

Crisis of ideas

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Judging by the consequences of the numerous crises we live through, we could say there are not enough actors offering solutions. This suggests that the biggest crisis is the crisis of ideas.

We hear about the crisis every day. For a long while now, we have been swamped by information on the global economic crisis. The crisis persists, and so does discussion about it. Then came the crisis of the euro, so big as to undermine the entire system of the European Union and demand institutional changes to make it functional again. The crisis in the Balkans has been around for decades, only the intensity and gravity vary. There are also crises in Montenegro. Economic crisis, which revealed that an outrageous number of citizens is living on the verge of survival. Political crisis, embodied in the crisis of the ruling coalition, and fed by a weak prime minister who can barely find a foothold anywhere out of the field of influence directly controlled by the president of his party.

Wherever we turn, we are facing crises. We have encountered so many of them that we almost forgot to ask whether anybody is trying to solve these grand problems. Judging by the consequences of the various crises we are living through, we could say there are too few of those offering solutions. This clearly shows that of all crises the biggest one is the crisis of ideas. This is true of Montenegro, but also, it seems, of the rest of the world could use the same diagnosis. Let us nevertheless focus on the crisis of ideas in Montenegro, the one which concerns us personally.

Representatives of the political parties constituting the ruling coalition have been in charge of the country for a very long time. This period was filled with problems which eventually grew into crises. The crisis engulfing the Aluminium Combine (KAP) has been dragging on for years, perhaps for decades. The steel plant in Nikšić is in a similar state, just like many, now defunct companies, in the North and the South. Strikes of workers, trade union representatives of various professions and students reveal the problems in each area touched by the protests. But a problem much bigger than those that are spurring the debate, protests or comments on the current crises is the lack of action to solve piled-up problems.

The case of KAP is illustrative: it has progressed through a series of refusals to find a sustainable solution. The impotence or ignorance to find the right solution at the right time has returned as an enormous bill – twenty and more million of euros, as we found out recently. Other problems that have been put on hold will eventually produce a number on the tab, and the ones to pay for all delays will be the citizens. All of this tells us that the ruling coalition isn't capable of producing ideas that would allow it to manage the problems as elected, accountable government, and eventually produce solutions. This lack of ideas is well grounded in nearly endemic corruption and well marketed idea that there isn't anybody else who could do better under the circumstances.

This leads us to the opposition parties in Montenegro and the question whether this side has any solutions for Montenegro's problems. Judging by their mechanisms of political contest and the proposals we had a chance to hear, we couldn't conclude that the opposition is amazingly rich in ideas that can't wait for a chance to make the lives of Montenegrin citizens better. They can't even offer the basic formula that would ensure regular change of government, founded on the regular electoral will of the citizens. Impotence of the opposition is only partly justified by their claim that there the political race isn't fair. They got the chance when the long-term Prime Minister and President of Montenegro withdrew from public office, keeping only the party seat, but even then we didn't find out what would change in the lives of Montenegrin citizens if somebody else were in power.

Activities of both government and the opposition in Montenegro offer plenty of evidence for the theory of mutual lack of ideas as the biggest crisis we can think of. Neither side has produced a single piece of news or opinion that would remotely suggest innovation and reflection. Everything comes down to strategic positioning and petty bickering. The result is widespread resignation and resistance to

politics. We don't think of the political sphere as a source of concepts and practical solutions to our problems, as it should be, but as a field of distribution of resources and privileges. In this environment there is no chance for those who think and create, and everyone who does come up with an idea is immediately considered eccentric. And then we wonder why the standards of living of most citizens are miserable, and why we keep running in the same vicious circle of old problems.

The most important question is the way out. If we agree that our basic problem is the crisis of ideas, what can we do, our fellow citizens, to move from the spot we've been chained to for too long? Understanding what we have and what circumstances we live in is a start. The next step is to develop civic initiatives that would slowly circumvent the network of party intermediaries. Our crisis of political ideas has its roots in partocracy. Emphasising the importance of citizens as political actors would at least suggest a struggle against partocracy. Civic Montenegro is capable of producing new ideas, it only needs to emerge from its own crisis of doubt and impotence.

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