

# How to Kill Packet-Radio & APRS? Come to Serbia! (Part 3)

**Miroslav "Misko" Skoric, YT7MPB**

IEEE Austria Section; NIAR India

*email: skoric@ieee.org*

*packet: YT7MPB@YT7MPB.#NS.SRB.EU*

## Abstract

*In this paper, I continue analyzing continual country's ham radio leaderships' wrongdoings that significantly lead not only to the stagnation in development of VHF/UHF/HF ham radio data infrastructure but also to possible extinction of anything else but telegraphy contests and 'fox-hunting'.*

## 1. Introduction

As you see, this is the third installment of this 'regulatory' series. This year I almost decided not to write, but eventually I changed my mind the 'last minute'. At first, I would like to remind you that my first paper for DCC conferences was published in the proceedings of the "22nd Annual ARRL and TAPR Digital Communications Conference" (Skoric, 2003). Several years after that, I announced: "I ceased any connection with governing people in Serbian ham organizations for good." (Skoric, 2018). But the last installment showed that I was wrong: "Almost twenty years later I came back to Amateur Radio Union of Vojvodina (Savez radio-amatera Vojvodine, abbr. SRV) to serve as the Union's secretary" (Skoric, 2019).

You are right if you ask me now: Why do you waste your time with people who do not deserve your attention & assistance, and why do you bother submitting another paper about? Well, my answer could be this: If I do not do that, and instead fly into apathy, who else would be a witness to all wrongdoing in Serbian ham radio!

As I informed you last time, Polish radio amateur Armand, SP3QFE, asked me to assist

him in locating any local ham in the area of Sremska Mitrovica city (Serbia) who was skilled in ham satellite operations. At that time (October 2018) I was not involved in any 'official' ham activity in the country. So the real question was how SP3QFE reached me at all – having in mind that for ham topics he could have contacted SRV or SRS (*Savez radio-amatera Srbije*, Amateur Radio Union of Serbia). But SP3QFE found me thankfully to my recent (2016, 2017) visits to his country of Poland for participating in some technical (non-ham) conferences. And because I promoted ham 'data' modes in those scientific events, my visits were recognized among amateur radio circles in SP3QFE's homeland.

So that is why I am sure that writing research papers, and presenting such papers in technical events is crucial for our hobby. Without my activities in Poland, it is questionable whether SP3QFE would get in touch with me or not.

In any case, thankfully to that link, a group of interested hams (at that time not-so-proficient in satellite operations) was found in the local ham club in my city of Novi Sad (loc. JN95WF). The preparations for an ARISS contact with scientists at the International Space Station (ISS) started on time, and the program was performed

successfully at the end of February 2020. Although I was glad that everything went well with the ISS sked, and that both pupils and teachers in Sremska Mitrovica were happy, I felt slightly uneasy because I did not participate in the ‘working group’ who performed the session.

In fact, I had offered to the ham club’s president my best services when it comes to writing a research paper on that ARISS contact (means coauthoring an article together with the school’s teachers, which could be then published in some domestic or international publication). Unfortunately, my offer was ignored without any explanation, and I could only say that it was a result of common misunderstanding among Serbian hams on what technical & research papers are all about.

You bet, when our club’s ARISS team returned from Sremska Mitrovica, I listened to their comments on that experience. The main feeling was that the school staff has done the most relevant parts of the session, while the hams “just assisted” in providing radios, antennas, and related logistics. Except local newspapers and electronic broadcasters being invited to the show (as well as local politicians), there was no ‘proceedings’ of the ham event. Now it is several months after that radio contact with ISS, but there is no sign that anyone from the school was interested in keeping closer contacts with our ham club. In my view, a technical paper written together with the teachers would significantly contribute to the visibility of our club in local and wider educational community (not only in Sremska Mitrovica but also elsewhere in Serbia), and it would remain as a document of ham-school collaboration. Not to mention that such a document would also serve as an instructional venue for similar joint actions in years to come.

## **2. The ham union’s agenda**

### **2.1 Year 2019**

I probably haven’t mentioned in the previous installment that, as the Union’s secretary, I actively participated in preparing documents for annual meetings – SRV ‘assemblies’. So, for the 2019 Assembly I asked the Union’s board to include few things to the yearly plan of activities. For example, I urged that the status of former no-Morse license holders (‘E’-class) in Serbia should be harmonized with pan-European CEPT recommendations, by means that ‘E’-class holders (recently renamed to ‘2<sup>nd</sup> class’) shall be allowed to travel internationally in the status of ‘CEPT NOVICE’ category. I based that idea on the fact that many no-Morse hams wanted to use their FM walkie-talkie portables in their summer holidays & vacations in neighboring countries. Why not to allow those guys & gals to be more happy during their family vacations?

As I said in the previous installment, I took the opportunity to amend the official proposal for the Union’s yearly plan, so I added activities related to improving the rules – more precisely the necessity to accept CEPT recommendations in its entirety. As discussed in (Skoric, 2018), Serbia has accepted only some parts of CEPT recommendations that actually favored telegraphers. At the time of writing this (August 2020), nothing changed in domestic rules.

Ok, my amendments were included to the plan, and I expected the Union’s board to act accordingly in negotiations with our authorities.

I was wrong. Nothing was done.

In the same time, domestic *APRS* network remained underdeveloped: Only the nearest digipeater was in working condition – probably thankfully to the fact that our radio club was responsible for it. Month after month, few other digipeaters, located southern from Novi Sad, disappeared from scene one by one. Nobody from SRS seemed interested in maintaining the national *APRS* infrastructure. It is a shame for Serbia not to have an *APRS* backbone! See Figure 1 for a recent view to Serbia (Србија).

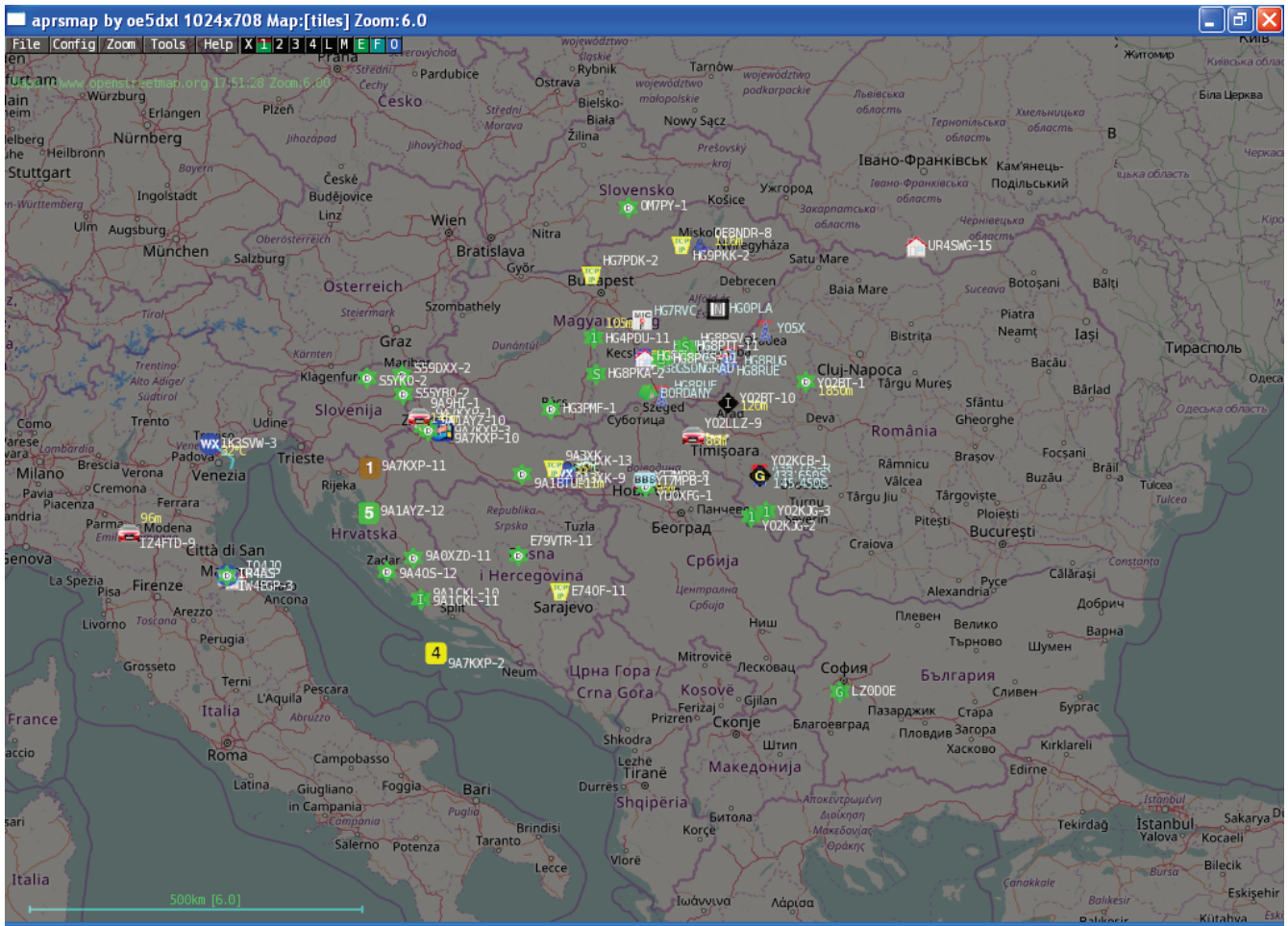


Figure 1. Non-existing APRS network in most part of Serbia/Србија (screen-shot taken on July 29, 2020).

## 2.2 Year 2020

Year 2019 was busy with other activities. I actively participated in an IEEE-related technical conference in Goa, India, where I promoted ham ‘data’ modes among Indian students & teachers. Thankfully to good relationships in between Government of India and NIAR (National Institute of Amateur Radio) from Hyderabad, India performed in the past a nice pilot-project in implementing HF modes (preferably *factor*) within its national-wide rescue infrastructure.

Although that pilot-project was almost forgotten some years after its ending, I based my talks on its positive outcomes. In that direction, I continued practicing *factor*, AX.25 packet-radio, and other ‘data’ modes in the local ham club.

Incidentally, my amendments on CEPT recommendations became ‘silently’ removed from the new annual plan. When I objected that to the Union’s board, one of the vice-presidents, Stanisa YU7AC, responded me in a personal mail, which I bring here in its entirety (Figure 2).

From Stanisa Zaklan <szaklan@gmail.com> ☆  
Subject **E klasa**  
To Me <skoric@uns.ac.rs> ☆

Da ne bi smo "davili" ostale u vezi te "E" klase, evo nekog mog mišljenja.

Prvo, mislim da sam ti već ovo napomenuo . Predlažem da, ako možeš, ubuduće neke tvoje predloge i mišljenja izlažeš što sažetije. O problemu te E klase , napisao si čitav "roman".

Ja, a mislim i većina onih koji dobio ovakav teks, uopšte ga ne čitaju. Mislim da je tvoja kompletna rasprava oko E klase, imajući u vidu tvoju elokventnost, sve si to mogao sažeti u dvadesetak rečenica. Mislim da nam je u svim problemima koje imamo, položaj E klase potpuno nevažan.

Pošto sam bio u vreme kada je ona utvrđena, bila je namenjena za one koji hoće da rade samo FM i samo na VHF/UHF opsezima.

Pošto nisam razumeo poentu tvog stava oko E klase, da li ti hoćeš da se njima dodeli prva klasa?

Da li ćeš , uskoro, do SRV u vezi onih papira?

73

yu7ac

Figure 2. YU7AC diminishes my efforts in fight for liberalizing ham radio regulations.

Here is the partial translation in English:

“In order not to ‘kill’ others regarding that ‘E’ class, here is my opinion. I think that I have already talked to you about. My suggestion to you is to write more concisely any of your ideas and opinions. Regarding that ‘E’ class you submitted a whole ‘essay’. I myself, and suppose the majority of other recipients are not going to read it at all. In my opinion, all your discussion related to ‘E’ class, having in mind your eloquence, you might have submitted in twenty sentences only. I think that, considering other problems we have, the status of ‘E’ class is totally irrelevant. Because I was there in times when it [‘E’ class] was incorporated, it was intended for those who wanted to work FM only and restrictively to VHF/UHF bands. Because I haven’t understood your point on ‘E’ class [now categorized as the 2<sup>nd</sup> class], do you

maybe advocate that they just shall be granted the 1<sup>st</sup> class?” (Zaklan, 2020)

I did not respond to such offensive words. It was clear to me that both SRV and SRS were main (if not the exclusive) sources of the problems.

### 2.3 No real political will yet

Interestingly, both the SRV’s president (Keki Laszlo YT7DQ) and two other vice-presidents (Bariček Laslo YU7CM, Popov Aleksandar YT7WE) never voiced any objection to my proposal for improving the rules. It remained unclear why YU7AC became so furious about my ‘open dialogue’ initiative. Maybe because it appeared that he actually lied to me in another occasion when he tried to ‘assure’ me that the strongest opponent to my amendments was his ‘good friend’ Sinisa, YU1RA, the one of those in SRS leadership who had created bad rules back in 2011, (Skoric, 2019).

After having realized that SRV's governing board is a 'bad company' too, I tried to initiate an 'open dialogue' with our membership. I did that by using *YU0V* mailing list (that list is in Serbian language only). I started that in an unrelated discussion on possible introducing new ham bands (new in Serbia). It was obvious that self-proclaimed ham 'elites' in SRV & SRS only wanted new bands to be spared for the 1<sup>st</sup> class ticket holders. In opposite, they kept silent on any possible move to improve the status of the 2<sup>nd</sup> class (former no-code 'E' category).

The strongest proponents for new advantages were those who opposed my amendments. I couldn't resist not to react to all selfish and egocentric opinions I received in the mailing list.

So I posted a series of comments to the leaders' essays. As expected, the 'chorus' of them tried (again) to diminish my efforts for liberalizing national regulations. Among the loudest ones was Zoran YU1EW, the acting president of SRS.

I am not going to copy correspondence from the mailing list. What I can conclude for now is that

I was fully satisfied with that opportunity to inform our members about wrongdoers and their misbehaves. And to show no fear, too ...

On the practical side, I did my best to continue exploring 'data' modes in the local club (RC "Novi Sad", YU7BPQ). By using my personal & club's equipment, I perform radio email exchange with a handful of European stations. My test system is based on a laptop running a Linux version of 'BPQ' Node/BBS/RMS software, written by John Wiseman G8BPQ. See Figure 3 for actual setup. At the time of writing this, my BBS exchanges its message content by connecting forwarding partners via HF radio on 20m and 40m bands, and then using pactor 1-4 modulations. Until a month ago, the secondary BBS port was linked to a VHF radio station, by using a sound-card interface for 1200 baud packet-radio (the 'red box' on the left side in Fig. 3). Eventually the club decided to devote the VHF radio to *Echolink* operations, so my VHF port rendered inactive. My intention is to explore all possibilities for HF data exchange, having in mind that club's antennas are in not-so-perfect condition, and need significant repair.

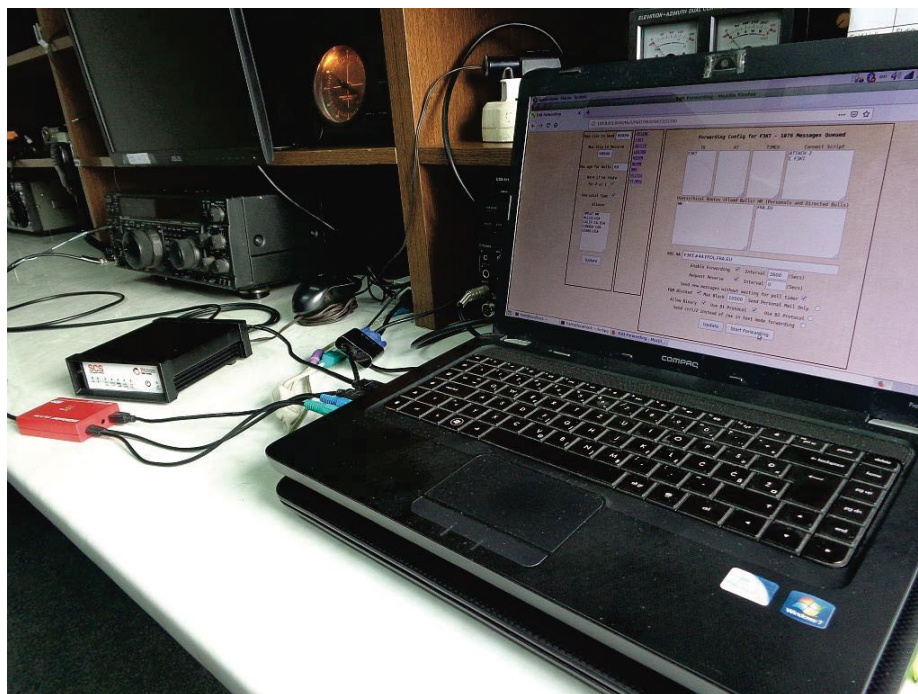


Figure 3. Pactor 1-4 equipment in RC "Novi Sad", Serbia.

## 2.4 Sporadic statements ...

For the above-mentioned HF ‘data’ activity, I still do not get visible support from most club members. To make things worse, the actual *Coronavirus* pandemic discouraged many (if not almost all) members to visit the radio shack. So most of them are uninformed about this effort. I can only hope that health situation will improve in the near future, and give me a chance to make a good presentation on this infrastructural topic.

As we all know, *Covid-19* caused many public events to be postponed or canceled. One of them was the ham gathering in Friedrichshafen, Germany. After the event’s cancellation was officially announced in April 2020, YU7AC posted in the mailing list: “I am so sad now because I planned to win a lottery there [in

Friedrichshafen]”. So far on ‘important’ things that ham ‘politicians’ in Serbia are focused on. On the other side, they never wanted to create a positive environment where each & every ham radio segment would feel valued and motivated enough to give their best contribution.

Amazingly, the ham ‘politicians’ in Serbia have never written a textbook for ham beginners. For several times I asked them: Why? Do you have not enough knowledge? Or there wouldn’t be enough profitable outcome from such an effort?

Most responses are based on a false premise that “there is already enough literature for beginners” - but none of them can show a new title written by a domestic ham expert. The last book I have personally seen and read, was made by Djordje Stojanovic YU1KH in 1995, see Figure 4.

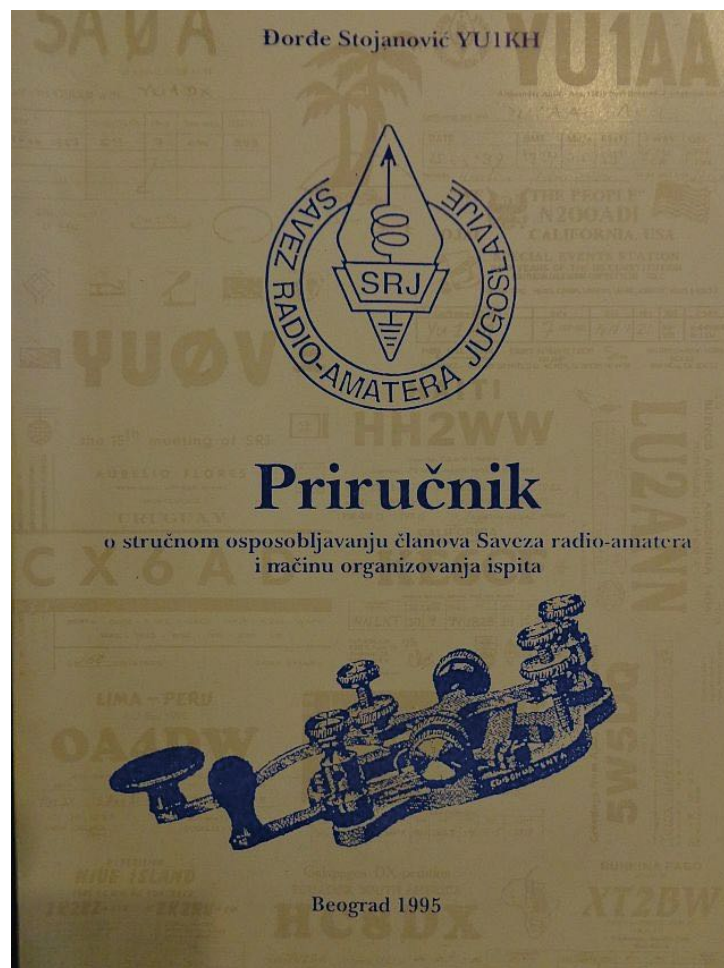


Figure 4. Handbook for educating SRS members and organizing ham examinations.

Interestingly, when I used facts from YU1KH's publication in my open dialogue with the members, the acting president of SRS, YU1EW, diminished the validity of that book by claiming that the publication was "too old". He did not comment the notorious fact that the book was accepted (at the time of publication) as the educational reading i.e. a textbook for SRS members and candidates for ham examination. That was clearly written in the book's preamble.

Newest findings related to wrongdoing in SRS, I have recently sent by email to Prof. Dr. Irini Reljin, deputy minister in Serbian ministry for telecommunications, tourism, and trade (TTT). She is in charge for sector of electronic communications and postal traffic. No responses from her, or someone else in TTT ministry yet. In my email I made it clear that SRS officials had **deceived** the Ministry and the regulatory agency RATEL, by **misleading** governmental bodies into thinking that SRS had acted honestly and on behalf all categories of Serbian hams, and on behalf the nation's technology level as well.

At the time of writing this I still hope that my suggestions sent to Ms. Reljin will be of use.

### 3. More issues

I mentioned in the previous installment that few individuals in SRS, SRV, and ham clubs have strong intention for keeping *status quo*, in order to protect their selfish personal interests (read: their own or their family businesses). Among those I listed, is for example YU7AC, one of the acting vice-presidents of SRV. His private company, named "ELMED", works in the area of telecommunications. I have recently learned that "ELMED" was a supplier of DMR radio equipment for Government of Vojvodina province (the northern part of Serbia, YU7/YT7 prefix). In parallel of this lucrative business, YU7AC has campaigned for building a local DMR ham repeater in Novi Sad city – the capital of Vojvodina province. His campaign alone would not be observed in a negative context, had

it been performed by someone who was just an enthusiastic radio amateur and DMR promoter. That was not the case because, besides businesses with governmental entities, "ELMED" had a not so frequent permission for importing ham gear. That means, by campaigning for a DMR repeater, YU7AC probably planned to import a quantity of cheap DMR hand-held radios of Chinese production. Eventually he imported a few items. However the number of DMR network participants is still very low. (Please note that building a new DMR repeater was financed by the SRV's membership money, combined with a donation from the local RC "Novi Sad". It is unknown whether YU7AC invested a single dollar from his own pocket.)

Once again, I ask you for advice on how you deal with such cases in the USA or elsewhere.

#### 3.1 Strange budget handling

The legality of the Union's budget is also under a question-mark. For several years now SRV office is located in a municipality-owned property that the Union pays for rent. (Note that during its 70-year tradition, SRV haven't managed to purchase any real estate for its office.) According to the municipality rules & regulations, it is not allowed for organizations that pay for rent to make a profitable business by further renting the space to third parties. But SRV does just like that, so a half of the previously borrowed space is now re-rented to a restaurant around the corner!

So instead of using the (paid) space for installing something of a broader amateur radio interest, such as a technical display room, or a kind of a 'ham museum' or like, the Union uses just one room (of circa ten square meters) for the administrative tasks.

Furthermore, there is no visible interest in using paid space for establishing a packet-radio network node, or a multi-facet BBS with VHF/UHF/HF forwarding features, and/or some satellite opportunities. None of that!

On the other side, a big (if not the biggest) chunk of the Union's income is spent on a variety of contest diplomas and plaques – even though a minority of SRV members participate in contests organized by the Union. Not to mention spending a lot of (membership) money for printing thousands of new QSL cards under special call signs, even though the Union itself does not have (and use) **any** workable radio station under its roof. And even that would not be a big deal, if all those awards had not gone so often to foreign ham winners who personally do not contribute to our organization's budget.

I objected that situation for several times, but it seemed that no one cared. Furthermore, I advocated opening a bank account for foreign membership subscriptions, intended for hams residing in other countries, and in such case awards would be sent them at no cost. In opposite, international postal parcels to non-members shall be charged accordingly. My proposal was rejected with an explanation that "ARRL sends diplomas internationally at no cost". (Interestingly, I did not hear a single word on high standards of living in the USA, foreign membership as a standard category in ARRL, a number of good quality publications made under the League's umbrella, and so on.)

### 3.2 Dangerous historical revisionism

Even though I am not a contest-inclined ham, I recently witnessed something I found shameful. Let me give you some introduction: Every October there is a traditional ham contest titled "Vojvodjanski oktobar" ("October in Vojvodina"). It has been organized by SRV. In my opinion, the title was properly chosen (long time ago) because of the contest's timing and its organizer.

And it was no problem with that name until recently: Last August-September (2019), rumors started telling that the name was about to change because of a "reminiscence to communism". (For those who are not familiar with the last days of the WW2 in this part of Europe, October 1944

has been remembered for the liberation of Vojvodina province and the other eastern parts of former Yugoslavia. So many Yugoslavian (Serbian, Croatian, Montenegrin, Bosnian, etc.) 'partisan' soldiers and volunteers, alongside with Soviet military, had unnumbered casualties during the liberation operations. I have lost two family members: A younger brother of my late father, and also a brother of my late mother. We have never lost them from our memories though.

But recently, almost 75 years after those heroic times, "Vojvodjanski oktobar" ("October in Vojvodina") somehow got a 'bad taste' in the mouth of the SRV's leadership. When I tried to discover what the problem was with the old name, YU7AC, the vice-president 'explained' me that the word October gave them a "reminiscence of the communist times". I was shocked! What a shameful attitude in YU7AC who himself worked as a fully-paid employee (in the role of the administrative secretary of SRV) in those "communist times"! And not only that: Without being a loyal Communist Party member, he would have never been an employee in such a high position – in the times when all hams were carefully registered, well controlled, and treated as a paramilitary communication squadron of the national security interest.

I have personally seen in SRV office an old photography where YU7AC posed besides a political parole "I posle Tita, Tito" ("After Tito dies, long live Tito"). But, amazingly, just a few decades later, YU7AC eagerly wants to "wash his personal biography". He wants to forget everything he was doing during the "communist times", and you bet – to become a 'fresh nationalist', fully loyal to Mr. Vucich, the acting autocratic president of Serbia, and his rigid political regime. Why? Because of business.

Nevertheless, when I asked for other contest name-change proponents, some members suggested that the SRV's president (Keki Laszlo YT7DQ) and one of the vice-presidents (Bariček Laslo YU7CM) also supported the name change. I really cannot say whether that is truth or not, but the fact is that both persons are of Hungarian



national minority (having double citizenship & passports of both Hungary and Serbia). And having in mind that Hungary was a part of Nazi axis during the WW2 and, as such, lost the war, it would not be far from truth that many Hungarians would like to ‘re-paint’ that part of the region’s history.

In any case, “Vojvodjanski oktobar” (“October in Vojvodina”) was quickly renamed to “Memorijal Mihajla Pupina” (“Memorial of Mikhail Pupin”), a researcher-inventor of Serbian origin who did good deeds in technology areas – but only after his moving to the United States of America.

Not a problem for me: But then I proposed to establish at least a new ham contest or diploma devoted to the USA, because neither Mr. Pupin nor Mr. Nikola Tesla would have ever been in a position to make great things for humanity – without being welcomed by the USA.

My proposal was ignored.

#### 4. Conclusion

Having said this story, I remain unsure what could and should be done in Serbian amateur radio, in order to change (improve) the things. Maybe strong ignorance, or a visible boycott to the contests organized by this country would provoke some reconsideration among ham radio practitioners in Serbia. Like it or not, what is for sure and has been proven as a workable way against wrongdoers in Western Balkans, is *pressure*. Pressure of all kinds. As soon as local politicians (incl. ham radio ones) realize that their stupidity is not going to be tolerated (anymore) by (western) democracies, there will be more chances for a better society and for modern computer-based communication systems to be (re-)established and then well-maintained.

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