

Letters from Serbia - the 5th

Good and Bad Tycoons

by László Végel

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The daily newspapers have reported of Branimir Nikolić Brančić's suicide – he was one of the better known members of the resistance movement Otpor. After the fall of Milošević (October 5th, 2000), he applied himself to investigating the business mafia – the newly rich tycoons. As a lonesome knight, completely independent, he began the complex and dangerous job of confronting these tycoons.

The circumstances of his mysterious suicide have not been commented on (even) by former members of Otpor, some of whom now occupy high ranking positions in the political establishment. Through strength and moral energy Otpor had, in 2000, successfully helped to topple Milošević. However, later it turned out that it was easier to topple Milošević than to deal with the mafia. Some of the members of Otpor, and that rebellious generation, have found their place in the establishment, while others have taken a step back from the public life. These young people belonging to the generation of "illusions lost" who worked through their best years in Otpor, let their voices be heard from time to time from somewhere on the margins, while those who got rich during Milošević's reign are still making profits.

Nikolić was one of those idealists who took the 5th of October revolution very seriously and honestly believed that Serbian society could be purified. Today it is, unfortunately, obvious how naive this idealism was. Until October 5th the anti-Milošević demonstrations were equally attended by those who wanted to remove a plebiscitary dictator because he lost four wars in a row, as well as those who wanted to remove him for star-

Pisma iz Srbije, 5.

Dobri i rđavi tajkuni

od Lasla Vegela

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U dnevним novinama je osvanula vest da je Branimir Nikolić Brančić, jedan od markantnih članova nekadašnjeg opozicionog pokreta Otpor – izvršio samoubistvo. Posle Miloševićevog pada (5. oktobra 2000.), posvetio se razotkrivanju biznismena-mafijaša, novoobogaćenih magnata. Posve fakultativno, na način usamljenog viteza krenuo je u složen, opasan obračun sa tajkunima.

O okolnostima misterioznog samoubistva čute (i) nekadašnji članovi pokreta od kojih su mnogi na visokim funkcijama u aktuelnoj vlasti. Svojom monolitnošću, moralnom energijom, Otpor je 2000. godine uspešno doprineo padu Miloševića, međutim, kako se kasnije ispostavilo, bilo je jednostavnije oboriti Miloševića nego razotkriti mafijaše. Deo „otporaša“, te pobunjene generacije – naime – ugradio se u strukture vlasti, ostali su se pak skeptično povukli iz javnosti. I tek s vremena na vreme se čuje sa periferija javnosti poneki glas onih pripadnika generacije „izgubljenih iluzija“ koji su svoje najlepše godine proarčili na otpor, dok profiteri Miloševićevog režima, umnoženi, i danas skidaju kajmak.

Nikolić je spadao u red onih idealista koji su 5. oktobar 2000. godine shvatali krajnje ozbiljno, koji su iskreno verovali u mogućnost pročišćenja srpskog društva. Danas je već – na žalost – posve jasno, koliko ja taj idealizam bio naivan. Sve do 5. oktobra zajedno su defilovali na antimiloševićevskim demonstracijama oni koji su hteli da smene plebiscitarnog diktatora, jer je za redom izgubo četiri rata, i oni koji su protiv njega bili zato što



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ting those wars. In the demonstration masses there were nationalists and liberals, as well as dissatisfied members of the secret police. The demonstrators were supported by tycoons and by some parts of the paramilitary formations. We could go on in listing the makeup of that colorful mass! Everyone got something out of the October 5th revolution - there were even some comical situations because many rushed to Belgrade at the last minute, when all had already been decided, only to be as close as possible to the now opening positions of power. Only the idealists lost.

The Parliamentary building was still in flames when the fight for the division of power started. These days, the repercussions of this fight are coming to the forefront. The Anti-Corruption Agency has been insisting that, in accordance to the new law, no one can hold positions both in the executive and legislative branches of government at the same time. It turned out that more than 1500 people would have to step down from either of their positions. On the other hand, those holding more than one position are requesting that the Anti-Corruption Agency allow them to continue with this status. Of course, this is just the tip of the iceberg, since these are only the cases which are regulated by law. As it turns out the vast majority of politicians have been greedily collecting positions, especially in executive boards (which are very well paid) - while this practice is not illegal - it is "just" a symptom of the aforementioned power struggle.

Branimir Nikolić took his ideals seriously - probably too seriously. Right after the changes of 2000 he started insisting that it must be investigated how some of these tycoons accumulated their wealth. The tycoons promptly sued him, the court fined him, but since he did not pay the fine he ended up in jail - all the while the "new capitalists" who got rich under the Milošević regime, went about their business, and even today we still don't

je te ratove pokretao. U masi demonstranata našli su se i nacionalisti i liberali, ali tu su bili i nezadovoljni pripadnici tajne policije; demonstrante su podržavali i tajkuni, ali i delovi paravojnih formacija, i mogli bismo još nabrajati ko je sve činio ovo šaroliko društvo! I svako je izvukao neku korist od 5. oktobra - bilo je i sasvim komičnih situacija, mnogi su u poslednji čas pohitali u Beograd, kad je tamo već sve bilo odlučeno, samo da bi se našli što bliže foteljama - jedino su idealisti izgubili.

Zdanje parlamenta je još bilo u plamenu, kad je počela borba za raspodelu vlasti. Posledice te borbe ovih dana fatalno dolaze do izražaja. Agencija za borbu protiv korupcije, naime, insistira da, u skladu sa nedavno donetim zakonom, niko ne može istovremeno da bude na funkciji i u izvršnoj, i u zakonodavnoj vlasti. Ispostavilo se da bi više od 1500 osoba trebalo da odstupi s jedne ili druge funkcije. Multifunkcioneri pak sad masovno traže od Agencije za borbu protiv korupcije da im se odobri obavljanje dve funkcije. Mada je to tek vrh ledenog brega, jer je reč samo o onim slučajevima, koje zabranjuje slovo zakona. Ispostavilo se da je ogromna većina političara pohlepno skupjala funkcije, naročito članstva u dobro honorisanim upravnim odborima, što zakonom doduše nije zabranjeno, već je reč „samo“ o borbi za vlast...



Branimir Nikolić je svoje ideale shvatao ozbiljno - verovatno i previše ozbiljno. Odmah posle 2000. godine, počeo je insistirati na ispitivanju porekla bogatstva nekih tajkuna, na šta su ga ovi tužili sudu, Nikolić je osuđen na novčanu kaznu, i pošto nije platio, strpan je u zatvor. A „novokapitalistima“ koji su se obogatili u Miloševićevo vreme, nije usfalila ni dlaka sa glave, i ni do danas se ne zna na koje su načine stekli svoja enormna

know how they amassed their fortunes. Our current Minister of Justice recently commented on how independent the courts use to be. She said that there were cases where political parties "delegated" their own people to the courts. It is also well known that political parties are financed by the tycoons.

bogatstva. Koliko su sudovi u Srbiji bili nezavisni, o tome je upravo ovih dana govorila ministarka za pravdu. Rekla je, naime, da je bilo slučajeva da su partije „delegirali“ svoje ljude u sudove. A opšte je poznato da partije finansiraju tajkuni.



After he did his time in jail, Branci came to terms with the fact that the people he had named and suspected were not actually that important. There were far bigger predators on the scene. The media is full of reports about mafia members and the state seems powerless to deal with them. It isn't a question of this or that mafia boss, but of the tycoons who, as if they were playing chess, hold the government in check move. A testament to the enormity of their power, to how influential they are, is the recent resignation of Radovan Jelašić (former Governor of the National Bank of Serbia) – he was severely criticized by tycoons during the past weeks because he refused to make interventions using Serbia's foreign currency reserves to slow down the Dinar's fall in relation to the Euro. The Euro's climb was causing losses for those holding a monopoly on import. The Governor wanted instead to stimulate Serbian exports and was supported in this decision by the International Monetary Fund. Jelašić warned in vain that if the government continues to try to solve the budget deficit with loans Serbia will be facing the "Greek scenario".

So it happened that the tycoons won that battle and the Governor, citing private reasons, handed in his resignation. It was clear to him that he had no chance against a far mightier opponent. He just said that he did not make this decision under political pressure. His explanation is acceptable but not

Branči je odležao svoju kaznu zatvora i suočio se s činjenicom da osobe koje je on osumnjičio, zapravo i nisu bile tako važne. Na sceni su se pojavili mnogo krupniji grabljivci. Mediji su prepuni u poslednje vreme vestima o mafijašima, a država je, čini se, nemoćna. Nije reč samo o ovom ili onom narko-bosu, već o onim tajkunima koji drže vladu u šahu. A kolika je njihova vlast, koliko su uistinu uticajni, najbolje pokazuje da je i Radovan Jelašić, guverner Narodne banke, bio prinuđen da podnese ostavku, nakon što je poslednjih nekoliko nedelja bio izložen oštroj kritici tajkuna, jer je odbijao da intervencijama iz deviznih rezervi zemlje uspori slabljenje dinara u odnosu na evro – rast evra je nanosio štetu monopolističkom uvoznikom lobiju. Guverner je bio za opciju stimulacije srpskog izvoza, a ta njegova orijentacija je nailazila na podršku i Međunarodnog monetarnog fonda. Uzalud je Jelašić upozoravao da će, bude li vlada i u buduće pozajmicama pokušavati da reši budžetski deficit, i Srbiju zadesiti „grčki scenario“.

Tajkuni su, dakle, dobili ovu bitku, a guverner je – pozivajući se na razloge lične prirode – podneo ostavku. Bilo mu je jasno da nema šanse protiv daleko nadmoćnijeg protivnika, i rekao je samo toliko da ovaj potez nije povukao pod političkim pritiskom. Njegov objašnjenje je prihvatljivo ali će malo ko u nje-

many people will believe it considering that a little while before he quit Prime Minister Cvetković criticized the National Bank. According to Vladimir Gligorov, an economics analyst, it is clear that the tycoons were unhappy with Jelašić's decisions, and that they are the reason of his resignation. So it is to be expected that the National Bank will be under their influence in the following period.

Considering all the corruption scandals coming to light right now it is evident that the tycoons, who accumulated their wealth during Milošević, still hold the reins of power in a tight grip. The media reports on this or that corruption scandal, the government makes big promises, even proposing that it will be investigated who is personally responsible, kindly asks that those mentioned in the scandal prove where their capital came from, and they even make bold claims that they will put an end to corruption – but to no avail. Perhaps not even their intention was sincere. The promise made is just words.

On the other hand, drug lord Darko Šarić's business has successfully been uncovered – he had tried to smuggle around two tons of drugs from South America to Europe. Up to this point the average Serbian citizen lived in the belief that in the region drug smuggling was something that the Albanian mafia did, and now it seems that there is a purely Serbian drug mafia. When this scandal was made public the leading politicians did their best to lay the blame on Montenegro, claiming that their politicians held Šarić in favor and it was impossible to bring him to justice. There is no evidence regarding the validity of these claims. However, it is a fact that Šarić is a citizen of Serbia and that for several years now, under the noses of Serbian tax authorities, he had been spending enormous amounts on real-estate, hotels, fields, building luxury villas in Vojvodina and no one from the relevant authorities found it necessary to question where he got the money for such purchases. For now the police are not saying who was officially responsible for monitoring whether Šarić was abiding by the law, what mistakes were made and who was using personal connections to protect him. The media is still keeping the public's attention focused on Šarić's Montenegro connections. In regards to this question a Montenegro opposition politician (and darling of the Belgrade media), Nebojša Medojević, took part in a live TV interview where he claimed that Darko Šarić alongside Stanko Subotić (the tobacco mafia boss), is enjoying the protection of certain circles in the Montenegro government.

ga i da poveruje, jer je neposredno pre toga i premijer Cvetković kritikovao Narodnu banku. Kritičniji od premijera bili su samo oligarsi. Prema mišljenju ekonomskog analitičara Vladimira Gligorova, sasvim je jedanoznačno da su tajkuni bili nezadovoljni guvernerovim potezima, i da su oni razlog Jelašićevog odlaska. Pa se može očekivati da će Narodna banka u narednom periodu biti pod njihovim uticajem.

A da tajkuni, koji su se obogatili za vreme Miloševića, i dalje čvrsto drže u rukama poluge vlasti, pokazuju sve češće obelodanjivane korupcionaške afere. Mediji se neko vreme ustreme na ovaj ili onaj korupcionaški skandal, vlada daje krupna obećanja, stavlja u izgled čak i pozivanje na ličnu odgovornost, ljubazno apeluje na dotične da dokažu poreklo svoje imovine, štaviše, smelo izjavljuje da će stati kraj korupciji – ali, bez uspeha. Možda ni namera nije bila iskrena. Obećanje ostaje pusto obećanje.

Uspešno su razotkriveni, međutim, poslovi narko-bosa Darka Šarića koji je iz Južne Amerike prokrijmčario u Evropu oko dve tone droge. Sve do sada prosečni građani Srbije živeli su u uverenju da se u ovom regionu krijumčarenjem droge bavi albanska mafija, sad se ispostavlja da postoji i čisto srpska narko-mafija. Kad je afera izbila u javnost, vodeći političari su se iz petnih žila upinjali da odgovornost svale na Crnu Goru, ističući da Šarić uživa simpatije crnogorskih političara, pa ga zbog toga nije moguće privesti pravdi. Nema dokaza koliko ima istine u toj tvrdnji, ali je činjenica da je Darko Šarić državljanin Srbije, i da je dugi niz godina, pred nosom srpskih poreskih organa kupovao, na veliko, nekretnine, hotele, oranice, gradio luksuzne vile u Vojvodini, i niko od nadležnih nije našao za shodno da se zainteresuje, odakle mu novac za sve te investicije. Za sada organi gonjenja ne govore ništa o tome ko je bio službeno u obavezi da obrati pažnju na Šarićevo kršenje zakona, kakvi su propusti učinjeni i kakve su sve veze funkcionisale – mediji, međutim, i dalje drže pažnju javnosti na Šarićevim crnogorskim vezama. Pa je tako u jednoj živoj televizijskoj emisiji nastupio i Nebojša Medojević, crngorski opozicioni političar, ljubimac beogradskih medija, koji je ustvrdio da Darko Šarić, zajedno sa Stankom Subotićem, šefom duvanske mafije, uživa zaštitu crnogorskih vladinih krugova.

At that moment Stanko Subotić himself phoned in to the show but to the surprise of the host and Mr. Medojević, not from Montenegro but from Switzerland. Among other things he said that Medojević was being paid by Serbian businessmen Milorad Mišković and Milan Beko – all in the goal of discrediting him (Stanko Subotić). He claims that Mišković and Beko decided to do this because he, Subotić, had borrowed them 50 million Euros so that they could buy the port in Belgrade as well as the daily Večernje Novosti for WAZ. Several days later Stanko Subotić gave a lengthy interview to the Montenegrin TV station IN and documented his claims.

In Serbia the reaction was as if a bomb had gone off – which leads to the conclusion that Šarić is just a piece of the puzzle in the Serbian corruption panorama.

Following the interview there were vehement mutual accusations and denials. Both Mišković and Beko have denied having any connection to Subotić. WAZ also denied any allegations, pointing out that they intended to buy Večernje Novosti only with their own capital. They also stated that they had signed a contract with Manojlo Vukotić, editor in chief of Večernje Novosti, which stipulated that Vukotić was to mediate for WAZ in the purchase of Večernje Novosti. Of course, Vukotić denied this, claiming that he was only a media consultant and that for this received 50 thousand Euros, but that all further cooperation had been stopped. After all these incidents the Belgrade weekly magazine Vreme published a report on WAZ which gives cause to believe that this German company was in the business of laundering money in Serbia. One of the suspicious business undertakings of WAZ in Serbia was its business connections to the tobacco mafia boss, Stanko Subotić, and drug lord, Darko Šarić (Vreme, March 25th, 2010).

Utom se u emisiju uživo telefonom uključio apostrofirani Stanko Subotić ali, na iznenađenje voditelja i gospodina Medojevića, ne iz Crne Gore, nego iz Švajcarske. I rekao, pored ostalog, da Medojevića finansiraju srpski biznismeni Milorad Mišković i Milan Beko, sve da bi njega, Stanka Subotića, kompromitovali. A Mišković i Beko su se na to odlučili jer im je on, Subotić, svojevremeno pozajmio 50 miliona evra, da tim novcem kupe luku u Beogradu i da, uzgred, kupe za WAZ još i beogradske novine Večernje novosti. Nekoliko dana kasnije Stanko Subotić dao je duži intervju crnogorskoj televiziji In i svoje optužbe potkrepio dokumentima.

U Srbiji kao da je eksplodirala bomba, što navodi na pomisao da je Šarić samo mozaička kockica u srpskoj korupcionaškoj panorami.

Potom su vehementno usledile uzajamne optužbe i demanti optužbi. I Mišković, i Beko su porekli da imaju bilo kakve veze sa Subotićem. Demanti je objavio i WAZ, precizirajući da je isključivo sopstvenim kapitalom hteo da kupi Večernje novosti. I objavio još i to da je sklopio ugovor sa Manojlom Vukotićem, glavnim urednikom Večernjih novosti, kojim je predviđeno da Vukotić posreduje za WAZ u kupovini Večernjih novosti. To je Vukotić dakako demantovao, rekavši da je

bio samo medijski savetnik, za šta je dobio honorar od 50 hiljada evra, ali da je dalja saradnja prekinuta. Posle svega beogradski nedeljnik Vreme objavio je članak o WAZ-u, koji daje naslutiti da se ta nemačka firma u Srbiji bavila pranjem novca. Osim toga, među sumnjive poslove nemačkog koncerna uvrstio je i njegove poslovne veze sa šefom duvanske mafije Stankom Subotićem i naroko-bosom Darkom Šarićem. (Vreme, 25. 03. 2010.)



On the one hand, the weekly Vreme is making allegations against certain business people, while on the other it is not delving into the business undertakings of the other two tycoons – Milorad Mišković and Milan Beka – it just accepts, without criticism, that they denied all allegations. They are innocent. Obviously, there are good and bad tycoons. The police are, as always, in intense investigation. The Minister of Internal Affairs has said after all that the government will show no favor to anyone, while the State Secretary in the Ministry of Justice has stated that they will put a stop to corruption even if it means government dissolution. Statements like these are very frequent. However, the government has not fallen yet, nor have the tycoons been hurt in any way – everything is as it was before. It should be noted that the job facing us is not at all easy – considering that the various tycoons had their business beginnings in the nineties and were made in the original mold of Serbian express capitalism. Confronting the past is becoming more difficult – as became evident when the Srebrenica declaration was being discussed in Parliament. After months of negotiations the Parliament passed a declaration, but not how the Democratic Party wanted it. Out of 250 members of Parliament only 127 voted for the declaration – which doesn't mention the word "genocide". The heir of Milošević's party - the Socialist Party, now a part of the ruling coalition, was firmly against the use of the term "genocide". In much the same way and out of respect for the socialists the Parliament did not discuss which political parties were responsible for the genocide, that is, the crime that took place in Srebrenica, because that would mean delving into the past of the Socialist Party, which is part of the ruling coalition and which to this day has not condemned Milošević's policies.

The declaration was not received with great sympathies in the general public either. According to a commentator of the daily Politika (which is partly owned by WAZ), in the dirty Balkan war no one was completely guilty or innocent; therefore there is no need for a special declaration on Srebrenica. All of these occurrences indicate that the past is still a heavy burden in Serbia – whether we are discussing Srebrenica or tycoons.

*(Translated from Serbian
Nina Đurđević-Filipović)*

Nedeljnik Vreme, dakle, optužuje deo poslovnih ljudi, ali ne ulazi u poslove druge dvojice tajkuna, Milorada Miškovića i Milana Beka, već nekritički prihvata njihove demantije. Oni su nedužni. A time se kazuje da postoje dobri, i rđavi tajkuni. Policija za sada intenzivno traga, kao što je i uvek do sada činila, uostalom. Ministar za unutrašnje poslove je, ipak, više puta naglasio da vlast nikome neće gledati kroz prste. A državni sekretar u Ministarstvu za pravdu je izjavio da će se korupcionaštvu stati na kraj, pa i po cenu pada vlade. Takvih i sličnih izjava je i do sada bilo bezbroj, međutim, sve do sada vlada nije pala, niti je tajkunima bilo šta usfalilo, svi su ostali na svojim mestima. Treba priznati da zadatak nije ni malo lak, imamo li u vidu da svet tajkuna vuče korene iz devedesetih godina, iz same materice srpskog ekspresnog kapitalizma. Suočavanje s tim razdobljem je, međutim, sve teže; videlo se to jasno i prilikom donešenja parlamentarne deklaracije o Srebrenici. Posle višemesečnih usaglašavanja i nagodbi parlament je doneo deklaraciju, ali ne na način kako su to planirali funkcioneri Demokratske stranke. Od 250 poslanika svega ih je 127 glasalo za predloženu deklaraciju u kojoj nema reči genocid. Upotrebi termina genocid, naime, odlučno se protivila Socijalistička partija Srbije, naslednica Miloševićeve stranke, sada članica vladajuće koalicije. Isto tako, imajući obzira prema socijalistima, parlament nije raspravljao o tome, koje su političke snage i dovele do genocida, odnosno zločina u Srebrenici, jer bi tada trebalo posezati u prošlost upravo one Socijalističke partije koja je deo aktuelne vlasti i koja ni do danas nije osudila Miloševićevu politiku.

Ali ni šira javnost nije sa naročitim simpatijama primila parlamentarnu deklaraciju. Prema mišljenju komentatora beogradskog dnevnog lista Politika, koja je delom u vlasništvu WAZ-a, u prljavom balkanskom ratu nije ni bilo jednoznačno grešnih i nedužnih, pa je zato neprihvatljiva posebna osuda događaja u Srebrenici. Sve to ukazuje na to da je prošlost u Srbiji još previše težak teret, bilo da je reč o Srebrenici, bilo o tajkunima.

*(Preveo sa mađarskog
Arpad Vicko)*