

CIVIC

April smarts

By: Daliborka Uljarević

Our life under selective implementation of already flawed laws is being thoroughly ignored in the hope that the problems will go away on their own or with certain individuals. This hope is as naive as the April fool's joke was real, cynically uncovering the brutality of our reality and the impotence of the laws and institutions.

The 1 April joke of the daily "Vijesti" that the mega-star of the post-Yugoslav lands **Svetlana Ceca Ražnatović** is coming to Montenegro to apply for the Montenegrin citizenship and thus evade the Serbian law struck many readers as a surprising, but not unbelievable piece of news.

Željko Ražnatović Arkan's widow is being charged with tax fraud and embezzlement of other income related to the sale of players from the football club "Obilić", illegal possession of 11 guns, plus the accompanying equipment that would suffice for an entire average unit of the Montenegrin police, including uniforms, police licence plates, handcuffs, batons, boots etc. Given the situation, even these facts caused little reaction. The hearing organs of some SDP leaders were a lot more sensitive to the sounds of music aired by this artist, although they showed a lot of understanding back in the days when that or similar music was played by the leader of DPS, **Milo Đukanović**, in the moments of greatest electoral celebrations and relaxation. But what they tolerate to Milo for the sake of coalition interest they need not to tolerate for Ceca, no? It has always been the custom of such individuals to hide their distaste before the more powerful ones only to vent it all the more forcefully and fiercely on the weaker ones in order to sooth at least some of their frustrations.

The problem is, of course, not in the quality of music or even in the silicone star enmeshed in controversial activities and even more controversial friends, some of whom have already been convicted to several decades of imprisonment in connection to the murder of the Serbian Prime Minister **Đinđić**.

The problem is in our everyday reality where such surreal tropes blend in seamlessly, as we know all too well that there are no limits to abuse of the laws and institutions in the interest of the local bigwigs or the ruling parties. Even the public broadcasting service took "Vijesti"'s story without considering the possibility of an April fool's joke – in a country where every journalist is known, not only by name, but also by the nicknames in the media and on the web portals. This only goes to show that the employees of this media house, which is financed by the taxpayers, are consciously creating a parallel reality knowing that the things are far from the rosy version they serve to the public, and that they are therefore not surprised by such deviations from the rosy world.

Another interesting moment was the reaction of the responsible Ministry of Interior Affairs, begging the question of the level of intellectual and intelligence capacities of the staff, which officially denied the news of that content, originally signed by "F. April"!

The issue of citizenship is, of course, not to be made fun of. But those upset at the April fool's joke should first ask themselves how it came about. Perhaps the reason is the fact that the current law has forced almost 18 000 of our citizens into a tortuous, humiliating experience of acquiring the citizenship even when they fulfil all the conditions for it.

I don't need to go far from my own house to find an example: my mother was not born in Montenegro, but she has lived in Boka Kotorska for the last 40 years. She partly finished her schooling there, found a job, qualified for a pension, established a family, put together enough for a decent life, used her legal rights and fulfilled all the legal duties. In May 2009, when her old documents (which were regularly issued to her by the local police unit in Kotor) expired, she applied for the new ones, which unexpectedly brought up the question of the citizenship. And this is where our citizens are being sifted through. Apart from having to suffer unprofessional and unpleasant treatment from those who are

employed on the local level to facilitate our citizen's access to this process, she had to wait 10 months for legal right - her personal documents – while in the meantime her freedom of movement was significantly limited. The whole thing had to be accompanied by several attempts to reach the responsible institutions, including through extra-institutional democratic channels of protection of citizens' rights. Not to mention the bitterness at seeing some other citizens, who submitted their application at nearly the same time, receiving their own documents much more quickly. What made my mother's case so difficult? Perhaps the fact that she was born in the "wrong" place, with a "wrong" nationality and that she votes for the "wrong" parties, which altogether gives the followers of the self-declared fathers of the nation a very good reason to deny her and people like her the basic civic rights. So much for double standards in practice. Going back to the politicised and incompetent lawmakers, it should be known that the same law allows the possibility for various persons to acquire citizenship through the privileged procedure, while we never found out what it was they did to deserve such grace from our state. Therefore, it was not hard to believe that Ceca would get the citizenship faster than some of our citizens whose citizenship prospects remain uncertain.

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