



Press Release, (21.12.2004)
Past and Present: Consequences for Democratisation
Web-publication available free of charge

The Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe announces the publication of an Electronic Book, which is available on the webpage, www.lustration.net. This book is a documentation on the proceedings of a Seminar organised by the CDRSEE and the Centre for Antiwar Action* in July 2004 in Belgrade. The seminar was attended by 40 experts (legal field, academics, journalists, NGOs) from 12 countries** and attracted significant local and international media attention.

The process of facing the past, especially disclosing historical facts hidden in secret archives and making a clean break with it, is a sensitive, complex, and contentious issue in all post-authoritarian countries. Lustration and lustration procedures, as well as public debates on the past, range among the most important issues in the transition period. What is the relationship between public debates on the past and the consolidation of democratic structures, institutions, and procedures? And what is the relationship between lustration and democratic consolidation? Are these strong or even casual relationships? These were the general main questions of the seminar in Belgrade, and these are the main topics of this electronic book.

Widely acknowledged experts of the Western Balkans, e.g. Jakob Finci, Zarko Puhovski, Ivo Goldstein, Vojin Dimitrijevic, Jovica Trkulja, Biljana Vankovska, Kathleen Imholz and Ben Andoni present their analyses on selected aspects of the democratisation processes in their countries, and international experts provide an overview on the experiences made in East Central Europe and in Southeast Europe (outside the Western Balkans).

The results allow for a rather congruent conclusion: Weak efforts to deal with the authoritarian past and its stakeholders tended to coincide with problems of democratisation, whereas stronger efforts usually tended to strengthen democratisation. Case studies show that the Western Balkans countries are lagging behind in comparison to East-Central European countries. In most cases, no lustration laws have been passed; the opening of secret dossiers is hotly discussed but remains unresolved and some attempts to institutionalise Truth Commissions have not achieved effective results.

Looking at the Western Balkans nation by nation: Ups and Downs (Albania), some improvement over the last 5-6 years (Croatia), some achievements in detail, but the big questions still open (Bosnia and Herzegovina), weak interest in public debates on the past, concentration on present institution building (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and nothing essential achieved (Serbia and Montenegro).

The publication has been produced under the umbrella of the EC funded project *Disclosing hidden history: Lustration in the Western Balkans* and follows the four major aims: enhancing the public debate on the past; improving lustration procedures; increasing legal and political awareness; strengthening citizens participation and the role of civil and human rights groups.

* in cooperation with the Albanian Human Rights Group in Tirana, the Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies of the University of Sarajevo, the Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Zagreb, the Foundation Open Society Institute Macedonia in Skopje.

** (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Germany, Greece, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro and the USA).



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