

Letters from Serbia - the 10th

Stalemate!

by László Végel

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In Serbia the situation remains the same! The mother of all issues – Kosovo, is still on the agenda and it suppresses all other issues deep to the background. The suppression is such that even the issue of accession to the European Union is almost exclusively brought up only in relation to the Kosovo question.

During his Belgrade visit in late August, the German Minister for Foreign Affairs, Guido Westerwelle, held talks with President Boris Tadić, Prime Minister Mirko Cvetković, Minister for Foreign Affairs Vuk Jeremić and leaders of parliamentary parties. Later in an interview to the German radio station Deutschlandfunk he reminded Belgrade politicians that they decrease their chances for EU accession with the confrontations regarding Kosovo and insisting on the status question. He was open about the fact that for Serbia Kosovo is a major test for graduating to the European Union,

Pisma iz Srbije, 10.

U pat poziciji!

od Lasla Vegela

Septembar 2010.

U Srbiji je stanje nepromenjeno! Na dnevnom redu je i nadalje pitanje Kosova, majka svih pitanja, koja sve druge probleme potiskuje u duboku pozadinu, do te mere da se i pitanje priključenja Evropskoj uniji pojavljuje skoro isključivo u konstelaciji kosovskog problema.

Krajem avgusta, prilikom svoje posete Beogradu, nemački ministar za inostrane poslove Gvido Vestervele razgovarao je s predsednikom republike Borisom Tadićem, premijerom Mirkom Cvetkovićem, ministrom za inostrane poslove Vukom Jeremićem i sa liderima srpskih parlamentarnih stranaka. Potom je u intervjuu datom za nemački radio Deutschlandfunk, podsetio Beograd da svojim konfrontacijama oko Kosova, insistiranjem na statusnim pitanjima, umanjuje svoje šanse priključivanja Evropskoj uniji. Nije krio ni to, da Srbija mora na pitanju Kosova da polaze



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PISMA IZ SRBIJE 10 | 09 | 2010

LETTERS from SERBIA 10 | 09 | 2010



and if it passes this test – Westerwelle added hopefully – then one day Serbia may, along with Kosovo, join the EU. Very clear words! Up until now Serbia has based its foreign policy on the premise that it could keep Kosovo and join the European Union. After Westerwelle's visit we now have the "either Kosovo or the European Union" dilemma. Shortly afterwards William Hague, the British Minister for Foreign Affairs also visited Belgrade and his attitude was even more clear, hard and pronounced than that of his German colleague.

From a brief announcement it appears that Serbian politicians have somewhat softened their stance. According to President Boris Tadić's statements they are ready to further discuss with leading European Union countries and the United States the proposed resolution which will be given for a vote to the General Assembly of the United Nations; however, that there is also a line that will not be passed. It can only be speculated where this line is and who will draw it.

Unlike the discussions with other European diplomats Guido Westerwelle's tone had a sobering effect on the Serbian public. Slowly – too slowly! – there are other voices becoming heard, and they cast doubt on the sustainability of the rigid Minister for Foreign Affairs doctrine according to which Serbia can keep Kosovo and join the European Union. There are ever more voices saying that Serbia should be prepared to make concessions regarding Kosovo – it will not have to accept it as an independent country, but it will have to bear this reality. We should negotiate and fight for the rights of those Serbs who remain there.

According to Bosko Jaksić, a commentator of the pro-government Belgrade daily Politika, we should make those concessions as soon as possible because every postponement potentially means that we could lose tomorrow what could have been won yesterday. Among other things, Jaksić believes that this type of procrastination has been characteristic of Serbian politics in the past twenty years. Up until now criticism of Serbian foreign policy could be found only on web pages on the net; however, after Westerwelle's visit doubtful attitudes regarding these policies could be found in the dailies, political magazines and TV as well, and now more frequently it can be heard that this policy will lead to a "new defeat in Kosovo".

Serbian diplomats are sure that painful rela-

svoj evropski maturalni ispit, i ako u tome uspe, onda – nagovestio je Vestervele nadu – onda bi Srbija jednog dana mogla, zajedno s Kosovom, da sedne za evropski sto. Vrlo jasne reči! Sve do sada srpska spoljna politika temeljila se na doktrini da bi Srbija mogla i da sačuva Kosovo, i da uđe u Evropsku uniju. Posle Vesterveleove posete pomalja se i dilema „ili Kosovo, ili Evropska unija“. Odmah potom usledila je i poseta britanskog ministra za inostrane poslove Viljema Hejga, koji je bio jasniji, tvrdi i odrešitiji i od svog nemačkog kolege.

Iz šturog saopštenja moguće je zaključiti da su srpski političari unekoliko umekšali svoje stavove. Prema izjavi predsednika republike Borisa Tadića, spremni su da razgovaraju s vodećim zemljama Evropske unije i sa Sjedinjenim Državama o predlogu rezolucije koji će biti podnet na usvajanje Generalnoj skupštini Ujedinjenih nacija, ali da jedna određena granična linija neće biti pređena. Moguće je samo nagađati, međutim, gde je ta granična linija, i ko će da je povuče.

Za razliku od diskursa ostalih evropskih diplomata, energični ton Gvida Vestervelea uneo je prve znake otrežnjenja i u srpsku javnost. Polako – previše sporo! – jačaju glasovi koji izražavaju sumnju u održivost doktrine tvrdokornog srpskog ministra za inostrane poslove, po kojoj Srbija može i da zadrži Kosovo, i da uđe u Evropsku uniju. Sve je više onih koji priznaju da bi Srbija morala da bude spremna da učini ustupke u pitanju Kosova – ne mora, doduše, da je prizna, ali mora da otrpi nezavisno Kosovo. Treba pregovarati, i pregovori-ma se izboriti za prava kosovskih Srba.

Prema mišljenju Boška Jakšića, komentatora beogradskog provladinog lista Politika, te ustupke treba učiniti što pre, jer svako odlaganje krije opasnost da će se sutra izgubiti i ono što bi juče još moglo da se dobije. Jakšić inače smatra da ja ova vrsta odugovlačenja bila karakteristika srpske politike tokom poslednjih dvadeset godina. Sve do sada kritika srpske spoljne politike dolazila je samo sa veb-stranica stisnutih na internetu, međutim, posle Vesterveleove posete sumnje u njenu održivost pojavile su se i u dnevnim listovima, političkim magazinima i na televiziji, pa se tako sve češće čuje da ovom spoljnom politikom Srbija priprema „novi poraz na Kosovu“.

Srpska se diplomatija pak nada da će bolne odnose sa Evropskom unijom unekoliko da ublaži okolnost da ni sama Evropska unija nije

tions with the European Union will somewhat be mitigated by the fact that the EU itself is not unanimous when it comes to whether or not to accept Kosovo's independence. Spain, Greece, Slovakia, Cyprus and Romania will not acknowledge Kosovo as an independent state no matter what price – even after the International Court of Justice gave its advisory opinion. This in turn had fueled certain hopes in Serbia.

Of course, the divisions within the European Union are more of a problem for Europe itself. Even if looking from the Brussels towers it is not difficult to notice that the countries in question are themselves riddled with internal national disputes. We may refer to the simmering Romanian-Hungarian or full blown Slovak-Hungarian disputes as being daily political quarrels, a means of servicing the nationalistic sentiments or tactical moves in domestic politics of certain governments so as to expand their areas of influence. Also, it must be noted that the roots of these problems reach much further and can be found in the European legacies of the Versailles treaty.

Considering that state creation and nation building was not a parallel process in the middle-East parts of Europe, the ethnic makeup of that region has become very diverse; which means that the borders of states and nations rarely coincide. It is simply impossible to draw borders in a just fashion. When the Versailles borders were being drawn the superpowers sacrificed minorities on the altar of European peace. However, the Second World War proved that this could not be a permanent solution. Not even the Yalta meeting could change the situation much – the agreement reached at Yalta actually solidified the situation: the middle-Eastern parts of Europe with authoritarian regimes which were under Soviet influence, during the softer or more pronounced Cold War periods, swept their national disputes under the carpet arguing that those same disputes had been overcome through the dictatorship of the proletariat.



jedinstvena po pitanju priznavanja nezavisnosti Kosova. Španija, Grčka, Slovačka, Kipar i Rumunija ni po koju cenu nisu spremne da priznaju nezavisnost Kosova, čak ni posle savetodavnog mišljenja haškog Međunarodnog suda pravde. To je u Srbije pobudilo izvesne nade.

Podeljenost unutar Evropske unije, međutim, više je problem za samu Evropu. Čak ni iz briselskih

tornjeva nije teško primetiti da su pomenu-te zemlje bremenite unutrašnjim nacionalnim protivrečnostima. Razbuktaleslovačko-mađarske, i tinjajuće rumunsko-mađarske polemike možemo nazvati dnevno-političkim čarkama, servisiranjem nacionalističkih strasti, ili taktičkim unutrašnjopolitičkim potezima dotičnih vlada u cilju širenja svojih sfera uticaja, ali potrebno je priznati i to, da su koreni tih sukoba mnogo dublji, i da se kriju u ostavštini versajske Evrope.

S obzirom na to da na srednje-istočnoevropskim prostorima stvaranje država i formiranje nacija nije teklo paralelno, etnička mapa je postala veoma šarolika, odnosno, granice država i nacija se retko gde poklapaju. Naprosto je nemoguće povući pravedne granice. A prilikom povlačenja versajskih granica velesile su žrtvovalе manjine na oltaru evropskog mira. Međutim, Drugi svetski rat je pokazao da to ne može da bude trajan lek. Ni Jalta nije na tome ništa mogla da promeni – sporazum sklopljen na Jalti zabetonirao je tu situaciju: srednje-istočno-evropski autoritarni režimi pod sovjetskim uticajem, te bipolarno ustrojstvo sveta, s mekšim i tvrđim hladnoratovskim periodima, trpali su nacionalne protivrečnosti pod tepih, govoreći da su one prevladane diktaturom proletarijata.

The Yalta agreement was practically annulled with the changes in the political systems in the middle-Eastern regions of Europe, but the Europe of Versailles has proven to be a firm foundation. No other way exists, and this one is the only logical and acceptable one. Peace in Europe is unthinkable without the premise that borders cannot be changed. The question remains though – do national minorities have to continue being victims of European peace? In totalitarian regimes they were silenced and while multi-party parliamentary democracy has brought to the surface the problems of national minorities Europe would rather turn a blind eye to them. Minorities which had suffered hard repression under the previous regimes now are speaking up and demanding greater collective rights. The bigger paradox becomes obvious when we take into consideration that under the totalitarian regimes the majority did think that the communist ideology suppresses national independence – that it “denationalizes” the majority nation. Hence, from the majority as well we see that same nationalistic frustration so common to the minorities. Because of this both the majorities and the minorities expected that the change of political systems would not only bring multi-party parliamentary democracy but also liberate repressed national consciousness. The human power of those forces which brought about political changes in countries of the middle-Eastern regions of Europe was above all nationalistically minded. Western European policies, sometimes openly other times covertly, supported the nationalistic anti-communism that has, ten years after the changes, become the dominant political discourse.

This in turn explains why the civil-liberal values seen at the beginning of the nineties in the middle-Eastern regions of Europe seem to have faded, and why at the same time the concept of the nation-state has strengthened. Even though all the talk was about civil changes, civil society, what everyone really thought about was national liberation. Today Western European press lacks understanding when trying to confront the fact that, after multi-party parliamentary democracies have been established in middle-Eastern European countries, there has been an increase of populism, chauvinism and anti-Semitism. After an initial euphoric greeting of Europe there came a great disappointment with her, a spiritual closing off into the nation state - even though borders were opened up and capital is free to move in and out. With a certain degree of irony, it could be said that this is a victory

Sporazum sa Jalte je praktično ukinut promenama političkih sistema u Srednje-istočnoj Evropi, ali versajska Evropa se pokazala kao čvrst fundament. Drugog puta i nema, ovaj je jedini logični, i prihvatljivi. Evropski mir je nezamisliv bez nepromenljivosti granica. Pitanje je, međutim, da li nacionalne manjine moraju i nadalje da ostanu žrtve evropskog mira? U totalitarnim režimima bili su osuđeni na ćutanje, ali je višestranačka parlamentarna demokratija iznela na površinu problem nacionalnih manjina pred kojima bi Evropa najradije zažmurila. U pređašnjim režimima grubo ugušivane nacionalne manjine sad su progovorile i zahtevaju veća kolektivna prava. Krupan paradoks se, međutim, ogleda u tome da je u totalitarnim režimima i većina bila uverena da komunistička ideologija guši nacionalnu nezavisnost – da „denacionalizuje” većinsku naciju. Dakle, i iz njih je izbila ista ona nacionalna frustracija, koja je bila karakteristična za manjine. Usled toga je, i većina, i manjina, od promene političkog sistema očekivala ne samo uvođenje višestranačke parlamentarne demokratije, nego i oslobađanje prigušivane nacionalne svesti. Snaga onih masa koje su izvele promenu političkog sistema i zemljama Srednje-istočne Evrope bila je prevashodno nacionalno obojena. A zapadno-evropska politika ja, nekad prećutno, nekad otvoreno, podržavala antikomunistički nacionalizam koji je, u desetleću nakon izvedenih promena, postao dominantni politički diskurs.

Time se može objasniti zbog čega su građansko-liberalne vrednosti s početka devedesetih godina u Srednje-istočnoj Evropi tako opasno izbledele, a zbog čega su, istovremeno, ojačale koncepcije nacionalne države. Premda se pričalo o građanskim preobražajima, o građanskom društvu, mislilo se prevashodno na nacionalno oslobođenje. Danas se zapadno-evropska štampa s nerazumevanjem suočava s činjenicom, da je nakon uspostave parlamentarne demokratije u Srednje-istočnoj Evropi došlo do eskalacije populizma, šovinizma, antisemitizma. Posle euforične oduševljenosti Evropom, došlo je do velikog razočarenja u nju, do duhovnog zatvaranja u nacionalnu državu, uprkos tome što su granice postale otvorene, i što se kapital slobodno seli tamo-amo. S izvesnom ironijom može se reći i to, da je pobedila Coca-cola i nacionalizam, a ne evropski duh.

for Coca-Cola and nationalism, not the European spirit.

And of course it does not cross our minds to blame democracy for this since the question of national minorities can only be solved within a democratic framework; it must also be taken into consideration that democratic frameworks may give rise to serious questions, the type Western Europe has not counted on.

Namely, the European powers that be, which reign from the capitol city of Belgium (a country that is itself shaken by national disputes) give much more attention to vine quality, or protection of endangered species, than to the diverse map of Eastern European minorities. There is no doubt that the principle of the immutability of state borders has removed the threat of war and has rendered absurd the euphoric wish to fight by the militant middle-Eastern European countries. As strange as it seems, it is NATO who guards the peace of the Eastern middle of Europe, or if you will - the internal peace of the European Union!

I ne pomišljamo, dakako, da za sve to okrivimo demokratiju, pošto se pitanje nacionalnih manjina može rešiti isključivo u demokratskim okvirima, ali mora se uzeti u obzir da demokratski okviri postavljaju stvarna pitanja, onakva na koja Zapadna Evropa nije računala.

Naime, evropski oci, koji stoluju u glavnom gradu Belgije – zemlje koja je poljuljana nacionalnim protivrečnostima – posvećuju mnogo više pažnje kvalitetu vina, ili zaštiti retkih životinjskih vrsta, nego šarenoj mapi istočno-evropskih manjina. Nema sumnje da je princip nepromenjivosti državnih granica otklonio opasnost od rata i učinio apsurdnim borbenu euforiju militantnih srednje-istočno-evropskih zemalja. Koliko god čudno izgledalo, NATO čuva mir Istočno-srednje Evrope, odnosno, i unutrašnji mir Evropske unije!



From the perspective of a unified Europe aside from the principle of the immutability of borders adequate attention should be given to the status of indigenous national minorities; i.e. to unambiguously define collective minority rights as a requisite for joining the European Union. This would not only lessen the internal disputes between European Union countries but would also greatly strengthen the idea of a unified Europe. The definitions

Sa stanovišta jedinstva Evrope, međutim, paralelno sa principom nepromenjivosti državnih granica, trebalo je posvetiti odgovarajuću pažnju statusu autohtonih nacionalnih manjina, odnosno jednoznačnom definisanju kolektivnih manjinskih prava, kao neophodnom uslovu članstva u Evropskoj uniji. Time se ne bi smanjila samo unutrašnja trvenja među članicama Evropske unije, već bi se znatno ojačala ideja jedinstvene Evrope.

which are currently used do not suffice as solutions and it is not out of the question that in the future disagreements could escalate in several areas of Eastern Europe, and this would in turn seriously destabilize European unity.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia perfectly illustrates how unprepared the European political elite was to constructively manage ethnic conflict. At the very start, in an attempt to calm the growing disturbances, it sent a peace mission to the Balkans but without any defined plans. The masses did not respond well to projects aimed at maintaining the status quo and making peace between the political elites. The Slovenes and Croats were striving for secession, and with that Yugoslavia became the first state to attempt to change in a violent manner the face of Europe made by Versailles. There is no doubt that Milosević's violent politics along with the nationalism of Serbian political elites and their wish to dominate Yugoslavia, only accelerated this process - which would have taken place anyway, even in a democratic framework, with the difference that it could have been more peaceful and controllable. As a result of Yugoslavia's disintegration, on its former territories there were then new minorities for whose status no one offered a pacifying solution which would obligate all sides. That which Serbia demanded for Serbs in Croatia it did not even consider giving to the Albanians in Kosovo. This is just one extreme example from which less pronounced variations can be deduced.

It is evident that in those states where there are more numerous national minorities the ideology of the nation state and nationalism, and along with it anti-Semitism and anti-Roma attitudes, are much stronger – something that obviously slows down the democratic processes.

It is not the first time that in middle-Eastern Europe the national issues and the issue of prosperity are at odds. We are still witnessing this ourselves and it is a major blow for European unity. Rightist populism is expanding more and more and is suppressing traditional conservatism and is confronting Serbia's European perspective, modernization, prosperity and liberal democracy with national interests and being closed off in a national state which is affirming growing authoritarianism. Current occurrences are an indication that a part of Europe, to a certain extent, is following Putin's trail. It cannot fully go along this path since it does not have the oil fields he has and since it is economically in a colo-

Trenutno važeće definicije, naime, ne pružaju zadovoljavajuća rešenja i nije isključeno da će se u budućnosti zaoštriti nesporazumi na više tačaka Istočne Evrope, a time će se znatno destabilizovati i evropsko jedinstvo.

Koliko je zapravo evropska politička elita bila nepripremljena na konstruktivno upravljanje etničkim konfliktima, najbolje dokazuje raspad Jugoslavije. Na samom početku, s namerom da ublaži tek razbuktale strasti, poslala je mirovnu misiju na Balkan, ali bez određenog plana. Projekti održavanja stuskoia i pomirenja političkih elita nisu naišli ni na kakav odjek u masama. Slovenci i Hrvati težili su otcepljenju, i time je Jugoslavija postala prva država koja je namerila da nasilnim putem promeni profil versajske Evrope. Nema sumnje da je Miloševićeva nasilnička politika, u sprezi sa nacionalizmom srpskih političkih elita, njihovom željom da dominiraju Jugoslavijom, samo ubrzala ovaj proces koji bi, međutim, i bez toga, dakle i u demokratskim okvirima bio pokrenut, s tom razlikom, da bi mogao da ima kontrolisane, mirne tokove. Kao rezultat raspada, na prostorima bivše Jugoslavije nastale su nove manjine za čiji položaj, status, međutim, niko nije ponudio umirujuće i za sve strane obavezujuće rešenje. Ono što je Srbija zahtevala za Srbe u Hrvatskoj, nije ni pomišljala da ponudi kosovskim Albancima. To je smo jedan ekstremni primer iz kojeg se iscrtavaju mekše varijante.

Pada u oči da u onim zemljama u kojima žive brojnije nacionalne manjine, mnogo snažnije diže glavu ideologija nacionalne države, nacionalizam i, zajedno s tim, antisemitizam i antiromsko raspoloženje – što, dakako, umnogome usporava u njima demokratske tokove.

Ne dešava se prvi put u Srednje-istočnoj Evropi da se pitanja nacije i pitanja prosperiteta nađu na suprotnim pozicijama. Tome smo, zapravo, i sada svedoci, i to je veliki udarac za evropsko jedinstvo. Sve ekspanzivniji desni populizam, koji potiskuje sa javne scene tradicionalni konzervativizam, evropskim putevima, modernizaciji, prosperitetu i liberalnoj demokratiji suprotstavlja nacionalne interese i zatvorenost unutar nacionalne države u kojima se sve više afirmiše autoritarnost. Ono što se sad dešava, ukazuje na to da deo Evrope, koliko-toliko, stupa na putinovske staze. Ne može baš u punoj meri da zakorači tim putem, jer ne poseduje naftonosna polja, i jer je ekonomski u kolo-

nial type dependence on the West. In spite of this it is becoming clearer that, as a consequence of the specific situation of Eastern European development, one-party authoritarianism has not disappeared but just transformed. These democracies are still very frail and these societies would gladly transfer from Yeltsin's route for transition to Putin's road of authoritarianism – if they had the necessary economic strength. And since they don't they are stuck between these two options. National elites in current middle-East countries of Europe, suffering from the sickness of Yeltsinism are dreaming of Putinism. Long-term this does nothing to strengthen European unity and it will lead to a new "post-modern Yalta" which will draw invisible borders. The differing opinions within the European Union regarding Kosovo's independence already point to this danger which surpasses the problems of Serbia and Kosovo.

Of course, the more influential countries of the European Union can pacify Serbia and coerce it to make compromise since Serbia is in a specific "post-war" economic situation. So it seems on the surface that some sort of arrangement can be made. However, the nationalism that is waking up in small middle-Eastern countries of Europe is not just a Serbian or just a Balkan phenomenon; after all, it is not possible to put all the responsibility, or all the blame, on the Balkans. We should be aware that up to now Europe has not been able to find a solution for relations between countries in the middle-Eastern parts of Europe, which would not negatively affect further democratic transformation. The fact that international capital has already entered these countries, or that the International Monetary Fund is supervising budget spending, does not even from afar mean greater European unity or a victory of democracy.

***(Translated from Serbian by
James May)***

nijalnoj zavisnosti od Zapada. Uprkos tome, međutim, sve jasnije se ispostavlja da, kao posledica specifičnog istočno-evropskog razvitka, jednopartijski autoritarizam nije nestao, već se samo preobrazio. Ova demokratija je i nadalje veoma krhka. Ova društva bi rado prešla sa jecinovskog puta tranzicije na putinovski put autoritarizma – kad bi imala za to neophodnu ekonomsku snagu. A pošto im ona nedostaje, zaglibljuju se između te dve opcije. Nacionalne elite u sadašnjim istočno-srednje-evropskim zemljama, pateći od bolesti jecinizma, sanjaju o putinizmu. Na duže staze, to nikako ne doprinosi evropskom jedinstvu, nastaće jedna nova, „postmoderna Jalta“, sa nevidljivim granicama. Različiti stavovi unutar Evropske unije povodom nezavisnosti Kosova već ukazuju na ovu opasnost, koja prevazilazi problem Srbije i Kosova.

Uticaojnije zemlje-članice Evropske unije, naravno, mogu da umire Srbiju i da je prinude na kopromise s obzirom na to da je ona u jednom specifičnom „poratnom“ ekonomskom položaju. Na površini, dakle, može da dođe do neke nagodbe. Međutim, nacionalizam koji se budi u malim srednje-istočno-evropskim nacijama nije samo srpska, ili samo balkanska pojava, na kraju krajeva nije moguće baš svaku odgovornost ili svaku krivicu svaliti na Balkan. Treba uvideti da Evropa sve do sada nije uspela da iznađe takvo rešnje za međusobne odnose na istočno-srednje-evropskim prostorima, koje ne bi ometalo dalje demokratske preobražaje. To što je međunarodni kapital ušao u te zemlje, ili to što Međunarodni monetarni fond nadzire budžetsku potrošnju, ni izdaleka ne znači evropsko jedinstvo, niti pobeđu demokratije.

***(Preveo sa mađarskog
Arpad Vicko)***