

For Ourselves

By: Daliborka Uljarević

As long as some of the citizens of this country feel like second-rate citizens, the state itself cannot be stable. And the government which cannot ensure equality before the law ought to be replaced.

I am one of those people who have been passed by when the Nature distributed artistic talents. I believe that there is a reason for everything, even for such combinations of affinities, and that it is up to us to make the best use of what we have. And I never felt this as a shortcoming or an obstacle to enjoy the talents with which others create artworks and to admire them for it.

There are, however, some moments when I wish I could use an art form to communicate a feeling, an image, an experience... and this is precisely how I felt after listening to the testimony of **Veselin Bojović**, a citizen of Montenegro, who spent 125 days in the Military Research Centre "Lora" in Split in the early 1990s. Long time ago, some would say, but it could have been yesterday judging by what this man is still going through.

"There, I'm a survivor from Lora... The people here who were there with me know how it was... I was very young then, 18 years old...it was...uh, all sorts...it was torture...**Luka Adžić**... I was cleaning the corridors when they brought him...they were tearing him apart, four men were beating him...they were pulling his beard, I don't know what they didn't do...there was blood...from every part of his body...Torture...I was in a cell with **Žarković's**, they were tortured...they were battered, broken, mutilated...I don't know what to tell you, it was torture...They made us beat each other, carry each other, sing their songs...We beat each other, what else, you had to, you did it...If you don't do it to him, he'll do it to you...with a bat...uh, that's all, I don't know what else to tell you, I'll give the word to the others..."

During his short speech, he was repeating "It was torture...what can I tell you...", giving us only a sketch of the horror he's been through and the traces of which are still painfully visible and audible, 18 years after, in the shaky voice of this stout man from Žabljak. And Veselin Bojović has a lot to tell us. His face, his tone, his cramped body told us more and more convincingly than the broken words that were leaving his mouth...Across from his set **D.T.**, also a former inmate of "Lora" and our citizen. He couldn't talk, but neither could he hide that he was again living through some of these terrible scenes listening to Bojović...

These are only two of many of our citizens who in the 1990s, led by the words of the then and now leaders of Montenegro, nudged on by the reports of RTCG and "Pobjeda", went to neighbouring Croatia to "war for peace". These are the people who, in spite of being uniformed and armed, in spite of all the principles of the international humanitarian law, dreamed of death as a salvation from the hell in which they found themselves imprisoned and discovered unthinkable limits of endurance. We do not find anything about it today in "Pobjeda" or in RTCG. At a round table organized by the Montenegrin Association of War Veterans from 1990 in cooperation with Centre for Civic Education (CCE), titled "Justice and Equal Treatment for the Victims of War Crimes" there was not a single camera from RTCG, which is financed by their taxes, and taxes of the family members of those who did not come back and whose remains have still not been transported to Montenegro. There was also not a single representative of our prosecution, which ought to blush before **Tonči Majić**, president of the Dalmatian Committee of Human Rights. Because, on this occasion, Majić announced new criminal charges that will involve the crimes

committed against Montenegrin citizens. The defence of the rights of its citizens is a job for the Montenegrin state, and Majić, who for many years has been fighting for the prosecution of war crimes committed in Croatia can be of great support, but he cannot be replacement. The institutions, after all, exist for their citizens, no?

In this context, the story of Veselin Bojović is important for all of us. It shows that the citizens are just consumable little clogs to this government which uses them to stay in power with just any ideology. It shows that the pattern remains the same, even when the colours change. It shows that institutions have been captured. It sends a message to all of those who believe that they are dear to the Leader that they are not safe either, because they taught him that anything is possible and that the laws are not the same for all – just like when they forgot about Bojović and his colleagues.

Justice which is due to Veselin Bojović and other Montenegrin inmates of “Lora” is for them as much as for the rest of us. Just like the justice for the Croatian citizens who were the inmates of Mornj is justice which concerns both us and them. Justice is that meta-legal and meta-political principle which helps us to evaluate the quality of political institutions and the nature of their functioning, and which has long been expressed by the slogan: live in honour, do not harm anybody, give to all what they deserved.

“New generations need to hear what the older ones are refusing to tell them” wrote once **Simon Wiesenthal**, a man who survived Nazi camps and dedicated his life to researching and documenting crimes and identifying perpetrators.

This knowledge is important in order to overcome the heavy burden of the past, whose skeletons should be dealt with before we can build a healthy society. As long as some of the citizens of this country feel like second-rate citizens, the state itself cannot be stable. And the government which cannot ensure equality before the law ought to be replaced.

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