

Interview: Boris Buden TUDJMAN IS YET TO BE BURIED

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(generously and quickly translated for JUSTWATCH-L by Vanja Filipovic)

Is it true that the forum in Split at which you participated was your first public appearance in Croatia since it became an independent country?

- It's true. This is the first public forum at which I was invited. And I must confess, neither Tadjman nor Tadjman's secret police are to be blamed for this.

How would you explain that exclusion?

- I have only now started explaining that exclusion - it used to seem self-evident to me. I tried to analyze not only on the basis of my case, but also on the case of famous "witches from Rio" problem. Today, we must go back to that case - not to rub it against somebody's nose, but to analyze what had happened to us, and what kind of processes took place. In other words, what kinds of processes have led to the "witches" case. If we are to analyze it critically today, the "witches" case was not Tadjman's fault, nor it was the state's fault: they did not manufacture this

case. The case started in one of the non-governmental organizations, PEN, and in an independent newspaper - both represent those segments of the society that should be the fundamentals of democracy. However, the case was then put in words by one independent intellectual, who happened to be a presidential candidate in the recent elections, receiving about 5% of the vote. I imagine that this was the most famous text written in Croatia in the past ten years - so we are talking about the most celebrated Croatian author of this period - Slaven Letica. No other Croatian text was more commented in the world as this. As the author, Letica had included this text in his book, including a short commentary that on the theory level, he was right. I think it is time that we accept the logic of his theory. Now that his presidential candidacy has passed, we can examine whether Letica was writing from the position of knowledge and what is his theoretical legitimacy.

- Why do you think this analysis must start with the "witches" case?

Examining the "witches" case is necessary not only because it is the most important thing in the world, but because that analysis can spare us a lot of illusions about phenomena such as nationalism. There is another danger: that everything that happened to us is blamed on Tudjman and others directly involved with the evils that took place around us. Some cultured folk have already expressed the feeling that those who were in power are to be blamed, which means that the rest of us are not guilty of anything.

- But if a Croatian soldier is innocent of the war crimes committed during the war, how could cultured folk be blamed for anything?

We are not talking about traditional guilt, because no one will go to jail for "cultural crimes." People who have killed should go to jails. A good portion of those who have killed are still free. So this becomes a

question about a part of our society left out of the moral and political responsibility. We must raise this question and find an answer to it in order to cleanse our conscience and to get a truly

democratic future.

- Do you view the recent elections as an important step for our civil society?

Right now, everybody is talking about the civil society that is winning. But there is also a hypothesis that the civil society and younger generations, not political parties, have won these elections. And now we

come to that concrete problem: was I able to write what I wanted under Tudjman's regime? Yes! Not a single word was censored, everything I wanted to say I did say. But all that I wrote, I did not dare to repeat out in the street, nor in the circle of people that I had studied with, nor in part of my family. And we should not forget that the Catholic church is a part of the civil society - while in normal conditions the church should be nothing more than a non-governmental organization - that the street is a part of the civil society, as is our spontaneity. We must not forget that the spontaneity of the masses under Tudjman's politics was not directed by a single autocrat, but was produced by various cultural and

religious factors, as well as non-governmental organizations - that's the point.

UNSEPARABLE PHENOMENA

- Would you dare say those things in the streets today?

Today, everything is different. Everything becomes different with the change of governments in these areas. People become silent, start to sense things - where will the new regime take us in the next five or ten years. Nationalism is out, civil society is in, and those two phenomena are inseparable and that inseparateness had shaped our fate for the past ten years. So the first thing we must do is to bury Franjo Tujman completely, which means to cover his grave and not leave it open, so that all the shameful things that have happened during the last ten years - from the Hague indictments, economic collapse and cultural shame - are not crammed into that small grave. That grave is too small to take those ten years,

the meaning of which in our so-called history we still don't know.

- Some analysts are claiming that the creation of independent Croatian state was a step toward democratization of this region, since it involved the creation of a multi-party system?

The Croatian state was never legitimized as a democratization project. Communism was not only totalitarianism but also modernism of not only Croatian, but all Yugoslav societies. Just one example: secularization. Communist atheism was not in itself an enemy of the Croatian people. It represented modernization of Croatian society in the direction of what makes every democratic society: the separation of church and state. That's something that we had stepped away from in the past ten years, but not in

the direction of democracy, rather backwards. So the following question should be about the role of the church in Croatia in the 1990s.

POPULAR MASSES OF THIEVES

- The following question is: how do you characterize the role of the church in Croatia in the 1990s?

The church simply could not resist the possibility of grabbing control over the masses, amassing power and riches. The classical Marxist critique of the church rested in the thesis that the secret of religion was not in the heavens, but in the material specter of societal life. The Croatian Catholic church in the 1990s proves exactly that thesis. It forgets all values, including the divine ones; instead, it embraces the value of participation in ideological and cultural hegemony, grabbing concrete material goods, not only in reversing the communist expropriation of its assets, but also assuming a privileged position in Croatian society. The price that had to be paid was the giving up of the certain moral categories. and it achieved that without any internal conflicts, a sense of self-defeat and paradox. And then we come to Krajina issue and what had happened in the aftermath of the "Storm" operation. It's not just about the killing. It's about massive robbery, involving not just small groups of thugs, but popular masses. The church watched that and did nothing. I wonder whether they saw this robbery as a part of

their own religious responsibility.

- At the time, you asserted that the Croatian problem was not in don Ante Bakovic, but in Archbishop Bozanic and what was expected of him? At the time, I criticized that moment in which a short but powerful democratic euphoria took place surrounding the Zagreb Archbishop. When Boaznic spoke up about the sins of the structures, one part of our public thought that this was the defining moment in the liberalization and critique of the Tadjman government. This certainly was not the case. Bozanic never questioned the fact that the Catholic church had secured ideological infrastructure of Tadjman's governance. But the main problem was that the public had expected that a single Archbishop solves the problem of democratization and he solves the immediate political questions. That simply showed the democratic ineptitude of that society.

THE ILLUSION OF SOVEREIGNTY

- You mean, the ineptitude of the opposition?

Not really, because this was not the opposition of political parties, but a democratic segment of the civil society and independent media and the people who were inside of it: that made those expectations. And what was the party opposition of Ivica Racan in the past ten years? The same thing that characterized him in 1990: silence. So it seems in Croatia you should be silent long enough, and you'll get a reward. But let's also talk about the human rights abuses. Neither SDP not HSL, nor the other four opposition parties - except for IDS - have openly denounced the human rights abuses. The politics of human rights were not seriously adopted by any political party. That's the problem that remains in the future.

- You also wrote that the hardware of the nation-state is so obsolete that the software of a modern culture cannot work? Do you think that this assertion was changed by the election results? Is the project of building a nation-state placed ad acta?

I believe that it is. That project rested on an illusion of the

sovereignty of the Croatian state. We embraced that project with the slogan: "No one gets between us and God." That was an illusion. Today, all presidential candidates, including Granic and future HDZ cadre, are aware that between us and God there are many other factors; EU, NATO, global capitalism, etc. The project of sovereignty has failed. The future Croatian politics will have to give up that project, if we want to be part of the world. The size of Croatia equals that of German province of Bremen. As a political factor, a state of that size is irrelevant. The only interesting political possibility for Croatia now is to perhaps help influence democratization processes in Serbia. This is the only opportunity for Croatia to play an active, not passive, role and retain

some of its identity in present-day Europe.

- Harsher punishment for Croatian state-makers could not be issued?

The only rational future of Croatia in a political sense is joining the EU - that is the only remaining project. I am not sure whether the ex-Yugoslavia could have become a member, if it hadn't gone into war, but

I do know that tomorrow a part of Europe will not only be Zagreb, but also Belgrade. The trip between Zagreb and Belgrade will be a trivial trip between two European cities. Separating the primitive Serb, Balkan, Orthodox and other identities from a European identity has failed. Earlier, it was claimed that Croatia had to separate itself from the Balkans to preserve its European identity. Today, we must join the rest of the Balkans to preserve it.

- And then the world will recognize that we are part of the Central Europe and not the Balkans?

But what is the meaning of that Central European identity? I've been living in Vienna for the past ten years, and I still haven't figured that out. Is it the more visible presence of Turks in Vienna than the visible

presence of any multiculturalism in Croatia? When you come to Zagreb, and when you realize that everyone there is white, Catholic, Croat, than you realize that you are somewhere deep in

the Balkans. Zagreb is truly a Balkan village.

IDEOLOGICAL BLINDNESS

- For years, Tudjman blamed the West of pushing Croatia back into the Balkans, while Gotovac claimed for years that it was Tudjman's government pushing us there. You, however, claim for years that both Tudjman and Gotovac pushed us back into the Balkans?

It's not a question of who pushes us away or toward the Balkans. The issue is that pushing us away or toward the Balkans is not a legitimate, modern cultural or political project, and neither Tudjman nor Gotovac realized that. Gotovac had that problem that he constantly tried to find the authentic identity for Croatia - something, as he used to say, that God has envisioned to be between Vukovar and Dubrovnik. God hasn't envisioned anything. There were clear European interests and concrete steps of the Croatian government, as well as complete ideological blindness and opportunism of the Croatian opposition: that's what had shaped the Croatian identity, not some irrational delusions.

- You cannot deny that the results of the recent elections have somewhat changed that identity?

The saddest thing that had happened in Croatia is that Tudjman was not fired from office, but that he died. Now, in the moment when everyone wants to legitimize the victory for democracy, the new age and the euphoria as their own personal achievement - from intellectual elite to opposition parties - they forget that the biggest part of the work was done by a simple illness. Now they are going to claim that they would have won even if Tudjman was alive. But that's not true. In this victory, we must retain the sense of defeat.

THE QUESTION OF SURVIVAL

- How are you dealing with the fame that surrounds you and the reputation of a hardened leftist?

I don't know why do you think I'm a leftist. The absence of chauvinism, support for minority rights, a sense for global issues are not only leftist characteristics. This is as if someone said that MTV was a leftist

institution. The easiest way to dismiss us was to say that we were leftist extremists. Was the UN Declaration of Human Rights written from a leftist position? Is the separation of church and state a leftist position? Have we ever lobbied for appropriation of private property? No! So proclaiming us to be leftists was the opportunity to create some sort of the political center between the extreme left and ultra right. But why didn't that center adopt the values of secularization and human rights? So we, along with HHO [Croatian Helsinki Watch, I think - VF], free media like Feral and a few anti-war and women's organizations, were branded leftist freaks. The issue of putting murderers in jails should not be concern of HHO exclusively, but of all members of the society.

- How will the new Croatia position itself toward the so-called "Serbian question"?

The Serbian question should be viewed as a problem of modern capitalism, in which exists the right of private property. The secret of the Serbian question is that it does not exist. It is a complete lie of modern Croatian history, that we must solve it in order to have a stable Croatian state. We must respect private ownership - that's the issue - and when the new government sends messages to the West saying, "yes, we will return the Serbs," they are actually saying, "yes, we will fulfill basic requirements for capitalism!"