

CIVIC

## Barbarians of our times

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I am convinced that amongst the “Barbarians” there are those for whom being part of that fan club is a way to express their affection for their city, their football team and the sporting spirit. There are also those who rely on the atmosphere and permissive environment of a sporting crowd to vent, within legally sanctioned boundaries, frustrations with their own miserable circumstances. That’s also fine. But those who hide behind the screen of fandom in order to spread intolerance, hatred, fear and violence must be held responsible, and the “Barbarians”, as organisation, must distance itself from such individuals. There is nothing honourable or manly in attacking people who act under their own name in an anonymous communication, which contains clear elements of violation of law. There is nothing brave in assaulting others, in a larger group and under the cover of the night, and then running away from the responsibility. There is nothing about brutality that safeguards the future of Christianity – as confirmed by a more relevant authority, rector of the Faculty of Theology **Gojko Perović**, who condemned the attack, calling it a sin.

Montenegro's everyday reality reflects deep scars from the recent past and consequences of illnesses we never managed to overcome, and which only change the form, while continuing to undermine the health of our social organism. These are processes we mustn't ignore any more, and the best example is the recent attack on the director and actors of the video “We're part of the team”, **Danilo Marunović** and **Todor Vujošević** and their friend **Mirko Bošković**, a journalist of RTCG.

This is only one indicator of the same xenophobia, which in the past erupted in aggressive nationalist hatred with tragic consequences. Just recall the deportations of B&H citizens, Bukovica, Kaluđerski laz, Štrpci, Morinj... Twenty years later there has still been no adequate legal epilogue to these crimes, nor to many other cases of torture, all stemming from the hatred that some Montenegrin citizens directed towards the other and different. When such hatred receives no punishment, and the politicians resort to irresponsible flirtation with complex and sensitive identity issues, it only changes target, without ever disappearing. This is how today, in a country which began negotiations with EU, we can still have physical and verbal attacks on the members of the LGBT population or on those who through their personal and professional engagement try to contribute to development of a contemporary notion of human rights: where all citizens have equal chances, regardless of the differences which are integral part of their identity.

Let us rise from the level of one act of hooliganism of those who know no other way to express themselves, or of loafers who demonstrate their superiority in anonymous offensive internet comments in an attempt to discredit everyone who is not just like them. At a risk of digressing, it is worth noting that any media interested in maintaining credibility and legality in a contemporary democracy shouldn't publish such comments to begin with.

This is not about conflict between some “Barbarians” and those who support their acts and attitudes and some NGO activists, international organisations and institutions who are by the victims. This is about a clash of worldviews. The former are ready to attack, trample upon and eliminate those who they don't accept as part of their team, and the latter believe that human rights are a universal category that must be defended by all available legal and legitimate means.

The attitude towards such conceptual differences in the development of the Montenegrin society will be the key testing ground for the Montenegrin institutions. In addition to investigating and prosecuting perpetrators, these institutions should also worry about our capacity to accept differences. And this capacity will set the dynamic for the growth of the civic and European in Montenegro. This is why this case is much more than a physical assault on a three guys or a verbal attack on three NGO activists. This is also an attack on the constitutional foundations of Montenegro as a democratic state, which ought to protect the rights of its citizens, and be efficient in sanctioning those who violate their basic rights and spread hatred and violence.

We are all free to choose our lifestyles, as long as we don't infringe on the rights of others. This is why we, members of the NGO sector, act and react within the boundaries of our personal and organisational abilities, to protect the rights of vulnerable groups and individuals. This is an exhausting, sometimes Sisyphus' struggle, which only brings fruit in the long run, and in the meantime brings us many enemies. However, all of us who do it have made a conscious decision to, contrary to the current practices of the Montenegrin society, insist on and keep defending the principles we sincerely believe in, and which are the basis of the modern civilisation, whose benefits all of our citizens deserve to enjoy, regardless their differences. You may like or dislike our work, we can surely argue about it, but violence and insults are not part of the game we consider fair sport.

Most of the members of "Barbarians" come from the younger generations, which are yet to start their own families. Even so, they should think whether they would like their children to come home with a broken nose because someone didn't like their hair colour, their laughter, their friend, their partner or their choice of clothing... Who has the right to tell us how to paint our hair, how to laugh, with whom to socialise, who to sleep with, what to wear? This kind of street-level censorship and violent intervention is normally the herald of society's decay into fascism. I don't want to see our society become ridden by legal insecurity, discrimination and street justice. I hope the "Barbarians" wouldn't like it either, because you never know when in such societies somebody might assault you, perhaps for being a "Barbarian" and thus against somebody's tastes. I would always condemn such discrimination and violence as well, because our tolerance should only stop at the boundary of violence – whoever the target, and whoever the perpetrator.

And finally, let us not forget our politicians who don't have the strength to publicly take a stance on these different visions of society's values. They prefer to bury their heads, calculating which option would bring them more votes. They are in fact the most responsible for the climate we live in, for the production of violence, for the grave economic and social circumstances in which some people may feel better if they beat up someone who thinks differently, even if that isn't going to fill their fridges. Like it or not, we all have to accept others on our way to EU and towards full democratisation. As well as responsibility for our own acts. Which is only the manly and honourable thing to do, right?

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