

CIVIC

Eyes wide shut or wide open

By: Daliborka Uljarević

The choice of and responsibility for the way in which we continue – with eyes wide shut or wide open – is up to each one of us individually. Let us each decide how to use this great power according to our own conscience.

During a meeting with an US official who, on behalf of Obama's team, tried to identify the challenges facing the countries of this region, after a long conversation, I heard the question: "Are you still optimistic in spite of all that you said, or do you think that in ten years or so you will still be telling an American official the same things?".

I am optimistic, although things often look bad. I believe one can always see the light at the end of the tunnel and if you open your eyes wide enough for yourself and for new opportunities, changes, and refuse to accept pre-packaged opinions and conclusions. It isn't easy. It is like swimming: you can let the current carry you along or you can dare to swim towards your goal. The truth is that both the sea and the life currents sometimes work in our favour, whereas sometimes they can just as well steer us towards dangerous rocks...

My answer to the interlocutor was that we have a great potential, but that we are currently in the phase where we have to reach an important decision of how to use it. If every citizen of Montenegro starts to believe more in him or herself, in his/her own capacities, and shed the fear of speaking our minds we won't have to have a similar conversation with another one of his colleagues.

"It is not necessary to deprive him of anything, but simply to give him nothing; there is no need that the country make an effort to do anything for itself provided it does nothing against itself", says **Etienne de la Boetie**, a writer, politician and humanist who in the XVI century wrote a brilliant piece "*Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*". His words easily bridge the gap of five centuries and are applicable to the Montenegrin reality where every damage, misfortune and dilapidation produced by this government is skilfully re-packaged with no adequate election response.

To err is human, and we all do it, and we all get to pay more or less for our errors. Except for the ruling structure which avoids responsibility, but does not stay away from plundering our resources and years.

It is everyone's right to vote according to their conscience. In Montenegro, many citizens are deprived of precisely this choice. Therefore, our common problem is the government, which has long been reaching outside the limits of democratic decency. It still prevails only through its capacity to spread and reinforce fears, to blackmail, feed corruption and crime, slander and discriminate against dissidents, and undermine the system's institutions.

But now there are no more usual suspects to blame. We are alone on our own, to analyse, as is the long standing practice in developed democracies, the successes and (un)fulfilled electoral promises from September 2006 (let us remember this date when professional patriots, led by **Ranko Krivokapić**, start counting among their major successes between two elections that they have personally restored our state's independence).

Instead of blindly obeying the words of **Svetozar Marović**, the Pasha of Budva, who has "tolerantly" advised us that we will be "wiser, more sensible and responsible" if we vote for his "Zavalas", let us count the kilometres of roads that really were constructed, deadlines respected, and the transparency of procedures of public procurement. Let us ask ourselves whether the quality of our lives increased,

whether the conditions for our further development have been provided, did the price of electricity soar legally, how many students got to travel abroad in the last three years, how much was their knowledge appreciated when they came back, did the wages and pensions arrive on time and in the amounts promised, did we have the guaranteed healthcare free of charge or did we always have to pull at our “connections”, how much bigger is the budget of an average citizens, and how much is in the coffers of the politicians from the ruling circles? Just the fact that some citizens of Pljevlja did not experience growth to the extent that their compatriots **Rajko Kovačević** or **Predrag Bošković** is enough for them not to support the coalition of parties in which these two are in power, regardless whether their names will appear on the party election list or not. In those countries in whose company we yearn to be, half of the officials would have to resign after the inspection of parking in front of *Delta* where they go in the weekends with their families using official vehicles. It's on purpose that I don't speak of the other, bigger affairs, which not only should have retired this government , which calls itself “European”, long time ago, but should have also brought some of its representatives to the professional attention of investigative judges. This is why Europe is still so far away...

They will say the system is working. Indeed, but only to serve the Leader and the Party. If you happen to be of the “wrong” political persuasion, you will have to face the most restrictive articles of a law, receive the most severe fine in summary proceedings, while the friends of the Family will be kindly asked to refrain from violating the laws ahead of elections, with a promise that once the elections are over they can go on as before.

I can bet that those who have heard of Etienne de la Boetie can be counted on the fingers of one hand, but that everyone has heard of his nearly contemporary **Niccolo Machiavelli**. And, that is a symptomatic indicator of the development of our political life and the culture of resistance and protest.

Boetie tells us: “He who thus domineers over you has only two eyes, only two hands, only one body, no more than is possessed by the least man among the infinite numbers dwelling in your cities; he has indeed nothing more than the power that you confer upon him to destroy you... You yield your bodies unto hard labour in order that he may indulge in his delights... You weaken yourselves in order to make him the stronger and the mightier to hold you in check... Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you to place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break in pieces”.

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