

CIVIC

Stockholm syndrome

By: Daliborka Uljarević

“They weren’t bad people. They let me eat, they let me sleep, they gave me life”, said one hostage of flight 847 when liberated, abstracting the terrible drama he survived. Should this be the summary of our rights, potentials and dreams?

A recent short but refreshing trip out of this environment and talks with some amazing people brought me a number of ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, relief, for we are not alone in the challenges that stand before us, but on the other hand, new worries because of the lack of clear answers and guidelines.

What is wrong with this country and these people who can well recognise thieves, cheats and debauchers and still keep them in power? What is the reason to ignore so many, ever more frequent and worse outbursts of arrogance and violence or to accept these as something inevitably ours that we can’t do anything about? What is it that takes away the energy and self-confidence for all so necessary reforms and leaves us with resignation and hope that somebody else will do the job for us?

It is clear that there are no simple answers nor can we analyse current state of affairs separately from many influences which shape it. Still, everything reminds irresistibly of the so called “Stockholm syndrome”. A mini-poll among some young people of decent education and social intelligence shows that the expression is relatively unknown in Montenegro.

So, as a small explanation, expression “Stockholm syndrome” was first used by criminologist and psychologist **Nils Bejerot** who assisted the police during a 1973 bank robbery in Stockholm, Sweden, during which the robbers kept the bank employees as hostages for six days. The victims became emotionally attached to their captors and after they were freed even defended them in the process. Later on the term came to be used for any situation when a hostage who cannot escape or is in some way isolated and in grave danger but shown occasional signs of kindness or mercy by the person keeping him/her in that condition, becomes emotionally attached to his or her torturer. It is terrifying that this twist of conscience requires barely three to four days, while afterwards everything develops spontaneously, strengthening this irrational relationship.

In translation, at the level of the Western Balkans, because this is in no way typical for Montenegro alone, since we all share similar air here, this “international yet ours Stockholm syndrome” has been best summarized by **Dzoni Stulic** in his line “Our groove is wicked”.

Within families, this is the same principle that maintains domestic violence, a tableau where a woman suffers beatings and humiliation from her husband and defends him in it. It is a true story that a while ago, during a research conducted in Montenegro, when asked if she was ever beaten by her husband a woman answered “No, only when I deserve it”.

Psychologists speak about this as “identification with aggressor”, but it is not unheard of that the same approach was used by some political regimes in establishing and strengthening own power.

Is it possible that we suffer collectively from the “Stockholm syndrome”?

The fact is that, fundamentally, we are supporting politics based on fear, threat, power – or we start to get used to it, even to persuade ourselves that it is not that bad, to justify all arrogance of our authorities, to find it even charming, to model our behavior on it, or claim their inherent right to it. We forget that things have been different, that they can be different and that we are here to create that difference, not to go with the flow.

What are we still afraid of? That it can be worse? Well, it will be worse, trust me. Those whom you now fear feel and know your fears and the link that connects you and that gives them the audacity to be even more arrogant, cruel and violent. They are pleased with the loud silence, which they interpret as approval. It bothers them when someone dares to question their omnipotence or “totalitarian kitsch”, which **Kundera** also wrote about since “the true enemy of totalitarian kitsch is a man who asks. A question is like a knife cutting through the cloth of a painted backdrop so that we can all see what goes on behind it”.

But in order to ask we must first win a bit of freedom. The freedom which is so beautiful when talked or sung about, but which often paralyses us with the burden of responsibility and risk it brings.

This world isn't a marketplace where we buy or sell. Which is why everyone must do as much as he/she can. This is more than enough. Provided that we don't underestimate our strength and possibilities, although precisely those so-called “fathers of the nation” of ours and other tyrants with various names brought us to the point where we have little confidence left in what we should trust the most: ourselves.

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The author is executive director of Centre for Civic Education (CCE)