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Bosnian Friend (1870)

Fra Antun Knezevic

Let our neighbors be very angry about our pride in our old name, language, and customs and our outright refusal to embrace their name as a mark of our nationality and language. In their attacks on us our neighbors—to be quite clear, let us call them Jovo and Ivo—are in agreement. But they both are asking from us something else because they can't for the life of them see eye to eye on this. Our friend Jovo wants us to take on his name, while our friend Ivo says, "no way, Bosniak, you are mine and you must embrace my name." And so they go on back and forth, never bothering to ask us. Our friends, out of sheer love for us, and from endless quarrel, would have torn us apart and, had we not got used to it, we would have to turn to stone with astonishment. But as things are as they are, we will ask those friends of ours who write and publish: why do you so quarrel over us when you know full well that a Bosniak has of old been proud of his language and has called himself by his own name, that he has been devoted to his traditions and has kept the memory of his ancestors. The glorious tarih (history) of our dear homeland reminds us of those times when our native gentry at every opportunity spoke clearly and openly of their nationality, calling themselves by the proud and heroic name of Bosniak. We look at many documents of our writers from the centuries past in which our true national name of Bosniak was mentioned, and that is the reason why we, too, as their grateful and faithful descendants, call ourselves by the glorious name of Bosniak. We shall not and we must not give that up; we shall keep that name faithfully and constantly. We are proud that it was our very language, from our own homeland, that was taken as a basis for the literary language of our neighbors Serbs and Croats. The famed linguists Vuk, Karadzic, Danicic, and Ljudevit Gaj transferred our beautiful language into the literature of both said nations, so they started calling it as they wanted, the ones Serbian, the others Croatian, never bothering to mention us at all. We surely have the right to be proud of the fact that today our friends Jovo and Ivo are using our language in literature, and that at least everybody will concede to us. But we can never understand why the name they arbitrarily, without asking us, gave our language they now want to impose on us by all means, even barring us from calling our language in our own home by the name of our people. It is as if someone else were to give a name to our child of his own accord. That kind of behavior and that kind of demand we do not approve of and are by no means agreeable to. We, however, pay our due respect to both of our friends, the Serb and the Croat. We do not look down on their own nationality; we do not look askance at them, and we will never deny that we are of the South Slav tribe. But we want to prove to everyone clearly that we are Bosniaks and that we belong in the first tier of that glorious ancestry. We always remain Bosniaks, just as our forefathers were. So, let our brothers take a good look around the country and see for how many centuries they have dwelled and lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and yet they still want to be Serbs or Croats. Let them examine this thoroughly and think it through.

Translated by Omer Hadžiselimovi?

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