



## A BRAND KNOWN AS SERBIA

The concert of British singer **Amy Winehouse** held in Belgrade turned into a scandal of international proportions. Hence thanks to the popular singer, even indirectly, Serbia found itself again in the spotlight of world media. The footage of British star stumbling around the stage and unable to sing any song became one of the most watched clips on YouTube. Amy Winehouse's European tour organizers immediately canceled the concerts in Athens and Istanbul, and the world media began speculating on whether this is the end of her career. However, not only Amy was a star of the scandal that happened – willing or not, Serbia became also. Through responses to this concert from around the world, Serbia had an opportunity to see its bad image in the world even though it's been almost 11 years since the democratic changes.

For the story of Serbia to be launched was catered by a popular American stand-up comedian **Chelsea Handler**, who ridiculed Winehouse in her show "Chelsea Lately" due to the embarrassing performance at the Belgrade concert, but Handler also jeered the Serbian audience and all citizens of Serbia. Furthermore, one of the visiting comedians in the studio called Serbs a "**genocidal nation**" that suddenly "**has objections to the British singer's performance**".

Responding to the Serbian Defense Minister **Dragan Sutanovac's** Facebook status, Chelsea Handler called him a "**Bolshevik**" and expressed amazement that "**Serbs have Facebook and they are even allowed to attend concerts?**"

When Chelsea Handler finished with mocking Amy Winehouse and asked how people in the backstage had allowed the singer to come out to the stage in such a condition, she got the response that it was "**still Serbia**", that "**there is no law**", and that the British star "**after Belgrade probably planned to go to Kazakhstan**". Again, referring to the Serbian Defense Minister Dragan Sutanovac's Facebook comment that "**the concert was a shame and disappointment**", Chelsea Handler told him - "**Guess what, so is your country**".

This TV appearance has sparked numerous reactions both in the U.S. and Serbia. Serbian Ambassador to United States, Vladimir Petrovic, sent a letter to Bonnie Hammer, president of NBC Universal Cable (which oversees the E! network), describing Handler's act as "inappropriate, distasteful, and just plain bad humor". Comedians Greg Props and Chris Franjola apologized to Serbs after several days for their views presented in the show through the social network Twitter. The status posted by Greg Props even writes in the end "thank you" in Serbian. Chelsea Handler and E! which broadcast the show haven't yet found it necessary to apologize.

However the incident will be resolved, it has shown that Serbia has a very bad image in the world. Comedians always speak what their audience wants to hear, which means that their malicious comments about the Serbs is something generally accepted. Simply, the picture of Serbia and the Serbs as evil people formed in the nineties is still largely present in the West.



This attitude is the result of the wars and everything that happened in the former Yugoslavia and Serbia will have to invest a lot of effort to change it. Serbia is not dealing with this problem at the institutional level, nor has a strategy on how to improve its image in the world. Problems with the image of Serbia began exactly twenty years ago when socialist Yugoslavia split into new states: Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro. Yugoslavia headed by **Josip Broz Tito** 1945 - 1980 was a socialist country that did not belong to the Soviet bloc, but was at the head of the movement of hundreds of non-aligned countries, and therefore enjoyed the support of Western countries. Thus, Yugoslavia had a very good image in the world, and its leader Josip Broz Tito was warmly welcomed in both Moscow and Washington. Playing on the division of the world into two large blocks, Tito provided for the country more important place in the world than it deserved by the position, economic strength and population. In the bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia that began in 1991 and civil war that followed, tens of thousands people lost their lives and hundreds of thousands remained homeless. Europe has seen the most horrible crimes, destruction of cities and the ethnic cleansing since the Second World War. The United Nations set up a special international tribunal to trial war criminals from the territory of former Yugoslavia, the first of its kind since the WWII. The crimes took place on all sides, but according to the indictments issued by the ICTY, most crimes have been committed by Serbian military forces. Serbian military forces have been accused for the worst crime committed in former Yugoslavia - the massacre at Srebrenica.

During the war in former Yugoslavia, Serbia was handicapped in comparison to other emerging countries as they very much invested in creating a positive image of themselves as well as lobbied for their own interests. Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic hadn't even tried to do so, and the question is whether he would succeed even if he had.

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He was the instigator of the war story and was later accused of war crimes. The country was under UN sanctions. As a result, most countries of the world created a stereotype of the Serbs as violent people who committed crimes and who are the aggressor.

After the democratic changes and ousting of Slobodan Milosevic in 2000 a new era began for Serbia. The country turned to the future. Almost all indicted by The Hague, including the former President Milosevic, were extradited and the society started to democratize and implement political and economic changes. The ICTY began indicting and judging the high military and political officials from Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, and Serbia could talk about the crimes committed against Serbs with more rights. After all, today Serbia is a country with the greatest number of refugees in Europe. Belgrade has opted for the European Union and it seemed that the image of both Serbia and the Serbs would improve. Truly speaking, the image has been somewhat improved, but it is very difficult to fight against previously accepted stereotypes. Unfortunately, none of the Serbian governments over the past eleven years understood that it is necessary to invest in improving the image of the country. Simply, all believed that things would improve on their own.



However, not only Serbs have a bad reputation due to what happened in the territory of former Yugoslavia. **"Genocide - that's the only thing that the world knows about this country. Cruel genocide! But do not think that genocide is linked only to Serbia. That word is the only feature of Bosnia, Croatia, and even Slovenia"**, said recently in an interview to the oldest Serbian daily newspaper *Politika* **Simon Anholt**, a British expert in branding nations, regions and cities. Explaining how it happened that the word Serbia usually causes unpleasant associations in the minds of many people, Anholt said that a **"modern man has no time each day to carefully monitor all electronic media, or to read all the newspapers, but "catches" the general opinion and creates a picture of a society or country. It's a tyranny of public opinion. So, when you mention Nigeria, all immediately think of the corruption, associate the technology with Japan, Switzerland with precision"**. In a very interesting interview, Anholt talked about how some countries get a bad image. **"It is obvious why Serbia has a bad image. The former Yugoslavia was a battlefield of complex wars difficult to understand. There is no mystery about recent political events. But do not be afraid, the same problem have many countries in the world, but they nevertheless develop, prosper economically, as what I see here, but the reputation remains the same. As if you installed the rusty screws in a new car. Outside it's beautiful, but it's stuck"**, said Anholt and added: **"How a country's reputation can keep up with economic development? One way is to change. But all governments are beginning to do the same, to make up stories and tell the world boring stories about developing a new social policy, on how the state goes forward ... You'll admit "genocide" in this situation is much more appealing to the media. Therefore, new stories must be more interesting than that"**.

Therefore, Serbia can be angry with U.S. comedian, but she only said publicly what many of her viewers think. It just takes a lot of effort and time for Serbia to get out into the world with its values, culture and people. To change the image, new stories are needed.

It seems that right now, after the former Bosnian Serb military commander Gen. Ratko Mladic was extradited to The Hague Tribunal which almost closed the story of The Hague, in the sense that it will no longer be an obstacle to European integration, Serbia has a chance to launch a campaign to improve its image. The fact is that the media image of Serbia in the world has changed significantly after the arrest of General Mladic. In order to change the stereotypes, it takes a little more time and completely new future-oriented stories - not past-oriented. One of the new stories that are Serbia's chance is the planetary success of a young Serbian tennis player **Novak Djokovic**. Djokovic's sports victories stopped a number of Serbian political and national defeats. Djokovic is aware of that also and that is why he dedicates each victory to his country - Serbia.

Djokovic being currently the best player in the world creates a new image of Serbia and what is the most important for Serbia - his appearance is not associated with "Milosevic's time".

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Djokovic's popularity in Serbia is not only about his sporting achievements. He is a hero of the common people, although there is almost no politician who's not trying to be near him. Djokovic is a great athlete; he wins, but also respects his opponents and is not ashamed to say he is a Serb. He proudly raised three fingers, speaks several languages and writes in Cyrillic. What Djokovic is doing is the path Serbia should take in attempt to change its image.



Proud, self-confident - Djokovic gives lessons to the local politicians - both those who think that Serbia should be in constant conflict with the whole world and should not be changed and those who think Serbia needs to fulfill every requirement of the European Union, no matter what consequences these would have on citizens. Djokovic proves that it's possible to be a part of the world and your own. However, Djokovic is successful and his magic is not only about speaking nicely or looking good. He is successful because of his victories. Without them, his story would be just marketing, and marketing that doesn't have any foundation in life is short-lived, regardless how much had been invested in it.

Therefore, Serbia need new heroes, new stories and turning towards the future to change the bad image. However, for the story to last, Serbia needs victories. Victories in the economy, in sports, the reforms in human rights, culture ... Otherwise, we will be again shocked by insults and racism coming from an American comedian. Politicians in Serbia should be aware that changing the country's image in the world is as important as the implementation of reforms or accession to the European Union. However, before attempting to change the image of the country in the world, Serbian politicians should hear one piece of advice more by branding-guru Simon Anholt that says - "**you can lie only once**"! So, Serbia has to go out into the world with what makes it original compared to other countries. It is time Serbia started showing and proving its advantages. Most importantly, according to Simon Anholt, "**improving the image of a country means to work and not talk about working**".