

Citizen can change the system

By: Daliborka Uljarevic

We'll know that the real reforms and institution-building have began when we see a wave of insider testimonies from these same institutions, because it will mean that the employees trust the state of Montenegro, are willing to change certain things, put the public interest above their superiors, and that Montenegrin institutions are capable of leading us to EU

Six months ago, on this same page, I wrote a text titled "Systemic impunity of torturers". There, I explained that the difference in the way the police treated **Mirko Banović**, a convicted felon, and **Goran Stanković**, the first police insider and a man who in the crucial moment demonstrated unbelievable civic courage, which every democratic police would have rewarded, constitutes the most relevant indicator of the effectiveness of police reform, implementation of the laws and the Code in the police, as well as the kinds of traits the police values in its employees.

The new director of the Police Directorate **Božidar Vuksanović** decided to readmit into the police force Goran Stanković, restoring his dignity and allowing him to acquire the few years of service he still needed in order to earn retirement. For Stanković, this is at least some satisfaction and a promise of minimum material security, and for the police it is a rarely positive tangible proof of already rhetorically compromised reforms. In the midst of major, popular scandals, which implicate some very well known names, this case managed to attract little of continuous and adequate media attention. And yet symbolically and systemically, this case is much more important. Stanković's return to the police force sends a so far impossible message to all law enforcement structures, where many subversions of the law persisted partly because of unhealthy solidarity in crime, the law of silence and nearly unanimous support to this approach on the part of authorities. Moreover, this case carries an enormous value in a society where our citizens still mostly walk around with their heads hanging low, suffer through their lives rather than living them and accept as destiny all troubles that come their way, instead of confronting them by changing themselves and setting an example.

"I'm not a hero from those American movies, I'm an ordinary man", said Goran Stanković to **Aleksandar Saša Zeković**, **Tea Gorjanc Prelević**, **Stevo Muk** and me, while we sat in December 2009 in his modest home thinking of a way to protect him and his family, through our organisations and as fellow citizens. This ordinary, but in our society an extraordinary man, was for two and a half years the hero not only of this well known story, but also of a cruel personal drama that made him face the consequences of a well chosen, but difficult road. On that road, nobody could help him enough, and he stoically suffered through it. And he proved that the only rule we should live by and which preserves the citizen in all of us is to do what we honestly believe to be right, without calculating payoffs.

An individual can only do so much, but by refusing to be part of societal perversions, sooner or later he inspires others to follow. And to make sure that this individual, in this case Goran Stanković, does not remain a defeated winner, it is the task of all of us to point out and testify about irregularities, and to keep reminding that there is still much under the carpet of the police forces, that it's necessary to punish those officers who made it famous not by protecting the public law and order but by being subject of serious accusations of having threatened human rights researchers, or by torturing and mistreating some of our citizens, as established by courts.

Only effective political will to make the institutions, in this case the Police Directorate, professional, can result in dozens of employees speaking up against irregularities and offering evidence, knowing that the system will protect them against all forms of prosecution which officer Stanković had to experience in the past years. Undeniably positive move on the part of the Director of Police Directorate is by far not enough to persuade us that it's only the first step towards systematic development of reputation of a police officer as someone who is capable and ready to risk his or her life in order to defend public interest. But this is also the only way to make sure that inspector **Slavoljub Ščekić** is the last one who had to pay with his life the fact that he did his job well. The pace of development of a functional democracy in Montenegro, and consequently its integration into European Union, will depend on the speed with which we can construct institutions which have the capacity to apply the law equally to all, regardless of whether one is a political, business or mafia boss, or belongs to the 99% of the citizens of Montenegro who don't enjoy any privileges.

We'll know that the real reforms and institution-building have begun when we see a wave of insider testimonies from these same institutions, because it will mean that the employees trust the state of Montenegro, are willing to change certain things, put the public interest above their superiors, and that Montenegrin institutions are capable of leading us into EU. On that day, insiders won't be lonely exhibitionists, but an integral part of a quiet, committed force of public employees secure in believing that every step they make to unearth corruption brings Montenegro one step closer to the values of a civic, European society.

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