

CIVIC

## Dialogue for Europe

By: Daliborka Uljarević

***There's 150 years separating us from this book and its message. This goes to prove that we're indeed sharing the same space with Europe, but not the same time.***

A century and a half ago **Maurice Joly** wrote a book which, seen from the Montenegrin corner of that long dreamed and slightly idealised Europe, represents a fascinating paradigm of the abyss lying between an orderly society based on democratic ruling principles and powdered up contemporary despotism in which we live.

In his version, it is a *Dialogue in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu*, these two polarised theoretical approaches to the fundamental principles of the state building. We can, to drive the dramatic impact closer home, imagine the interlocutors as EU and Montenegro, the latter represented by the one whose letter to the miners stands above the law and institutions although, of course, it in the end turned out to be a mirage, like all those other promises given to those who seek their rights in the streets.

In the sea of questions Joly tackles in this *Dialogue*, it is worth focusing on three which still represent vivid challenges for us today: the university, state prosecutors and judiciary, and the police.

The Prince was aware of the dangers coming from the youth, and he doesn't want them to "meddle in the constitutional matters at the age of 18 as if they were in a theatre". "Such instruction can only pervert the ideas of the youth and introduce it too early into the issues surpassing its reason", he believes, and is therefore more inclined to an educational framework that will mould the youth into respect for the status quo and his own person and deeds. He is carefully growing what he calls "an army of professors", made up of those who spread the convenient lessons both in and outside the academia, and crushes those who show inclinations to independent thought. The parallel in the Montenegrin mise-en-scène of this aged piece is clear. Let's just remember how little this Government has done to introduce one systemically important subject – civic education – into our schools, whose directors are still more interested in their party positions than in their pupils' interests. Or, what is our University like when it comes to critical thinking. It's a small wonder then that Montenegrin students were never bothered by anything, never having a reason to organise a protest. It's a unique example in the region and beyond, and our Prince expresses his appreciation regularly, at the annual meetings with the student leaders.

The Prince marks the state prosecutor as one of the key clogs in the system of the executive power, adding that this office, together with the Supreme Court, are the pinnacles of his influence and of the influence of his friends, who carefully monitor every attempt to move any case towards appropriate conclusion, making swift and decisive corrections to produce the opinion and decisions in the interest of his power. Can anybody remember an effective case raised by the prosecutor against him or his collaborators? Can anybody expect **Vesna Medenica** or **Ranka Čarapić** to lead the fight against organised crime and corruption? Is there another state where the dissidents are treated worse than thieves and murderers? Finally, the criminals here can always count on existential threat, passion or fervent adherence to tradition to serve as extenuating circumstance, even when kicking an opposition leader for having offended someone's family. Naturally, similar understanding for those who have been

goaded on by the devil to criticise or dare to enter politics doesn't exist. They are at best up against disparaging treatment the expression of which equals irrevocable verdict.

Machiavelli explains to Montesquieu, and our Prince applies the advice to the letter: "I will make the Police into an enormous, powerful tool, to the extent that in my kingdom half of the people will watch over the other half... There will be no secret meeting, no committee, no salon, no friendship or private encounter, without at least one ear will be listening to what is being said, in all places, at all times. For all those who have known the secrets of rule, it is a shocking revelation to realise how easily the people become spies and informants, one against the other". The similarities with the Montenegrin reality are frightening and warning.

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This is why it is high time to open up this kind of dialogue now, to choose whether we want a ruler of our bodies and thoughts, or institutions that will protect our bodies and thoughts regardless of our differences.

We can't base a society on a destructive power, and the false security we live in is much worse than a few years of turbulence until the establishment of genuine, sustainable democracy.

Changes are always coloured by risk, that is part of their beauty. We have to stop underestimating ourselves and cherishing dangerous illusions, we have to face the truth even when it's unpleasant, and break out of this ghetto psychology, in order to join Europe. The Europe where institutions are important and despotism is untenable, regardless of its form, and which is demanding from us the rule of law, stability and functional participatory rule. In a Europe like that there's no place for leaders to identify the state with themselves. But there is place for citizens who make up the state, who are ready to shape it in terms of policies and values, since nobody can do it instead of them. Neither Machiavelli's nor Montesquieu's prince, regardless which one we might prefer, for the times of princes are gone. Welcome to the times of citizens!

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