

*Intervention by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights
to the 2007 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting*

FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS III:

Freedom of expression, free media and information

(Thursday, 4 October)

**Hate crime based on violation of Freedom of expression
and Political activities in Serbia**

Introduction

The results of the research conducted between October 2006 and April 2007 by Youth Initiative for Human Rights (Initiative) show that Serbia is faced with political violence in form of systematic string of numerous politically motivated incidents. Representatives of the authorities are helping in creating the atmosphere of fear by advocating policy of impunity. Regarding aforementioned incidents, there is a continuous lack of firm, legislated and expected reaction of the institutions of a democratic country. With such actions, the state creates the climate for further rising of political violence, strengthening the practice of violation of basic human rights and contributes to establishment of political violence as normal and socially acceptable occurrence, therefore disabling the process of democratisation and constitution of reign of jurisprudence and reinforcement of institutions.

The period of observation was marked by several significant political events. First, there was the referendum about new Constitution of Serbia held in October 2006, and then the elections for Serbian Parliament in January 2007. Members of pro-European and liberal political parties, NGO's and media were mainly the targets of the attacks.

Political Violence in the period of October 2006. to April 2007.

From October 2006, until April 2007, there were 119 incidents recorded in Serbia that can be categorised as political violence. The incidents noted in this research are physical attack on activists, members and leaders of political parties, attacks on their personal belongings, public threats, prosecuting, arresting or bringing to police for questioning, as a mean of political retribution and pressure; attacks on political parties' property (demolition, breaking in and stoning of offices or demolishing street stands).

“Tadic next to Djindjic” (a reminder: Djindjic was already dead at the time), “Hitler should have killed all Roma”, “Ustasa and traitors”, are only a few of the many graffiti on the walls of political party offices and other places with political message. Attacks and threats on NGO activists and journalists are also considered as politically motivated attacks

Highest number of attacks, 44 altogether, was aimed towards liberal coalition gathered around Liberal Democratic Party. National minorities parties suffered seven attacks.

11 attacks on Democratic Party were noted, ten of them aimed on personality and work of assassinated Prime Minister Djindjic and Boris Tadic, President of the Republic of Serbia. During observational period, there have been 20 attacks on journalists, and 14 attacks on NGO activists and their property. During this period, we have also recorded six politically motivated attacks on citizens of Serbia and one attack on foreign diplomatic-consular office in Serbia (consulate of the Republic of Hungary}.

The most serious incident took place between 13th and 14th of April 2007, when unknown attackers planted two hand grenades on the bedroom window of journalist Dejan Anastasijevic. Anastasijevic and his wife were unharmed, but there was significant material damage. Anastasijevic is renowned by his articles about war crimes committed by Serbian forces, and he is also a witness in trials yet to come in the Hague Tribunal. Not even after six months, the police has not found the perpetrators.

Not a single one of the 119 recorded incidents was prosecuted.

Conclusion and recommendations

- Authorities in Serbia must take all necessary measures to find, prosecute and punish the perpetrators and ordering parties of politically motivated attacks, which was not the case to this day. It is the only way to protect the members, activists and leaders of political parties, NGO's, journalists and citizens from growing violence.
- Special attention must be paid to protection of Roma and leaders of their political parties, because research results showed that number of attacks on Roma has increased from the moment they have won two seats in Serbian Parliament.
- It is necessary that the Government should explicitly profess itself on political violence wave that have overtaken Serbia, and to clearly show that it is aware of this problem and that it will not tolerate it. Political attacks are harming not only individual victims, but also society as a whole, because they represent the obstacle to development of democracy and establishment of the reign of jurisprudence.