Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

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

JMBG: Because It Can get Worse

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The most massive protests over the failure to adopt the Law on the Unique Master Citizen Number (JMBG) were held June 11, 2013, when thousands of citizens came onto the streets. As the most radical act carried out after the war, these protests were a blockage of the B&H institutions. The protests were characterized by the peaceful gathering of citizens who demonstrated against the irresponsibility of their politicians. Due to the non-existence of JMBG, babies born since February 2013 in B&H are, in fact, at risk of higher mortality: they are unable to travel beyond the borders of B&H to receive medical treatment outside the country. Failing to adopt JMBG, which provides a newborn citizen with his or her personal identification number, represents an unjust attack on the rights of the citizens of this country. The situation was enough to trigger massive protests among citizens, especially after hearing of the case of Belmina Ibrišević, a three-month-old baby, because she could not travel outside of the country for needed medical treatment.

For the first time, citizens stood together in a blockade. They were standing next to each other, and it did not matter who was who and to whom or to what each of them belonged. The blockade showed one more time something of which we are all aware: the lack of political initiative on important issues is to blame for the current situation in B&H. A country with a high rate of unemployment, with people in retirement receiving minimum income, with high levels of corruption, and with citizens on the edge of existence provides sufficient reason for protests and demonstrations. The common goal of the citizens was a shared one–the end of delays in the required work of the state political structures. The people in power have been behaving unprofessionally when they try to depict the blockade to be less important by making lame statements about the protests as an attack on the political structure and depicting it as undermining the good reputation of B&H. Of course, from this perspective, it is quite logical that the political structures are convinced that behind a group of people who disagree with them stands the opposition. And why is that? Because they themselves would never have anything done without looking for their own benefit, and they view the whole world as such. These protests involved citizens from all walks of life, from parents, students, people in retirement, taxi drivers, laborers. Some of the most pressing issues of the population were finally articulated.

With these protests the citizens fought for their children's rights, but the actual core of the protests had been embedded in the general social picture as well as the

resistance to the nationalistic politics which have dominated the postwar era. After the blockade ended, everything was done to hold people together so as to involve as many people as possible with the case in order to keep the protests strong. The question is, have we been all united and have we all been involved? Speaking of unity, it is clear that people from the other entity were not supportive of the JMBG protests in Sarajevo, which naturally questions the solidarity. People from other towns gave their support, but it was not enough. Where were the rest of the people during those days? Was it fear? The fear of changes that could occur or ”this is not my concern” or ”nothing will happen out of these protests”? It is important to mention that we still expect others to solve our own problems, and it is always somebody else who is to blame for those problems.

Despite all the mistakes that occurred during the protests, this new experience could indeed help us both in conceptualizing the organization of protests and in pursing our goal. It could be that most of our citizens are still unable to see clearly the true image of our country, but it could soon be shown clearly to them. The protests for JMBG could serve as a positive motivation and recognition of the fact that the division into ‘Your’ problems and ‘Our’ problems is not a solution that takes us to the same goal. Our problems are supranational. It is up to us to decide if our political demands are going to become our common, compelling, articulated demands. Because the question, Can it get worse, has only one answer: If we remain silent and just keep suffering, then of course it can.

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