

TESTIMONY *(to Foreign Relations Committee of American Senate)*

OF HIS GRACE ARTEMIJE, BISHOP, THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Mr. Chairman, honorable members of the Senate and Congress, ladies and gentlemen. This is the third trip that His Grace, Bishop Artemije of Raska and Prizren, the ancient see of the Orthodox Church of Serbia in the province of Kosovo and Metohija, has made to Washington, DC, with a delegation of Serbian democratic opinion from Kosovo in an attempt to avert catastrophe in our homeland.

In our previous missions, we spoke to centers of American power and opinion in an effort to avert an imminent escalation of the bloodshed in Kosovo. We warned that the mistaken American policy of, on the one hand, tacit encouragement of maximalist Albanian goals of creating a greater Albania, and, on the other hand, barely disguised political support for the regime of Slobodan Milosevic as the only possible voice of the Serbian people, was helping to make that escalation more likely. Regrettably, our warnings were not heeded, and the escalation against we warned has come to pass, with a terrible cost in human suffering for all the people of Kosovo, Serb and Albanian, as well as others, alike.

We now learn that not only has the Western community not been dissuaded from its past mistakes but may be on the verge of compounding them with a military intervention in Kosovo, perhaps preceded by air attacks against our homeland. We are here to warn, with all appropriate urgency, that this compounding of past mistakes may have unforeseen and perhaps irreparable consequences.

First, foreign intervention will strengthen, rather than weaken, the power of the Milosevic regime at a time when he may be most vulnerable. We are especially concerned that the past United States policy, initiated, we understand, by Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, to rely on Milosevic as a guarantor of peace is immoral and counterproductive. Whereas American negotiation efforts to date have been willing to talk to virtually all Albanians, they have ignored the democratic Serbian opposition. This is a grave error.

Second, it would once more encourage the radical program of violence among the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and its sympathizers, victimizing not only Kosovo Serbs-who in proportion, are now as many refugees as Kosovo Albanians- but anyone who opposes their terroristic program. This encouragement may very well lead in short order not only to the elimination of all Kosovo Serbs but the further destabilization of Macedonia and, especially, Albania, which is already on the verge of civil war.

Third, it may destabilize the already fragile peace in Bosnia.

Fourth, it may well lead to a long-term presence of American and other foreign forces on Serbian soil, where they may be subjected to the resentment not only of our people, who will see them as a de facto army of occupation, but may at the same time be subject to attack by more radical elements among the Albanians.

We want to assure you that we are not here today as emissaries or apologists for President Slobodan Milosevic and his autocratic regime. We are here as representatives of Kosovo Serbs who are frightened and who are under a serious threat of being completely "ethnically cleansed" from their homeland. We are also here to condemn the blatantly aggressive policy of the Albanian terrorists lead by the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army as well as the repressive policy by the Belgrade regime. Both policies have already caused the unnecessary deaths and dislocation of many, many innocent people in Kosovo and Metohija on both sides. The ethnic Albanian terrorist groups have carried out many terrorist attacks over the past two years, aimed at provoking of international intervention. The internal goal still remains the same as before: terrorizing the Kosovo Serbs so that Kosovo can become an ethnically pure Albanian province. Mr. Milosevic in turn unleashed a police and military offensive which resulted in the

deaths of not only terrorists but also of innocent civilians, which may serve as- and may be designed to serve as-a pretext for foreign intervention. This cycle of violence must be put to an end immediately. Nothing will be achieved by violence except destruction and carnage. Regrettably, we feel that neither President Milosevic nor the ethnic Albanian leadership grasp this simple fact. Both sides have learned absolutely nothing from the Bosnian civil war, which threaten to engulf the entire Balkans with a disastrous armed conflict.

The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian people of Kosovo and Metohija stand for a peaceful, democratic solution to the current crisis through dialogue. We also have detailed proposal for the long-term democratic settlement which, to date, has been ignored both by Mr. Milosevic regime and the ethnic Albanian leadership. We have presented these proposals in all our meetings here. The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian people of Kosovo and Metohija condemn all actions, by any party, which have led during the last few years to an escalation of violence in Kosovo and Metohija. We condemn all terrorist attacks perpetrated by ethnic Albanian extremists against Serbian civilians, Serbian officials, ethnic Albanians loyal to the Serbian state and the religious monuments of Serbian Orthodox Church. We also condemn police repression and all excessive and indiscriminate use of police force especially against the Albanian civilians. Further, we condemn the refusal of the Milosevic regime to institute open and sincere dialogue with the ethnic Albanian community to achieve a peaceful settlement. Likewise, we condemn the refusal of the ethnic Albanian leadership to embrace the path of peaceful dialogue with the Serbian authorities and the Serbian people of Kosovo and Metohija as well as their unwillingness to condemn armed attacks by the Albanian terrorist groups. We support the general condemnation of these terrorist acts by the US Administration and entire international community. Those attacks were calculated to lead to an escalation of violence and in fact have done so. We have detailed documentation of these attacks perpetrated in these last two years by the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army especially in Drenica region.

We appeal to all Americans to understand that the conflict in Kosovo is not between the Serbian and Albanian people but between a secessionist extremism on one side, and an oppressive and unrepresentative regime on the other. We appeal to the United States to reject simplistic calls for military intervention in order to hand state power over to the ethnic Albanian leadership. Such an action, in light of the history of Kosovo and Metohija before 1989, would lead to the ethnic cleansing of the Orthodox Serbian people from the ancient heart of our homeland. We, on the contrary, strongly believe in a democratic Serbia, with ethnic, religious and cultural tolerance. We believe that on this basis a cohabitation of all ethnic communities can be achieved. We support the idea of civic society in which all its citizens will have equal rights. We insist on full respect of the human and minority rights according to the highest international standards. We call upon the international community, the United States especially, to help democratic forces in Serbia replace the Milosevic regime with a government of law and public confidence. We firmly oppose to any change of international borders because such precedent would cause instability in the neighboring countries and the whole region. Our vision of the future of interethnic relations lies in the full democratization of political systems, rather than in further territorial, political and economic fragmentation. We strongly believe that not every political issue can be used to raise new territorial claims. Therefore, our regional approach is an initial framework for a future political dialogue in order to achieve a long-term stability and cooperation in the Balkans.

We call upon the United States and the international community to endorse the proposals of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian people of Kosovo and Metohija for a genuine dialogue, without preconditions. Only in that way, a peaceful, democratic settlement of the Kosovo crisis for all people of Serbia regardless of nationality or religion can be achieved. Military intervention will hurt, rather than help

the achievement of such a settlement. We express our deep sympathy for all innocent victims in Kosovo and Metohija and we pray to God to grant us wisdom and courage to preserve peace and mutual understanding because no one can build his own happiness on misfortune of his neighbor.

(Washington, D.C. September 17, 1998.)