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HISTORICAL MEMORY AND POLITICS OF MEMORY IN SERBIA*

A contribution to the study of NATO's action against the cultural memory in Serbia through examples of street renaming in Belgrade

Abstract

If we analyze historical memory and the current politics of memory in Serbia, it becomes clear that World War II is not over yet. There is a war waged collectively by NATO and the West against the recollections of heroic feats of the Red Army, as well as of a full constellation of Russian scientists, writers and other distinguished figures, in collaboration with the "Fifth Column" they created in Serbia. To say that this is a "revenge of the defeated" or a "cultural war" would be a major understatement, as they are seeking to completely erase history, the memory of historical milestones among the Serbs and Russians and to impose the present one (remembrance of those living today), which labels both Serbs and Russians as modern-day villains (genocidal nations) that do not deserve to exist.

Key words: *Memory, remembrance, history, politics, culture, Second World War*

The common definition of the cultural memory says that it is the symbolic heritage represented in texts, ceremonies, monuments,

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celebrations, holly scriptures and other media that serve as mnemonic prompts of meaning related to the past events. Under the same concept, the terms: culture of remembrance, national memory and cultural memory are often used **as synonyms** (however, we will show later the distinction in the meaning of the two terms).

In Serbia, the politics of memory is placed in the context of the politics of identity (national and religious), or the construction of cultural identity (Asman 2011 ; Đukić 2017¹).

However, Serbia's state sovereignty, including in the sphere of culture, has been significantly reduced following NATO's aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1999), the occupation of Kosovo and Metohija and the breakup of the Serbia-Montenegro Union by the (staged) referendum in Montenegro (Jušković 2016) and then, by an aggressive building of an anti-Serb identity among Montenegrins who accepted the new reality. Today's Serbia is clearly not a sovereign state, notwithstanding its membership in all international organizations including the United Nations, and its government includes members of various Western globalist organizations, from the Trilateral Commission to the Knights of Malta (Srbija danas 2014 ; Slobodna Bosna 2016; Espresso 2019).²

The fact is that the people fought hard for freedom and that political elections brought more freedom (especially during the government headed by Vojislav Koštunica), but the West quickly quashed these processes and imposed its own figures who controlled the political and cultural sphere. (Milošević 2020).

Even the sphere of the everyday life and the cultural memory were not spared from these developments. An example of the struggle in the sphere of the cultural memory is the controversy surrounding the street names in Belgrade, especially those with the names of Soviet generals and marshals, or in fact, any Russian figures. "Most East European cities renamed their streets after the fall of communism, but this process has been particularly radical in Belgrade", notes Lea Willingham. (Balkan Sight 2016).

¹ Vesna Đukić's monograph actually deals with the topic of sustainability of national identity based on the principle of cultural sovereignty of the state.

² In the Trilateral Commission, in addition to Minister Mihajlović, there are also: Prime Minister of the Government of Serbia Ana Brnabić, Jovan Kovačić – journalist (President of the Trilateral Commission in Serbia), Dejan Novaković – State Secretary in the Ministry of Energy, Aleksandar Nikolić – State Secretary in the Ministry of Defense, Miroslav Vesković – rector of the University of Novi Sad, Zoran Basaraba – Ambassador of Serbia in Israel, Đorđe Vukotić – advisor for regulatory issues in the Ministry of Energy, Marko Blagojević, head of the Office for Reconstruction of Flooded Areas.

By 2004, he the Belgrade City Council for Naming Streets and Squares renamed **almost 200 streets**, including those named after Josip Broz Tito, Karl Marx and the Red Army, Soviet armed forces that helped liberate Belgrade from the Nazi occupiers in 1944.³

In 1990, out of 150 streets in the old part of Belgrade, 25 names were in one way or another associated with socialism or with the Second World War. Today, only four or five streets retain their names from that era. Even the streets named after Marshal Tolbukhin and General Zhdanov⁴ – the liberators of Belgrade, were renamed.

However, that process has not been completed. In May , the then City Manager Goran Vesić stated that submitted an initiative to the Council to change the names of Gotse Delchev Street and Pohorska Street in New Belgrade with the names of the Soviet generals from World War II, Marshal Fjodor Tolbukhin and Vladimir Zhdanov.

The two commanders were in charge of the Red Army troops during the liberation of Belgrade in 1944 and the streets that once bore their names were located in the City center – presently Makenzijeva and Resavska.

Belgrade authorities later named two suburban streets after Soviet war heroes, but only after Serbia strengthened its ties with Putin's Russia a few years ago. In order to preserve the memory of their contribution to the liberation of Belgrade, Vesić suggests that more important streets should bear their names.

WHO CHANGED STREET NAMES – THE SERBIAN STATE OR NATO (- SERBS)?

As part of this “war for the interpretation of history“, over the last twenty years or so, while the **Serbian Renewal Movement** and

³ The following units of the Red Army participated in the liberation of Belgrade: 4th Guards Mechanized Corps under the command of Lieutenant General Ždanov, composition: 13th, 14th and 15th Mechanized and 36th Tank Brigades, 230th Howitzer Artillery Regiment, 140th Mortar Regiment, The 58th Guards Mortar Regiment, the 42nd Fighter Anti-Tank Artillery Brigade, the 22nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Division and the 218th Independent Engineer Battalion, then the 5th Independent Guards Motorized Brigade, the 73rd Rifle Division, the 236th Rifle Division and the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps is, together with reinforcement units, had in its composition 17,022 fighters, 160 tanks, 21 self-propelled artillery pieces, 31 armored cars, 366 cannons and mortars. Rifle divisions had between 7,500 and 8,000 fighters.

⁴ Having gone, as a member of the Soviet military delegation, to the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the liberation of Belgrade, on October 19, 1964, Lieutenant General Vladimir Ivanović Zhdanov lost his life in a plane crash at Avala.

Democratic Party held power in Belgrade, street signs named after prominent anti-fascist fighters were systematically erased from the streets of Belgrade in several waves under the excuse of anti-communism, notes Tanja Jovanović. (Vreme 2014). It should be added that the Serbian Renewal Movement leader, Vuk Drašković, who was even Serbia's Minister of Foreign Affairs at one point, is actually a NATO lobbyist, and was named the Euro-Atlantic Person of the Year in recognition of his merits (Milošević 2012), as well as other awards.

Both Serbian and non-Serbian media reported that the International Institute for Security declared the President of the Serbian Renewal Movement and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Vuk Drašković Euro-Atlantic Person of the Year 2011 (Vojvodina Radio Television 2012). "Through his **activities and public appearances**, Vuk Drašković presented to the Serbian public all the benefits of the country's participation in a security system such as NATO, while at the same time bringing Euro-Atlantic values closer to Serbian citizens of Serbia, resolutely and comprehensibly, shifting this important topic from an emotional to a rational point of view", says the Institute's press release. One of those values is Russophobia and anti-communism.



Drašković demanded that Serbia join NATO immediately, because it could not join the European Union without that ticket.

It is clear that NATO and the collective West, through the Serbian “fifth column”, removed everything that would remind the Serbs of their brotherhood and togetherness with the Russians. This removal was radical because the West wanted a radical transformation of the Serbian cultural memory. Apart from the streets named after Soviet and Russian figures, the Russian language was also targeted (Milošević, 2020a) and banished from the Serbian education system, and the media were strictly forbidden to report positively about Russia.



Marshal Tolbukhin

It would thus take decades to undo all the political, cultural and other nonsense of the Serbian “fifth column” done from 1999 until its subsequent, if partial, shedding of the Euro-Atlantic straitjacket. However, it is important to note that, thanks to the activity of the Russian side, the Russian liberators of Belgrade regained their streets (Embassy of the Russian Federation 2016). **A great injustice towards the heroes and liberators of Belgrade Marshal Tolbukhin and General Zhdanov was rectified by naming the streets after them**, stated the Deputy Mayor of Belgrade, Andreja Mladenović.

Following the changes of 5 October (1999 and the colored revolution, when pro-Western politicians gained power), Belgrade authorities, disregarding certain historical events, restored old names to the central streets in Belgrade without paying attention to the possible infliction of

historical injustices.⁵ Thus, the Russian marshal and the general who led the liberation of Belgrade on October 20, 1944 remained nameless. Marshal Tolbukhin got, admittedly, a street on the outskirts, in the Belgrade suburb of *Žarkovo*.



The Belgrade City authorities decided to rename Pohorska and Gotse Delchev streets in New Belgrade and give them the names of Soviet military commanders. Thus, Gotse Delchev Street became Marshal Tolbukhin Boulevard, and Pohorska Street became General Zhdanov Street. “Today, in marking the 72nd anniversary of the liberation of Belgrade, we repay the debt and correct the great mistake made to the heroes, the liberators of our capital. I apologize to the Russian people and the Russian Federation for that mistake, that the streets that truly belong to these great men who made a great contribution to our freedom today, do not bear their names today. I hope that the residents of New Belgrade and Zemun who live in these streets will be able to say with pride that they live in the streets of Marshal Tolbukhin and General Zhdanov” (Embassy of the Russian Federation 2016), Mladenović emphasized.

⁵ Operation Belgrade (or Belgrade Offensive) represents one of the largest and most significant battles in the Balkans during World War II. The operation lasted from 12 to 20 October 1944 and was part of an extensive operational plan of the Third Ukrainian Front of the Red Army and the First Army Group of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NLAY), as an uninterrupted continuation of the operations in Eastern Serbia and was followed by pushing the enemy through Srem. In this operation, the joint NLAY-Red Army units inflicted a heavy blow upon the German Serbia Army Group, liberated Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia and large parts of Serbia.

The Russian ambassador in Belgrade, Aleksandar Chepurin, stated that justice has prevailed and that the heroes have recovered what rightfully belongs to them and reflects their dignity. “Thanks to the Serbian people’s generosity, street names of the Belgrade liberators are back”, he added. “I would also like to explain the nature of this heroes’ feat. When the Soviet army approached Belgrade, it was able to capture the City almost without losses. It could take everything down by using aircraft and heavy artillery. But in that case, the historical center of Belgrade would not have been preserved. Marshal Tolbukhin, in agreement with the Yugoslav side, decided to design a plan for the capture of Belgrade as part of a ground operation, together with the Yugoslav partisans. Thanks to that, the historical face of Belgrade was saved”, Ambassador Chepurin said (Embassy of the Russian Federation. 2016a).



Ambassador Chepurin said: “The price paid for that decision is 4,000 dead and 14,000 wounded Red Army members and partisans, Chepurin concluded. The commemoration of the 72nd anniversary of the liberation of Belgrade proceeded with a memorial parade through Kralja Milana Street and the laying of wreaths at the cemetery of the liberators at Belgrade’s New Cemetery, followed by the official ceremony at the National Theater and a concert by the Academic Ensemble of the Russian National Guard in the Sava Center tonight” (Embassy of the Russian Federation, 2016a).



General Zhdanov

These symbolic victories over NATO lobbyists and NATO itself in Serbia would not have happened if the citizens of Serbia had not protested against the westernization of the streets in Belgrade. Thus, the following could also be read in the defense of the “Russian streets”. (Nova srpska politička misao 2009):

“Russian civilization is European civilization. Moscow and St. Petersburg are European cities, no less than Rome, London, Madrid... The foundations of modern Europe were laid in January 1943, near the city then called Stalingrad. This (presumably) is still the name of one of the districts in Paris.

Yes to Europe! We belong in this continent. No to the European Union (NATO), never.”

“Who, for God’s sake, then thought of removing from the names of Belgrade streets the Soviet/Russian generals and marshals who liberated Belgrade and Serbia? What was in the minds of those who made that decision, who voted for it, who approved it? How much blind anti-communism, blunt revanchism or pro-Western courtship was required to do such a thing!?”

“I think that ‘blind anti-communism’ and ‘blunt revanchism’ are the least part of it, it is mostly pro-Western courtship.” Or: “Ideology is the least problematic for your Serbian revolutionaries who were brought to power by the CIA by overthrowing the legitimately elected government as they have no ideology, unless bribery, corruption and receiving money from foreign governments to destroy their own country is an ideology.”

“There is only ‘pro-Western courtship’ with \$\$\$\$ as the ultimate goal. That is their only ‘ideology’. But the anger of the people is piling up.”

It was the last sentence that, in our opinion, encouraged politicians to join the Russian side and make minimal concessions, i.e. to return Marshal Tolbukhin and General Zhdanov to Serbian memory. However, the struggle for one's own culture, one's cultural memory, does not end with these steps.

THE STRUGGLE GOES ON – NATO AND THE WEST ON THE OFFENSIVE

Education is also an area of political, value and ideological struggle. A losing one for the Serbs, we can fairly say. It is no secret that since 1999, one of the priorities of the West in Serbia has been the control of education. Reforms were launched at all levels, with authors and lessons that established Serbian, Slavic and Orthodox identity being systematically removed from textbooks. The so-called globalization of education has taken place. It has become fashionable to know the English language, as well as to use different anglicisms as often and as much as possible, so that educated youth speak a kind of Serbian-English language today.

However, there have also been significant developments in the understanding of the cultural memory among young Serbs.

The West has begun a fundamental rethinking of the cultural memory into a culture of remembrance, through its “fifth column” in Serbian education (Milošević 2020b; Milošević 2020v).

Thanks to the efforts of the non-governmental sector – the so-called “Sorosians” and “grant-eaters” in Serbia, the idea that there is no history has taken root in the political community known as “other Serbs” (Serbs who support NATO, the EU, liberalism, etc.) under the cloak of science, meaning that there is no cultural memory. There is only a culture of remembrance – of what a living person remembers. Everything else is fiction, unreliable information (Milošević 2021).

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ИСТОРИЧЕСКАЯ ПАМЯТЬ И ПОЛИТИКА ПАМЯТИ В СЕРБИИ

*Вклад в изучение борьбы НАТО с культурой памяти в
Сербии на примере переименования улиц в Белграде.*

Аннотация

Анализируя историческую память и нынешнюю политику памяти в Сербии, становится ясно, что Вторая мировая война не закончилась. Весь НАТО и Запад борются против памяти о подвигах красноармейцев, а также созвездия русских ученых, писателей и других известных людей в сотрудничестве с пятой колонной, которую они сами сформировали в Сербии. Мало сказать, что речь идет о «мести побежденных» или «культурной войне», ведь они хотят полностью стереть историю, память о важных датах из тех же самых у сербов и русских, и навязать нынешние (воспоминание живых людей), согласно которому сербы и русские — современные преступники (народы-геноциды), не заслуживающие существования.

Ключевые слова: *Память, воспоминание, история, политика, культура, Вторая мировая война*