

Among the masks

By: Daliborka Uljarević

After 2011, which won us the freedom to talk about anyone and anything without worrying too much about evidence, the biggest progress in 2012 would be sort out who represents whom, what personal and political ambitions lie behind it, what means lie at their disposal, and who finances the whole thing.

Usually in January, around the start of the year, people try to sum up the achievements of the year behind them and make enthusiastic plans for the one that's coming. The 2011 brought little change we were hoping for, and the tide of disappointments peaked in a wave of anxiety, which only further obscures the roads to a better, different world. The already limited potential for change is now even more constrained, mostly due to personal vanity and inability to rise above it. This is hardly a novelty. A novelty would be if we made some effort to understand the reason for why we keep banging our heads against the wall and tried to find a realistic way to overcome the obstacle. That would also take some calm, which is hard to find in the midst of the adrenaline surge and the race for the most radical form of expression that would cover up for the lack of content, knowledge and vision.

One trend that sets Montenegro apart is the development of the non-governmental sector, which commands unexpected influence on the public sphere, without parallel in our region or elsewhere. In a society that had no tradition of this kind, the willingness of citizens to form associations and act through them is exceptionally encouraging. Not only is it a way to reinforce one of the pillars of democracy, the freedom of association – it is also the beginning of many useful arguments and activities. There is much to be said about the achievements of the NGO sector. But the influence it has in Montenegro, with all of its benefits, also has some drawbacks. Namely, its very success and influence has in some ways become danger to the NGO sector itself, blurring the line between civil society activism and standard party politics. This could cause some confusion at the market for votes, because NGOs do not participate in that race, even though some of them might have this legitimate ambition. In the current distribution of forces, there is much reason to cheer all those who wish to venture beyond their frame of reference and contribute to political change. This would also relax the atmosphere in the NGO sector, and stir up the stale and unproductive relationships among political parties.

Nevertheless, there is reason to worry about the lack of strategy of all those who wish to enter politics from the NGO world, as well as those in the present political parties. Revolutions don't happen on their own, although the research shows a successful revolution needs no more than six days of action. We should add here, as a warning, the popular theory of **Ralf Dahrendorf** that democracy is built in three stages: the change of government and drafting of a new constitution, which need take no more than 6 months; creation of a market economy, including amongst other things anti-monopolism, economic rivalry, and free competition with the development of a certain social protection network, which may require around 6 years; and the establishment of civil society which, according to him, needs at least a good 60 years.

Such theories, and there are many that follow a similar logic, indicate the need for a strategic approach, with detailed plans, a clear list of activities, people in charge of each, deadlines, expenses, etc. This requires a lot of commitment, work and dedication, because nothing happens overnight or through spillovers from some other areas or experiences. Nobody threatened **Ivo Sanader** with "Mitterandisation", and yet he is where he needs to be. However loud some of us may be in predicting "Sanaderisation" of **Milo Đukanović**, s/he can only be tried by the Montenegrin institutions, when they are capable of doing it.

Perhaps there are also some signs of hope in the cacophony of our daily politics. Montenegro today is a kind of *Hide Park* with a free-for-all microphone where anybody who so wishes can make his/her personal and political aspirations public trying to nudge the society in that direction. This, however, is only an indicator of the beginning of development of quality political processes. But the real progress,

the one which makes us all truly equal before the law, will come when the institutions begin to function in their full capacity. To go beyond the form of popular fiction and turn into effective policy, fight against corruption and organised crime needs well established, strong and professional institutions, which can only live up to this standard if they are free of political influence and are not led by the ancient, or even freshly appointed, partly policemen. Calling for the heads of individuals, without any real desire or effort to change the system, is no more than media exhibitionism – but its consequences can be severe. Individually, such media exposure allows the person in question some recognition, which can sooner or later be cashed in as material support or a tactical card. Socially, however, in this cruel struggle, most of all through the media, the first victims are the professions which ought to be above particularistic interests and desires for public limelight. Moreover, making vaudeville out of anti-corruption helps those who are indeed guilty or part of the political-criminal circles to blur the situation, push the discussion in the wrong direction, or simply dismiss the seriousness of such accusations.

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