

Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

An International, Interdisciplinary, Bilingual, Online Journal
Međunarodni, interdisciplinarni, dvojezični, online časopis

Letter To Dobrica Ćosić

Gajo Sekulić

At a roundtable on the topic of “Yugoslavia in World War II in 1941,” held in Belgrade on July 2nd and 3rd this year [1991], I asked for the floor after your presentation. I searched for an answer to one of your arguments. The dialogue had just started, and you and I agreed publicly to continue the dialogue via letters because of the lack of time at that moment. In the meantime, on July 9th, The Borda published a text under the title, “The Break Up of Two Ideological Illusions,” “as a compilation of unauthorised statements, rejoinders, and responses by Dobrica Ćosić” from the above mentioned roundtable. I now take the liberty with an open letter addressed respectfully to you, first, to repeat all that I said to you at the roundtable in Belgrade and, second, to give in part my comments on this text recently published in The Borda, I assume with your permission.

I said the following on July 3rd in a short written discussion, which I quote:

1. Great writers have the right and even the obligation to be sceptics and pessimists. During these moments, however, the scepticism and pessimism of great writers, among whose is Mr. Dobrica Ćosić’s, becomes a public matter. Great writers are now expressing themselves differently, not just in books, but also in speeches, essays, and interviews, and this becomes a matter of great political importance.

2. Your thesis that “the historical awareness of the Serbian people has been irreversibly defeated by the breaking up of Yugoslavia” requires a comment on the following two questions: First, is a break up of Yugoslavia considered a finished story? Second, under the expression “the historical awareness of the Serbian people” do you consider the democratic public of Serbia, to which Mr. Dobrica Ćosić gave a huge contribution over more than two decades? That is, do the citizens of Serbia and the Serbs who live in other republics—who are guided by the principle that the basis of democracy is a sovereign citizen and not a nation—belong inside your category?

If we take the break up of Yugoslavia to be a finished fact and if we consider by “the historical awareness of the Serbian people” a much narrower meaning from the one that I described above, then comes the following question: What is the consequence of the thesis that the Yugoslav break up is a finished fact with regard to the two possible scenarios to the “break up” of Yugoslavia? First, the horrible alternative of the break up through a civil war and, for me, through a religious and interethnic war that will

strike my Bosnia and Herzegovina the most (where I have lived for almost forty years) or, second, the splitting up of Yugoslavia in a way that is conducted with long-term, unwarlike, and stable procedures.

If one opts for the first (which I trust that Mr. Ćosić does not have in mind), then the break up of Yugoslavia is carried out and can only be carried out only through the one-sided projects of creating sovereign nation-states, which are not truly possible based on the assumptions of these present crazy times except through blood and the sacrificing of citizens' lives as hostages or vassals of their nations' fathers.

My primary motive for raising these questions, and especially the most important ones, lies in the inconclusiveness of the current arguments about the break up of Yugoslavia as a finished fact and in not accepting any violent means in the change of internal and external borders of Yugoslavia. Under violent means, I refer to not only the announced war games occurring everywhere, but also the narrow, one-sided, and allegedly democratic procedures of establishing new borders for Yugoslavia with its neighbours. I refer also to the one-sidedly established sovereign nation-states at the republic and autonomous province levels, with all their legality and legitimacy, without any other federal procedures.

Transitions are still possible, but under the condition of acceptance of a wider circle of participants and wider forms of agreements about the future of Yugoslavia. It would therefore be appropriate in Yugoslavia to give hearing to a civil democratic public and political actors who give arguments and not prophesies. For the first time, through an adequate, long-term democratic procedure it is possible to constitute a new democratic joint state where the sovereign citizen as an individual would propagate his sovereignty in the form of the sovereign authorities on the levels of municipalities, regions, republics, joint states, and the European Union. The situation calls for peaceful and patient understanding as well as the harmonisation of even the most opposing solutions for our future.

Besides that, the project of creating sovereign nation-states, especially for those who already announce the "division of Bosnia" would put us back for many years. I do not have the intention of persuading a writer with such creativity as yourself of the fact that the hope to save Yugoslavia without bloodshed still exists. As an admirer of your work, I am, however, forced to ask: Why did you get tired and lose your breath so fast, and of all people you, who was an inspiration and hope for others in the most difficult times in the old system?

The power of the arguments that you bring in favour of the thesis regarding the historical exhaustion of the Yugoslav nation and Yugoslavia and that Yugoslavia has been a state roof over the head of all Serbs for seven decades is tremendous. You write in *The Borda* that, "the vital cohesive strength of the Yugoslav multinational state is too weak to endure each serious temptation," that "Yugoslavia is a state which could not bear war nor peace, nor dictatorship, nor a disintegration process," but that "every night fall ends with sunrise," and that "two ideological utopias fell into pieces: the Yugoslav nation and totalitarian socialism" and "Hegel offers us a dialectic comfort: everything that wanes, wanes for reason. And evil creates good, too" (quoted from *The Borda*, July 9th, 1991).

I cannot get to such important issues with such a short letter, but I would dare ask two more questions of you: First, your thesis that contemporary events defeated the Yugoslav nation as the nucleus for Serbian national awareness is multilayered, and we would need a good archaeologist to dig up just the newest. Do you not think that this same argument is just as applicable, although in relative respects, to the other peoples in Yugoslavia? If that is indeed correct, then, here is my second question to you. The stipulation that the Serbian national awareness is primary or maybe even the only one with its basis in the Yugoslav nation, which you do not actually claim, needs to be qualified. I do not deny the claim, but I would simply add that with it you have opened up a new problem. The problem is the assumption about the overlapping of the nation with the state, which is more typical for Western Europe and less for Middle and Eastern European countries as multinational communities.

On the basis of insufficiently deliberated assumptions, the main message of your thesis regarding the “big defeat” of the historical awareness of the Serbian people due to the “break up of Yugoslavia” is that Serbia has lost its state and now has the historical right to create its own sovereign state. You do not say this openly but poetically at the end of your text in BORDA where you conclude that “the dawn of our historical existence in the 20th century now arises.” You know very well, as I do, that there exists not only in Serbia political forces that want to create a “Greater Serbia.” Your poetics can be manipulated with various scenarios of evil, and this is the reason I write you this open letter. The scenario of creating a “Greater Serbia” is the same as the scenario of creating a “Greater Croatia.” It is the same even as the light-headed manner of dissociation and secession of Slovenia from Yugoslavia, which, all together, causes the destabilisation of Europe, Yugoslavia, and especially Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A heavy historical responsibility is upon you and your words because you can indeed do much for a peaceful and the democratic solution to the crises of the citizens in this country.

To conclude, I mention to you now that I, too, know at least some sides of the Serbian soul from my personal experience as a Montenegrin of Yugoslav origin and because I attended school in Užice, Valjevo, Kragujevac and finished five years of grammar school in Požarevac. My grandfathers were much like the heroes in your famous novels who fought in the Balkan wars - both won Obilic’s medal in World War I and one of my grandfathers died as a commander of a partisan battalion not wanting to join the Communist Party in 1942. I will never forget those days in Požarevac when the immediacy and everyday support of my close friends, teachers, and professors of the famed grammar school from the 19th century as well as the gymnasium helped me endure the tension between my body and soul because my soul was most often on Goliotok together with my father.

Translated by Amila Čelebić - © 2007 Amila Čelebić

Published with permission of the author

From *The Individual and Violence - 1991: Open Letters against the War*
(Rabić, Sarajevo, 2006)

The preceding text is copyright of the author and/or translator and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.