

RESISTANCE IDEOLOGY

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This year, Zagreb will for the tenth time host the celebration of the Day of Victory over Fascism, organized by the Committee for the Square of the Victims of Fascism. The Committee was established in 1990, as a spontaneous civil initiative, after the new authorities at the time removed the signs that denoted the Square of the Victims of Fascism. This Committee was ignored by the public for years, proscribed by the authorities and attacked, even physically, by neo-Ustaša groups. However, the ideas and values that it defended initiated a public discourse among the Croatian public. Three such topics of debate should be emphasized, taking into account the influence they have had in changing the political atmosphere in Croatia:

1. the importance of non-partisan civil society initiatives;
2. the importance of antifascism today;
3. the tasks of the new political leaders in Croatia.

It is a matter of fact that influential political parties that were responsible for not letting Croatia's fascist past be forgotten did not do so in Croatia, or they did so only very shyly. Political parties are pressured by something that can be called the paradox of democracy. Politicians in a democracy always have to take account of voters' preferences. If they do not do that, if they stubbornly hold to unpopular, albeit possibly correct and honest programs, they run the risk of marginalizing the electorate and diminishing their influence on other political parties and the system in general.

That can induce a very dangerous chain of events, which might lead to the gradual disappearance of any useful or progressive ideas about change in a society. Progressive ideas are, initially, almost always minority ideas, so mainstream political parties will almost invariably not stand for them. The exit from this paradoxical situation has so far been offered not by political parties but by individuals and groups, such as non-governmental organizations and active non-partisan groups and individuals, which are the bearers of progressive ideas. They are independent from voters' influence and able to survive as unpopular minorities during the time that is necessary for their ideas to become accepted by a majority. This shows that non-governmental organizations and active non-partisan individuals are necessary in democratic societies, not only as a corrective force on authorities, but also as a source of fresh ideas, and free media are necessary as means for these ideas to reach public.

In past speeches at the Square, it was always emphasized that peace, freedom and equality represented the proper orientation for Croatia. The state was emphasized not as a myth one should die for, but as a service to the citizens. Respect for each individual's right to be different was also stressed. These are the values that lay at the foundation of today's Europe; they are the source of its attractiveness and the values whose defense was a source of antifascism. Antifascism appeared as a reaction against an ideology that advocated chauvinism, war and violence as social values. Further core values of fascism include contempt for democracy and for the freedom of individuals and human rights, as

well as a glorification of the leader and the myth of the nation and the state, regardless if it is Italian fascist, Nazi or Ustaša ideology. War crimes and genocide were just a logical consequence of such an ideology.

But, does resisting an ideology thus constitute an ideology in itself? Does it represent an ideology to resist hatred and violence, racial laws and crimes? Generally speaking, it probably does. Antifascism, conceived in such a way, is in inherent conflict with any form of rigid totalitarianism. More specifically, antifascism, in the perception of many people in Croatia, is inextricably linked to World War II and, thus, to Communist ideology. The Communist regimes that were established in Europe after World War II often proved their legitimacy by referring to their antifascist beliefs, without realizing (or acknowledging) that their regimes breached some of the same values whose defense was a source of antifascism. That is probably because the fight against fascism was the brightest point in the existence of Communist movements.

Those who oppose the rededication of the Square of the Victims of Fascism justify the crimes of fascism by stating that Communist regimes committed crimes as well. They equate fascism and Communism together. Crimes were certainly committed by Communist regimes. However, there is usually a confusion of nature of the ideas and practical acts by dictators who referred to the ideologies of fascism and Communism. This, actually, unjustly grants amnesty to the ideas of fascism. Communism is rather comparable with Christianity. Original ideas of both Communism and Christianity are the most valuable ideas of humanism, and peace and welfare are proclaimed goals of both of these ideological systems. There are few such good examples from which it can be seen that even the best goals can be endangered, if the means for their realization are not carefully selected. That happened with Communism, but also with Christianity during its long history. Contrary to Communist and Christian thought, however, every fascist idea is at its basis criminal. That was repeated at every gathering to celebrate the Day of Europe. There is no guarantee that this danger is just Europe's history. This will only stop being topical in Croatia if and when the name of the Square of the Victims of Fascism is returned.

Only 11 years ago, there was serious discussion in Croatia whether or not a multi-party system should be introduced. Today, with a multi-party system fully in place, no party advocates a one-party system, not because there are no people with dictatorial aspirations, but because that would represent political suicide for a party that would advocate such an idea. The vast majority of voters in Croatia consider the multi-party system something that is unquestionable; much like no one today questions women's rights to vote.

Recently, one MP was almost thrown out from the Parliament because of one sexist remark about women. Four years ago, Ante Đapić said in Parliament that Serbs in Croatia are no longer a political question but an ecological one. There was hardly any reaction in the Parliament and only some organizations for the protection of human rights reacted. Today, Đapić would think very carefully before saying something like that. Not because he has improved very much as a person in the last four years, but because the general mood of the public and the Parliament has changed.

The first task of those in power is to make these changes permanent, make them unquestionable. In such an atmosphere, chauvinist and racist speeches would not be

tolerated in Parliament, because their authors would face general despise and it would harm their parties. If we could learn anything from the events that are behind us, it is that such speeches do not end up in tomorrow's newspapers, but in crimes like those committed in Gospić and Pakračka Poljana.

These changes are still are not self-evident standards that are unquestionable. Politicians have to enable and foster a climate in which they can be become as such. Non-governmental organizations also have a role to play here. In that sense, the return of the Square of the Victims of Fascism should not be a victory of one group over another. Rather, it would - and should - be a victory of a civilized Croatia over one aspect of its troubled past and a watershed on its way towards being a more democratic and, thus, more pleasant place to live.

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