

NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2001

New Serbia Forum Human Rights Seminar

Yugoslavia is determined to be a law-based state and to adopt the European Convention on Human Rights. With the Lord Slynn of Hadley Foundation we held a seminar in Belgrade on 26 October for 30 Serbian judges and lawyers. Jemima Stratford, a Human Rights barrister at Brick Court Chambers, reports.

'We're off to Belgrade for a human rights seminar' David Anderson and I explained to colleagues in our chambers. Their looks of real surprise and interest reminded me each time the topic came up how dramatic the political changes had been since the fall of Milosevic.

Most of the British contingent – BACEE's Director Sir John Birch, Projects Assistant, Aisling Lyon, and the speakers at the seminar, Nuala Mole, David Anderson and myself – arrived on the Thursday evening, and were whisked into the centre of Belgrade by two taxi drivers who had to conduct some fierce bargaining in the face of Sir John's careful management of BACEE's funds! We drove past one tower block which still had blackened windows from the NATO bombing, but otherwise I was surprised at how little physical evidence there was of the recent crisis.

We were introduced to many of the seminar participants at a dinner kindly hosted for the New Serbia Forum by the British Ambassador and his wife. It was a very high-powered gathering, including the President and the Deputy President of the Serbian Supreme Court and a number of leading lawyers. However, despite their eminence, we all thoroughly enjoyed the band of Serbian folk musicians who arrived unannounced at the end of the evening.

Work began in earnest the following morning, with lectures, case studies and lively discussion on three

topics which had been particularly requested by our Serbian counterparts: the position of the judge under the European Convention on Human Rights; freedom of expression; and religious education. The seminar was held in the magnificent if slightly faded grandeur of the Aero Klub, where Forum Co-ordinator Jelena Radojkovic successfully beat off attempts by Microsoft to take over our room for a reception – surely the only occasion on which human rights have triumphed over Microsoft!



L-R: Jemima Stratford, David Anderson QC, HM Ambassador Charles Crawford, Jeremy McBride, Jelena Radojkovic, Forum Co-ordinator, and Nuala Mole, AIRE Centre.

The day was rounded off with a fascinating lecture by Jeremy McBride, Reader at the University of Birmingham, who has just been appointed by the Council of Europe to assess the compatibility of Yugoslav law with the ECHR. Jeremy

spoke about 'The Convention and the Past', concentrating on the attempts that have been made in new member states of the Council of Europe to apply the ECHR in respect of events that happened before accession.

It was a great privilege to visit Belgrade on behalf of BACEE at this important time in its history. Many of the judges whom we met had previously attended New Serbia Forum events as 'dismissed judges', removed from office by the Milosevic regime. It was above all hugely encouraging to see that these judges had not only been restored to senior positions in the judiciary, but were embracing human rights law with considerable knowledge and enthusiasm.

- November Five journalists, together with one MP, the Media Co-ordinator in the Cabinet of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Vice-President and Head of the Press and Information Department of a political party, took part in a week-long seminar in London on reporting politics. The programme looked in particular at issues such as the relationship between the media and politicians, reporting from areas of conflict, 24-hour news and coverage of elections.
- December Eight participants, consisting of academics, politicians and government officials took part in a seminar on minority issues. The seminar aimed was to introduce the group to aspects of multiculturalism within British society and included a two-day study visit to Cardiff to focus on the Welsh experience of devolution. Particular attention was paid to issues such as political representation of minorities at national and regional level and provisions for education in mother tongue languages.
- November 'Will Enlargement of the European Union Move the Iron Curtain Eastwards?' Heather Grabbe, Centre for European Reform.
- 'Principles and results of the new Yugoslav foreign policy', HE Goran Svilanovic, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (at Chatham House).
- December 'Former Yugoslavia: Are We Getting Anywhere?' , Alan Charlton CMG, Director South East Europe, FCO.
- 'Europe in a Changing World: The Outlook from Slovenia', HE Milan Kucan, The President of Slovenia. (at Chatham House).

Books by Members



Lutifje Pllana with her four year old niece Luarda Pllana.

No Place Like Home: Echoes from Kosovo by Melanie Friend

Published by Midnight Editions ISBN: 157344-119-8. £29.95

At a time when Afghanistan dominates the media and our thoughts, it is easy to forget the human tragedy that still besets Kosovo. Melanie Friend is a BBC radio journalist who has used her great skill as a photographer and interviewer to tell the story of the repression and war in Kosovo through the poignant individual accounts of ordinary Albanians and Serbs. The beautifully produced photographs and text are a chilling reminder of how people in our civilised continent turned on their neighbours through ethnic prejudice, fear and greed. Indeed for me, it is fear and sorrow that emerge as the strongest sentiments from this remarkable book.

John Birch

Available from Amazon.co.uk and at Borders, Foyles and Waterstones bookshops.

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