

Edmonton, AB. February 14, 2013.

**TO:** Dr. Simon Samuels  
Director of International Relations  
Simon Wiesenthal Center, Europe

**RE:** Open Letter – Remarks following the meeting between Dr. Simon Samuels and the Prime Minister of Montenegro, Milo Djukanović

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Dear Dr. Samuels,

I am writing to you in regards to your most recent meeting with the Montenegrin Prime Minister, Milo Djukanović. My assessment of issues discussed at that meeting is based on the reports by the Montenegrin media in general, and the *Analitika - Informativni Portal*, in particular ("Susret premijera Đukanovića sa predstavnikom Centra „Simon Vizental“ Šimonom Samjuelsom." See: <http://www.portalanalitika.me/politika/vijesti/90603-susret-premijera-ukanovia-sa-predstavnikom-centra-simon-vizental-imonom-samjuelsom.html>. Accessed on February 14, 2013).

The purpose of this letter is to point out some of the problems that arose from the meeting in question in hope that you might reconsider extended invitations and correcting publicized qualifications.

To start with, I want to say that I understand and respect your desire to maintain diplomatic etiquette when meeting government officials. I would, nevertheless, like to draw your attention to two highly contested issues that emerged as products of your meeting with Mr. Djukanović. I also wish to register with you my discontent over your position on both of those issues (as reported in the Montenegrin media).

First issue has to do with your characterisation of the attitude of the Montenegrin government towards the freedom of religion, while the second is about the invitations you extended to the Montenegrin prime minister.

As reported by the *Analitika*, you expressed gratitude to the Montenegrin government for its positive stance on religious freedoms. I am sure that you are the last person that needs to be reminded about the frequent disconnect between government rhetoric and the practice of governing. One could cite numerous examples of such disconnect, and Montenegro is no exception.

I would argue that your expression of gratitude was lacking in one important respect: the element of historical knowledge. Such knowledge includes the awareness of the activities of the Montenegrin government in the last two decades and during the bloody years of the Yugoslav break up. It is true that the rhetoric and the attitude of the government of Montenegro towards various religions had changed over the last twenty years. I would, however, posit that the current rhetoric of the Montenegrin government could not be completely divorced from the historical baggage it carries. Its record on religious tolerance and protection could not, in good conscious, be evaluated independent of its treatment of refugees, prisoners of war, and political opponents during the early 1990s.

Under the premiership of Milo Djukanović (multi-term prime minister since 1990) the government of Montenegro had preached tolerance while it often practiced and/or tolerated extremism, nationalism, chauvinism, and the hatred of the unwanted other. Djukanović's government had failed to protect the citizens of Montenegro of Islamic faith when they were molested, tortured, and ethnically cleansed in the early 1990s by various paramilitary units. The role played by the Montenegrin police forces in those crimes is yet to be properly assessed. Moreover, it was the government of Milo Djukanović that ordered its police forces to locate, arrest, and hand over civilian refugees from Bosnia to Radovan Karadžić's killers. A singular focus on one specific issue, such as the government's attitude toward the Jewish community in Montenegro does not compensate for the lack

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of awareness of a historical record. It, however, disregards the large chunk of recent history that represents an unpleasant burden for the Montenegrin government and its multi-term prime minister. Those are my reasons for objecting to your expressing the gratitude to the Montenegrin government in this specific way.

The second issue has to do with the invitations you extended to Milo Djukanović to speak at the *Museum of Tolerance* in Los Angeles. Again, I have to go back to the problem of the lack of knowledge about Milo Djukanović's activities over the last twenty years. During the past two decades Djukanović did, without a doubt, prove himself a masterful politician. The record of his actions, statements, speeches and policies, however, do not support the self-styled image of a tolerant and understanding person.

From his early days as an appointed leader of the so-called anti-bureaucratic revolution in Montenegro, to his post-war clintonesque expression of regret for lives lost in the fratricide of the 1990s, Milo Djukanović worked on transforming himself from a warmonger into an advocate of Euro-Atlantic integrations.

Since his first day in office (elected to the post of prime minister in 1989) Djukanović called on all the patriots to rally around the Yugoslav Army and protect the motherland from the predatory Croatian neighbour. While justifying the participation of Montenegro in the war of Yugoslav dissolution, Djukanović also had harsh words for anti-war activists. He stressed that "one cannot wave an olive branch while the Serbian people in Croatia are being slaughtered, massacred, raped," and declared that the aim of the war was "to liberate the oppressed Serbian population from under the fascist terror of the Croatian authorities." He famously declared that because of his dislike of the Croatian chequered flag, he stopped playing the game of chess, and promised to the people of Montenegro that time had come to "draw the demarcation lines vis-à-vis the Croats once and for all."

These are only fragment from the long list of statements and policy decision by Milo Djukanović given and enacted during 1990s. One wonders what kind of cathartic experience such a warmonger of 1990s would have to live through to emerge as a symbol of tolerance worthy of the stage at the *Museum of Tolerance*. One further wonders what some of the previous distinguished speakers from that stage would say to the invitation being extended to Milo Djukanović? I would like to think (call me naïve and idealistic) that Havel, if he were still with us, might object to it. I most certainly do.

Sincerely yours.

*Srđa Pavlović*

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**Note on the author:** *Srđa Pavlović teaches modern Balkan history at the University of Alberta. His work focuses on nationalism and identity construction.*