Srebrenica. Other cases, such as the one against the former Yugoslav military chief of staff Momčilo Perišić, who was sentenced to 27 years in prison in 2011, proved that the Yugoslav Army aided the Bosnian Serb army during the massacre by providing funds, equipment, staff and fuel to the Bosnian Serb army officers.

Although the political situation in Serbia changed in the past decade and efforts were made to reconcile the people (including a public apology by the former President of Serbia, Boris Tadić), the sense that the anti-Muslim sentiment in Serbia is still present is lingering to this day. Sarcastic comments, such as the one used here by the speaker, are common tools of expressing criticism towards the internal and external policies in Serbia.

Sources: Peric Zimonjic, Vesna (April 11, 2007). "Serb 'Scorpions' guilty of Srebrenica massacre". *The Independent*. Retrieved October 8, 2012, from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/serb-scorpions-guilty-of-srebrenica-massacre-444190.html>

"Summary of the Judgement in the Case of Prosecutor v. Momčilo Perišić". *The Hague: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia*. September 6, 2011. Retrieved October 8, 2012, from http://www.icty.org/x/cases/perisic/tjug/en/110906_summary.pdf

³ Please note that this footage was filmed in August 2012.

⁴ The first Gay Pride parade in Serbia took place in 2001, not 2003 as stated by the speaker.

police... And in the end, it turned out that the Church⁵ and these nationalist organizations are stronger than the state. It's one of the best examples describing the position of minorities in Serbia, and it can help in understanding the position of national minorities as well – Roma first and foremost, and their position in Serbia.

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⁵ The speaker here refers to the Serb Orthodox Church, the dominant church in Serbia, Montenegro and parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Serb Orthodox Church is known for having an influence on Serbian politics, although this influence seems to be weaker than it was at the height of the Yugoslav Wars (1991-1999).