

INTERVIEW WITH ZORAN PUSIĆ, PRESIDENT OF CCHR

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1. After the Black legion commander Jure Francetić's monument in Slunj, it seems there will be soon raised a monument of Pavelić's deputy head of state and minister Mile Budak in Sveti Rok?

Asked «what do you think about raising a monument of Mile Budak» perhaps a lot of Croatia's citizens would cite a classical joke in which Mujo tendentiously asks Fata «what does she think who would win President elections in America». In Slobodna Ćićo Senjanović with his mild sarcasm is «shocked» over a Novi list journalists' report, suggesting they obviously were tricked by a false information because «who would here raise a monument of Mile Budak». Humor is often, sometimes the only cure for human stupidity.

2. However, you reacted seriously demanding a removal of Jure Francetić's monument?

Yes, I did, because it does not only go about human stupidity here, which can have very serious and far-reaching consequences, here it goes about promoting a crime. People who raised that monument did it not because they didn't know what the Black Legion had done, they raised it because they consider brutal persecution and extermination of Serbs, Jews, Gipsies and Croats who do not share their opinion being a good thing to do and they are nostalgic for times when such things were possible.

3. What was public opinion about your action? You spoke about it publicly in Slunj.

The great majority of newspapers' and even TV's comments supported request for the monument's removal, which was initiated by a few NGOs. Positions of some politicians like President Mesić. or HSP (Croatian Party of Rights) president Mr. Đapić were known and predictable. Mr Mesić supported monuments' removal still in 2000. when it was raised, Mr Đapić called the request for its removal «an idiotic initiative of chetnik's organizations». The new development was that HDZ's (Croatian Democratic Union) government supported the request for the removal. It could be the sign that some leading persons in the government concluded that raising monuments to ustasha's war criminals could jeopardize the main strategic goal of this government - Croatia's acceptance to EU till the end of its mandate. A very few people came to the public discussion in Slunj. Fear of extremists and physical violence was too obvious. The number of policemen and journalists almost equaled the number of citizens of Slunj. Except one drunken character who declared that all citizens of Slunj wanted to have that monument because they knew Francetić was a big Croat, and one brave woman who told him it wasn't true, and that at least one citizen, that meant herself, didn't want that monument and considered it shameful, majority of other citizens who spoke out were trying to minimize the whole problem.

A reaction of HSL'S's (Croatian Social Liberal Party) representative was a typical one. He said that organizers of that public discussion as advocates of the monument's removal were not welcome in Slunj because they caused unrest and that citizens of Slunj knew their main

problem were bad infrastructure and the lack of a kindergarten, but not «some stone». That sudden interest in infrastructure problems and kindergartens as soon as an attention is drawn to a danger of revitalizing of ustasha's and nazist crimes is typical for a certain sort of Croatia's politicians. In a public discussion organized at the beginning of 1991. following the change if the name of the Square of fascism's victims the then President Tuđman's advisor, Mr Slaven Letica said that all that noise about the change of the name of the Square was failed because there were more important problems, like kindergartens' functioning, regardless of their names.

4. In this very case is that monument being raised to Budak a wtriter or Budak ustasha's criminal, or both?

What does the «Organization of Croats from Canada, Australia and other countries» (with its representative Mr Vidaković called Šošo) that rises the monument think, I can not tell. They say they are doing it because Mr Budak is «the biggest son of St Rok». I think it won't be difficult either to find a certain amount of St Rok citizens who will declare themselves newly fledged specialists in Mile Budak's literature. But that was already seen and discussed over when Mile Budak assigned a street in Split. Raising monument of Mile Budak, naming streets after him and justify it with his literary work would be the same as raising a monument of Adolf Hitler as German painter. This analogy is not far stretched at all; Mile Budak is the author of racial laws, and from all his work the most famous is his statement that «one third of the Serbs should be killed, one third should be exiled and one third should be converted to Catholicism» and his prop-word »Chase dogs over Drina» (meaning to chase Serbs to Serbia, river Drina being a border). It was not a coffee-room silly talk, but political program which NDH (Independent State of Croatia) consequently implemented during its rule. Somebody who supports raising the monument for such a person is either a plain ignorant or a plain scoundrel! And neither of those is a reference for somebody who wants to decide whose monuments should be risen in Croatia.

5. You mentioned Mile Budak's street in Split. Why did Budak first «get» and then «loose» that street?

Arguments in favor of naming a street after M. Budak were, of course, of a cultural nature. At this point one automatically remembers notorious Goering's statement: «When I hear the word culture I reach for a gun». That procedure was aimed to relativize/minimize ustasha's crimes, so that positions that led to those crimes and were close to the positions accepted by a notable part of the then ruling HDZ, could be presented as a bit more radical patriotism. The street was renamed again, the name of M. Budak was removed a few years later (1998.) as a result of Tuđman's effort to change his position of persona non grata in international politics and to improve relationship with Izrael. In 1994. a process of «fraternization» of Split and Beit Shemesh, a city in Izrael, was carried out. At the celebration in Beit Shemesh Ivo Sanader, deputy of the Minister or Foreign Affairs, was present. M. Budak's street existed then, but in Izrael they didn't know about it. In 1998. E. Zuroff from Simon Wiesenthal Center warned the mayor of Beit Shemesh that in their »fraternal city» existed a street named after the author of racial laws in NDH which enabled killing of a great number of Jews. There was a threat of international discredit, of «fraternity» annulment if the name of of M. Budak's street wouldn't be changed . As Tuđman, for pragmatic reasons changed a part of his «Roadless», which ill-disposed European and American readers could have explained as anti-Semitic nonsense (the change was executed only in the translation, for external use), it wasn't difficult to abandon, for the same reasons, the issue of the street's name. Of course, there were a lot of articles and

letters of readers published then, protesting against the unjust world which didn't allow Croatia to name streets after its writer.

6.The monument's pedestal was placed near Catholic church and its parish priest didn't mind it.

No, he supports the raising of Budak's monument and states «that Budak should be seen as a patriot and a great writer born in Sveti Rok, and the citizens have right on nice memories...» Mr Antun Šunjić, the representative of Croatian episcopal conference reacted in a similar way, while Mile Begović, the bishop of Gospićko-senjska county declared that «Budak's monument has to be as far as possible from the church». The monument of Jure Francetić is next to rectory, too and the Church doesn't mind that fact at all. After all, graffiti can be seen everywhere that represent a combination of the cross and the sign of one, according to the Church's own statements, terroristic organization, ustasha's U. Catholic church has never said a word about it, let alone condemned those graffiti as something what is, in its very essence, opposite to all basic values of Christianity. But they are experts in indulgences and probably will find the most painless way to comfort their conscience.

7. How would you mark politicians reactions?

President Mesić condemned raising monument of ustasha's war criminal. vice-president of the Parliament, Mr. D. Milinović declared he was against it because it is noxious for Croatia's prestige, and vice-president of Croatian government, Mr A. Hebrang said that «he knew how many good things Mile Budak had done». This is a good cut through Croatian political spectrum. For all that it is a little bit shameful that most of the politicians are not interested in merits of the case, in the fact that he was a criminal and that it is, for the sake of us in Croatia, immoral to raise him a monument. They are more concerned about «what the world would say». But at least they are sensitive to the world's reaction, while they do not react at all to what some newspapers in Croatia write and what do people from some NGOs talk. (Feral has been for years publishing a column Nomen est omen, protesting against having Mile Budak's street in Split).

8.What should be done to stop praising crime and raising monuments of criminals and why such things are not sanctioned?

Let's hope it will be a good exam for the Government. If they give in here, the next thing they might expect is the raising of the monument of a big Croatian jurist, Ante Pavelić. It's high time to put a fullstop on U. If rehabilitation of ustasha's idea is allowed, which during Tuđmans reign, with all those Merčeps, Mišetićs, Vukojevićs, Đapićs... gained ground, we can say goodbye to the European Union; and that will be the least harm and misfortune waiting us in that case! And there might be kindergartens, but children in them will be thought to hate all those they will be told they should hate.