

**Slobodan Antonić:**

*The Imprisoned Country: Serbia under the  
Government of Slobodan Milošević*

*Zarobljena zemlja. Srbija za vlade Slobodana Miloševića.* Beograd: Otkrovenje 2002, 479 pp.  
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The study by Slobodan Antonić is one of the first serious attempts made in the post-Milosevic period in Serbia to analyze the regime of Slobodan Milošević. A certain feeling of bias is already evident in the introduction, when the author emphasizes: 'The book was written by a sociologist, contemporary with the events, not by a historian, who is removed from the place and period described and can calmly watch the events and their outcome. In this book I have described the events, the development, the moods of the public as I experienced and felt them.' (pp. 11) From this introduction it follows that the author's priority was to write reflections for the Serbian society and that the influencing of the author by the events he witnessed should contribute to a broad discussion in Serbian society.

The book is divided into four chapters: Structure deals with various aspects and the structure of Serbian society. The public de-

fines seven moments of the crisis of the authoritarian regime. Elity assesses the decisive political agents in the period up to 2000. The Ruler, the fourth and last section, deals with Milošević himself.

The first chapter reveals the effort at naming and subsequently assessing the most important aspects of Serbian society, which made possible the establishment of an authoritarian regime. The author mainly deals with socio-economic conditions. He pays attention to politological and sociological theories and on their bases determines to what degree the development in Serbia was influenced by economic factors, the stratification of society, the education of the population, ethnic composition, and historical traditions.

Among the key moments defined by the author, which are said to have brought about the crisis of the regime, are: The year 1990, which brought the collapse of Communism,

the decision to permit political parties and political competition. This milestone necessarily meant a change in strategy for Slobodan Milošević. The second crisis started on 9 March 1991 with strong protests by the opposition, led by Vuk Drašković, disagreeing with the heavy control of the media by the ruling Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS). The following problems came in the next year. The war brought many economic problems for the country and its political isolation. The most serious problem was the political controversy with the prime minister of the Republic of Yugoslavia, Milan Panić, and to a high degree even with Dobrica Ćosić. The author, Slobodan Antoniċ, then defines the fourth crisis: in 1993, when an economic crisis set in and the majority of the population found themselves in hard conditions. The turn of 1996 and 1997 was marked by strong protests from the population. Before the communal elections at the end of 1996, the opposition forces became united into a coalition named *Zajedno*. This joint progress meant the acquisition of a very strong mandate. The governing SPS proclaimed the election results doubtful, which led to very strong protests. The inability to solve the crisis forced Milošević to seek an agreement with the opposition. Further problems arrived in 1999. Due to the intervention of NATO and the subsequent loss of control over the Kosovo region, the Republic experienced an economic crisis, break-up of the government coalition and protests organized by the opposition. SPS was able to settle this unsatisfactory situation. It staved off the governmental crisis, launched a program of reconstruction of the country, and began to put the blame for the poor economy on

NATO and the Western countries, which, once again, became the ideological enemy. The last crisis, ending in the final overthrow of the regime, is the electoral defeat of Slobodan Milošević on 24 September 2000 in all-union presidential elections, which were won by the opposition candidate, Vojislav Koštunica. Evident interference with the elections and distortion of the election results brought the greatest protests in the Republic of Yugoslavia and brought about the defeat of the governmental forces. The next development in the country only confirmed the result of these events.

From what was said above it follows that Milošević's regime really underwent several serious crises. The author tries to answer the question of why the regime survived for such a long time, why it succeeded in overcoming six serious problems. Milošević and the ruling elite often changed their strategy in order to save themselves. Very often they unhesitatingly used armed troops to suppress the protests. Slobodan Antoniċ sees the main cause of the long rule of S. Milošević in his determination to keep power.

The author classifies political elites into three categories. The most important are the etatistic. It was a group with the unequivocal support of Slobodan Milošević, who managed to persuade the etatistic elites that he would stay in power and for this reason he received strong support from them. The author says that the etatistic elite held as much as 70 percent of economy. Nationalism was a means for strengthening their legitimacy. Also present was the national-populist elite, in which the Serbian Radical Party headed by Vojislav Šešelje occupied a very strong position. This stream had very young support-

ers, often people with low education. The democratic opposition, to which belonged the Democratic Party, at times, the Democratic Party of Serbia, the Serbian Movement for Restoration, and other elements, which united into the election coalitions of DEMOS, Zajedno, Union for Changes and DOS, represent the liberal elites. This part is of great importance because there is a tendency to de-personify the regime of Slobodan Milošević; the author seeks to find out who his allies were and what their objectives and aims were.

The last chapter, called *The Ruler*, deals exclusively with the person of Slobodan Milošević. It defines several principal tendencies of the regime, e.g., the gradually decreasing of support by the population, the strengthening of the repressive elements and instruments of state power, the constant strengthening of the power of S. Milošević and the cult of his personality, the abuse of the Constitution, and interference with privatization by the etatistic elites.

The study by S. Antonić is a valuable contribution to a better insight into these prob-

lems. The author does his best to explain a great many aspects of the Serbian society, which were exploited by Milošević. To some degree, this is an attempt at the de-personification of the regime because it examines the elites that supported him and at the same time it explains the symbiosis of the two elements. The last part, however, shows the very dominating position of Milošević and points out the fact that the aim of de-personification is extremely difficult. Of great value is the analysis of the several crises of the government and the explanation of the strategy of the Party, the ruling elites and the suggestions by Milošević himself as to how to solve each crisis. The study shows that the regime could not avoid social pressures – their presence produced frequent changes in strategy, rhetoric, attitudes and the party programme. Although the book was written for Serbians, it is easy to understand even for non-Serbian readers and foreign readers will find it to be stimulating.