

ZORAN PUSIĆ, PRESIDENT OF THE CIVIC COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AFTER THE ATTACK HE AND HIS WIFE EXPERIENCED, ABOUT THE “NORMALITY” OF VIOLENCE IN THE CROATIAN SOCIETY

There are violent persons in the Parliament, too
Feral Tribune - Ljubica LETINIĆ
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Protecting citizens from a direct violence is primarily a task of the police, and then a task of courts. Nevertheless, in Croatia there are too many examples when violence was tolerated and punished even milder than parking violation. For ten years politics that induces violence could not be discussed as a serious social problem. It is important for as many people as possible to confront the fact that violence endangers the whole society, that it is something that should be resisted, otherwise it will bring general insecurity and knock on everyone's door. The society should be sensitized against violence. The only problem is it can be a little bit painful sometimes.



- On Sunday evening you and your wife were physically attacked in front of your home. More or less, after the fact everyone is publicly shocked, but how do you feel?

- Although it was not the first time, it is always a very unpleasant feeling. I didn't suffer any serious injury, except the blow to my knee as I fell on the concrete, but it shakes you profoundly... I couldn't sleep the whole night, thoughts about what happened and similar situations that had occurred before kept coming back to me, thoughts about suppressed frustrations that explode unprovoked in the outbursts of violence and barbarism, about violence and human species, about big differences among particular representatives of these species... You can consider it rationally and understand both social and biological reasons, but every time when you confront it directly, it is a little bit scary and discouraging.

- It was not the first time. That Vukovar's defender who was drunk in front of your house actually attacked your wife. Has something like that already happened to her?

- He attacked my wife verbally on her way from car to the house, with the standard repertoire of offences. I didn't hear that, as I was sitting in the car waiting for a free space at the parking lot. I saw a man approaching my car, I opened a door and said: "Good evening, can I help you?" He grabbed the car's door and tried to pull it out and muttered something about him knowing who I was and how people from Vukovar would get even with me. Then my wife came and begged him to calm down, he mumbled something like "cetnick's whore" and pushed her so she stumbled and hit the car. I jumped out of the car, he rushed forward and raised his hand to hit me. We ended on the floor and while I was keeping him down in an attempt to finish the fight, somebody hit my head from behind. And to make the story short, he and his brother left shouting threats, and the police came and made a record.

It was not the first attack on my wife either. She was present at the Square of Fascism's Victims in 1999 when similar savages beat people up, crushed old ladies' heads, threw tear-gas at peaceful citizens.

Anti-state activities

-Do you think that what happened to you is a symptom of some kind of a wider social picture?

- Well, it probably is. For years, the protection of human rights was in some part of society presented as anti-state activity. In a sense it was an anti-state activity, but it was aimed at that part of state

government machinery that was initiating violence, covered up and tolerated the results of violence against its own citizens. Tolerance for such violence was present at all levels. For example, during that mentioned meeting at the Square of Victims in 1999, the police didn't protect citizens from the violence, it didn't bring charge against any one of the violators, but took in some victims of violence and brought an absurd charge against them that they threw tear-gas at themselves. Or in a trial against two policemen (out of seven) who beat me because we did a sit-in protest against eviction of a mother with two children from their apartment, the Court tolerated the tactics of lawyer Vekić who was bringing to trial always only one of the accused, so the trials had to be postponed over and over again, until the process entered limitation period for instituting legal proceedings...

Unfortunately, there are too many examples in which violence is tolerated and remains unpunished or is punished milder than a parking violation. It is important for as many people as possible to confront the fact that violence endangers the whole society, that it is something that should be resisted, otherwise it will bring general insecurity and knock on everyone's door. The society should be sensitized against violence. The only problem is that it can be a little bit painful sometimes.

- How can society be compelled to face itself, to detect the problem, publicly voice it and do something with it?

- Protecting citizens from a direct violence is primarily a task of the police, and then a task of courts. If violence passes without sanctions, even if the police identify perpetrator, this is not beneficial. Judiciary in Croatia has a lot of personnel issues – a lot of judges and prosecutors have been fired and hired according to political appropriateness – and there is also hard (un)ethical inheritance because for many years prejudice based on ethnicity was tolerated. If we take the case of judge Branko Milanović in Gospić who treats rape as a form of rougher handshake, and the verdict for long-term imprisonment explains with the fact that ancestors of the accused have been riding on Croatia's back for five hundred years. Unfortunately, there are too many examples around us. All of this has lasted for a long time, the whole decade, and it is hard to overturn this back to normality. But it is important because the attempts to use judiciary as a fit maid of politics are steady symptoms of social migration towards autocracy and totalitarianism. Recently, there has been an affair regarding „Latinica“ where one of the TV reports was critically referring to Tuđman's idea of „mixing bones“ in Jasenovac. Because of criticizing this idea, *Feral* has been on trial ten years ago. Therefore, this is nothing new, but even today it caused reactions from some members of the parliament in the form of real hunt for, to paraphrase the president of the Parliament, blasphemous revealing of truth.

Instigating violence

- What can justify the society that does not want to name violence as such?

- For a decade, politics that instigated violence could not be talked about as a serious societal problem in most of the media, let alone on the state level. The last „Latinica“ (popular political talk-show) touched a small part of that, and some Parliament members demonstrated their lack of knowledge about basics of democracy and what their role in it should be as well as presented their lenience towards totalitarian ideas in the shameful discussion they led. Of course, this is not the first attack on journalists, but is significant; as television is far behind in making public things that are important revealed, and also is the most influential media and it is important things take place there.

- How do you perceive the past ten years in Croatia? This short path from the thought that the street balloon of extremism has deflated to Parliament's attack on the freedom of media and, of course, your personal experience?

- To make comparison with the Church, I will say that I perceive it as steps of reformation and counter-reformation. There are some steps that, no matter how pragmatic, are good. I think that Croatia's accession to the European Union, and this is visible, brings significant improvement. We are becoming a part of the biggest market in the world and this could, according to all indicators, and will have good economic effects. Apart from that, it will impose on the whole society certain behavioral

standards, some standards in respecting human rights that seemed like unreachable ideals during the 90s, and today it might be attainable aim. Despite my criticism towards HDZ (Croatian Democratic Party) and belief that HDZ was responsible for human rights violations during the 90s, I think current HDZ made some steps in good direction. This is a form of positive reformation. On Splitska riva in 2001, when some people held angry speeches because of the audience and some because of their deep held beliefs, HDZ was leading the movement towards isolated, closed and intolerant society that came as reaction to democratic changes in January of 2000. Today, we are witnessing a similar reaction within HDZ, something like „Cramer against Cramer“. What should I say, I am „crossing fingers“ for proeuropean stream of HDZ.

Faking changes

- Can all of this bear results if trends of reformation are exclusively based on pressures surrounding accession? Shouldn't a stable and healthy society be built from itself, from within?

- Things like this do not occur straight forward. Of course that societal acceptance of a certain civilization norm is more important, but behavior of leading Croatian politicians is also important, in line with what is expected from the leading politicians of the EU member country. All of this has impact on the public opinion and after some time on politicians as well, although at the beginning, change might have only been acting for pragmatic reasons.

- What do you think about the fact that the Parliament refuses to include the topic of violence increase towards Serbian returnees and the message that is being explicitly sent in this manner?

- In the light of recent discussions and everything that the Parliament spends time on, this is shameful but also significant. It indicates at least two things: part of Parliament members does not understand what is the job of a parliamentarian of a democratic country, and part of them confuses the concept of immunity with the concept of irresponsibility. Violence against returnees is a serious state problem that the Parliament should tackle. Unfortunately, Parliament is filled with people that have encouraged this violence. Parliament's members would have to have responsibility for the perception and reputation of the country in whose highest legislative body they sit, and receive high salaries. The message that the Parliament is sending about itself in the past few days and thanks to intrusion of some of its members in the fields where the Parliament of a democratic country should not interfere and by refusing to decide about something that is it's responsibility, is not encouraging.

HDZ's attack on HTV ((Croatian TV)

- How do you see the role of the opposition that withdrew from the Parliament hall?

- There might be some political tactics, but I think that they should have stayed in the Parliament and state their opinion, especially because this case was about television and discussion was broadcasted by television. I do not believe that the loudest and crudest members could be convinced anything, but what is said in the Parliament is being heard by ordinary citizens and so it is important that one could hear some reason stemming from that place, so that people do not listen to demagogical phrases and arguments ad hominem.



- First reaction of HRT was withdrawal, director has distanced himself from his journalist. What do you think about that and taking announced „Latinica“ about partisan movement off the program?

-His reaction afterwards has improved a bit. I have to admit that I was pleasantly surprised that they have gathered some citizens' courage to confront such ungrounded accusations. It was about time; they are ten years behind Radio 101! In the episode „State against HRT“ which preceded this one, with replacement of Tihomir Ladišić, they have not shown themselves to be fighters for independence of media. I watched the controversial show of Ladišić. The explanation of his replacement has been inaccurately presented, he has not declared anywhere that Croats have bombarded Sarajevo, he just insisted that Markica Rebić gives answer to the question: „Have Croats bombarded Sarajevo?“ which was indicated by TV report in which Rajić is threatening that he will turn cannons in direction of Sarajevo. I have driven on the relation Sarajevo – Kiseljak many times, there is twenty-seven kilometers of airline. HVO in Kiseljak did not possess cannons of such range and Markica Rebić must have known that. When Ladišić asked him that question, he did not give a clear answer. It seemed logical for him to say: listen, that is not true, they did not have cannons that could do that. However, he did not say that, he captivated the show at that key issue without the answer and that's how that show ended. Later I went to Sarajevo and Ivo Komšić, who is from Kiseljak, told me that tanks of Mladić were „cruising“ around Kiseljak, Stupni Dol, secluded and completely insignificant military-wise hamlet, is fifty kilometers from Kiseljak and was reachable only through Serbian territory. However, in Vareš, which is only two and a half kilometers away from Stupni Dol, BIH Army and HVO started cooperating in protection against Mladić's forces. This did not suit neither Mladić nor HVO from Herzegovina, so something needed to be done to stop it. They could not order this to the ones in Vareš, but Rajić, who has been transported to Stupni Dol by Mladić's trucks. However, Rajić, as lower ranking officer could not have made this decision on his own. So, he had to get orders from someone. It's too bad that Ladišić did not realize that Rebić wants to remain with false hypothesis in order to prevent the real problems and issues from being raised during the show. Of course, the easiest thing was to replace the journalist.

- How do you explain the frontal attack of HDZ on HTV, when even with the least appropriate ones at HTV they had so little troubles?

- Television is a powerful apparatus. It took almost fifteen years for it to get somewhat free, and not to be fully obedient maid of the governing politics. And politicians which are accustomed exactly to such „agit-prop cathedral of ghost“ and little disobedience is perceived as an uprising.

- I heard that you have been thinking about Einstein immediately before the attack in the parking lot. You were getting ready to write text about him that evening?

- Yes, I promised to write a popular article about his „miraculous year“ of 1905 when Einstein had published five articles as an unknown clerk at the lowest level in Patent Office in Bern, out of which two have confirmed atomic theory, and three have completely changed our view of the world. After a lot of Parliament, Judiciary and daily politics, a little bit of Einstein is something that doctors should prescribe.