

HISTORY IS A TEACHER OF LIFE

Months of May and October have for years been problematic for Serbian politicians. Not, as some would think, for economic or political problems, but because of history! Namely, on May 9th, Europe celebrates the Day of Victory over Fascism, which is named for the Day of Europe, while on October 20th 1944. Serbian capital city of Belgrade was liberated of fascist occupant by the forces of People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Red Army. Besides these two well-known anniversaries, Serbia in October also marks two tragic events. Namely, in only seven days, on October 14th and 21st 1941. fascist occupants did mass shootings of almost ten thousand civilians among which a lot of children of school age in two Serbian cities, Kraljevo and Kragujevac. In most of the European countries, especially those which were struggling against fascism, such dates are appropriately celebrated because it is the part of political culture and traditional values. Unfortunately, in Serbia it is not the case. It only shows the situation Serbian society is facing today.

Serbia entered the Second World War as the part of Kingdom of Yugoslavia (the state which was formed in 1918. on the territory of today's Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Montenegro and FYR Macedonia) which was occupied in April 1941. by fascists and divided into several parts between the Nazi Germany and its allies Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria while on the territory of today's Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and partly Serbia was formed Quislings fascists' state, Independent Country of Croatia (NDH). German occupant in Serbia formed quisling government under the leadership of Serbian General Milan Nedić (the case quite similar to the French quisling, Marshal Philippe Petain). Most of the soldiers of Yugoslav Royal Army were brought in captivity, but the parts of certain units refused to surrender. They were gathered by the lieutenant colonel of Royal Army Dragoljub Mihajlović thus forming the Chetnik movement („ Chetnik“ is the name for Serbian guerilla people organised in the First World War). On the other hand, in June 1941. immediately after the attack of Nazi Germany on the USSR (The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) the Yugoslav communists started armed fight. They formed partisans movement that was general one, gathered all people of former Yugoslavia. Only after a few years in this movement ideologically prevailed communists despite the fact that its leader from the very beginning was the leader of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito. These two movements were ideologically confronted but they, during the early autumn in 1941., cooperated in the struggle against Germans. Their conflict started in November 1941. when chetniks stopped their fight against the occupant and attacked partisans.

Tito's partisans (the folk name for the fighters of the National rescuer movement) chose the unsparring struggle against fasists and quislings which was led in the following next years at the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia and Serbia, while the chetniks (public name for movement members who were led by the lieutenant colonel Mihajlović) chose to wait until the situation in the world changes, meaning until the allies defeat Nazi. Besides, partisan movement , because of the ideology and its leaders, had the united government and the politics, while chetniks were the army without strong centralised command, which forces were relied on local communities where young soldiers were coming from.

In that kind of situation, partisan movement became the main enemy of fascist occupant, while the parts of chetniks' movement cooperating with the enemy against partisans committed war crimes over the civilians, as of Serbian nationality , thus also of Croatian and Muslim nationality. Yet in August 1943. the American President Franklin Roosevelt and the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill sent a message to the Soviet leader Josif Visarionovič Staljin in which they claimed that only partisan movement was struggling against Nazi. It was confirmed by the decisions of Teheran conference, held from November 29th till December 1st 1943. Where Roosevelt, Staljin and Churchill agreed to send political and military supprot to the partisans in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav King Petar II Karadjordjević , who was in the refugee in London since the occupation of the country, gave the order on September 12th 1944. In which the chetniks' movement was unformed, and all members of the movement, who were not accused of war crimes, were ordered to join the People Liberation Movement under the command of Marshal Josip Broz Tito.

These are the hystorical facts. The end of chetniks' movement was not caused by partisans but by the allies and Yugoslav King in whose behalf they were allegedly fighting. Partisan warfare emerged, by the help of the Allies, into strong Yugoslav Army which units with the help of Soviet Army on October 20th, 1944. Liberated the Capital city of Belgrade and until May 15th 1945. whole Yugoslavia. The warfare of Tito's partisans positioned Yugoslavia in anti-fascism coalition which triumphantly ended Second World War.

After a few years of so-called democracy in Yugoslavia was established one-party government of the communists. The trials to the real Quislings, as were provided in all other occupied countries of Europe, the communist government was using to quits the ideological opponents so that many innocent people were executed, and their property was nationalised. The leader of the chetniks' movement , General Mihajlović, was also arrested and was sentenced to death. This process was political and was not accomplished according to the standards that world is familiar with today, but through the process many crimes committed by the units and the individuals from the movement that was under the General's command were proved. Yugoslav communists were stern in their decision to shot Mihajlović so Marshal Tito did not even listen to the appeal of the French President , General De Gaulle who pleaded that sentence to death should be changed into the life imprisonment. The same as he did after the trial to the French Quisling , Marshal Petain. But there lies the difference between the democracy and the dictatorship. Yugoslavia survived under the leadership of the communists with their own vision of socialism, that was different from the rigid Soviet one, until 1991. when it fell apart in bloody civilian war.

All things that happened after the war in former Yugoslavia can be objected from the democratic and human rights point of view but it has got nothing in common with the fact that only Tito's partisans in former Yugoslavia and Serbia fought against fascists.

There exactly we come to the one of the greatest problems of Serbian political parties and the whole society as well – the lack of ideology. Because in the society where it is disputable who fought against fascists while this fact is not disputable either in Moscow or in Washington or in London, lives from today to tomorrow, without any plans or ideology. And that is why in Serbia even today enormous energy is spent on the past and irrelevant things while not enough attention is paid to the planning of the future. In Serbia public has the impression that left wing parties respect the tradition of anti-fascist struggle while the right wing parties are for the revision of history, the promotion of chetniks' movement and the rehabilitation of the right wing politicians that cooperated with the fascist occupants. Neither the division is natural nor the question is right. The division is not natural because both left wing and right wing members fought against fascism. Then, the right question is not who fought against fascism because it is already known but what happened to the country after the triumph over the Nazi and the Second World War? That question requires a discussion because it is normal that most of the political parties taking part in the democratic political system can not justify one-party system created in Yugoslavia after the year 1945.

Formally in Serbia on the left wing side are two great political parties – Democratic Party (DS) of the former President of Serbia Boris Tadić that governed the country until a few months ago and the Socialists Party of Serbia (SPS) of the actual Prime Minister Ivica Dačić with a few smaller parties. While the socialists (popular name for the Socialists Party of Serbia) have got the clear ideology and as the party emerged from the previous communist party base their politics on the anti-fascism, the democrates (popular name for the Democratic Party) are wandering. Just the democrates and their leader Boris Tadić are guilty because Serbian society still today has got the dilemma about who fought against fascism. During the last eight years of their sovereign government over the country, as the party of the left wing that keeps the inheritance of the anti-fascist struggle, the Democratic Party had to have the clear politics concerning their relation towards the past. Instead, the democrates flirted with the extreme right wing, allowing for example that the Government against the law form the Commission that would search for the posthumous remnants of the chetnik leader Draža Mihajlović who was at that moment already accused of war crimes!? That „left wing“ Democratic Party allowed that, for example, Belgrade does not have a street named after partisan general Peko Dapčević who commanded the operation of liberating of Serbian Capital. A few years ago, at the time of the government of Tadić's democrats, they abolished the streets of the Soviet heroes Marshal Tolbuhin and the General Zdanov (who commanded Soviet forces in liberating Belgrade) as well as the Red Army Boulevard, the army whose 960 soldiers and the officers gave their lives in order to Serbian Capital became free!? The names of these streets were brought back only after the state intervention of the Russian Federation which government obviously does not have any dilemmas who fought against the fascism. Anyway, Serbia does not treat this way only the heroes of the Second World War. Belgrade does not have the street of one of the most important rulers in Serbian history, the Yugoslav King Aleksandar who created Yugoslavia and was murdered in the French city Marceille in the assassination in 1934.

It is going to be remembered that in the time when the democrats were the part of the government among the portraits of dignified Serbian Prime Ministers was put the portrait of Quisling Prime Minister at the time of Nazi occupation, Milan Nedić. This portrait was removed in 2008. When Ivica Dačić, the leader of the Socialists Party of Serbia, was chosen for the Deputy President of the Government. Dačić then asked a logical question – why the portrait of the Quisling Prime Minister is on the wall of the Government? Democratic Party does not celebrate the important dates of the anti-fascist struggle, the representatives of this party even when positioned on the important state functions, do not take part in official ceremonies celebrating the important dates of fight against the fascism. As in many other cases, Democratic Party this time also took the position of not making conflicts with anyone. It is not the way of dealing with the politics.

In Serbia, not only the left wing but also the right wing faces problems. At this part of the political scene there are governing Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) whose leader until recently was the actual President of Serbia Tomislav Nikolić and now the leader is the first Deputy President of the Government Aleksandar Vučić, the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) of the former Prime Minister and the President Vojislav Koštunica, the United Regions of Serbia (URS) of the actual Minister of Finance Mladjan Dinkić and numerous smaller parties. Because of the attitude they have towards the one-party system which emerged in former Yugoslavia after the Second World War, the parties of the right wing very often neglected the fact who fought against the fascists. Nevertheless, it is harmful for the image of the right wing in Serbia because today in Europe the struggle against fascism deny only extreme right wing and neofascist movements.

Big Serbian right wing parties do not think that way and that is why it is important for them to have the attitude towards this period of history the same as right wing parties in Germany, France and Britain have. That is why the step that actual President of Serbia Tomislav Nikolić (until recently the leader of the right wing Serbian Progressive Party) did when he laid down the flower corona at the Monument of the Unknown Hero on the occasion of the liberation of Belgrade is historical for Serbia because the honour to the partisans and the soviet soldiers came from the politician of the right wing. Thus Nikolić showed that he is a responsible president of all citizens, that he respects historical facts and that he behaves as other presidents of all European states that struggled against the fascism.

If President Nikolić does not have any dilemmas, other politicians do have. So it is only possible in Serbia that the Day of the Victory over Fascism is not celebrated as it should be in the country which was the member of the Anti-Fascist Coalition, or that part of the political elite does not take part in the celebration of the Day of the Liberation of Belgrade from the fascists. We must notice that apart from the President Nikolić only state functioners that are members of the Socialists Party of Serbia took part in the ceremonies that celebrated the liberation of Belgrade. And it could not be different either, when in 2009. Serbian Government (in which left wing Democratic Party was dominant) remembered the day when the capital city was liberated only when the current Russian President Dmitry Medvedev announced his visit to Serbia on October 20th, at 65th anniversary of the Belgrade liberation by the soviet and partisan units. Russian president surely did not forget that almost thousand soldiers and the officers of Red Army died liberating Serbian Capital and came to give honour but current Government did forget.

So quickly was organised Ceremonial Academy and the celebration of the Belgrade liberations and the names of the Soviet heroes were returned to the streets of the city. This celebration was organised only that year and never again !? It was the Russian slap to the „left wing Government “ of the Serbian President Boris Tadić and the lesson we have not learnt anything from.

In the meantime, the Serbian Parliament have voted the law which enabled the rehabilitation of all people that were convicted in the political processes after Second World War. That rehabilitation is the term for peoples' heirs to be brought back the assets taken in the process of denationalisation. By this law was enabled to be retrieved the injustice towards numerous rich citizens of Serbia whose property was taken away after Second World War and they proclaimed enemies just because they were ideological enemies of the communists despite the fact that they did not cooperate with the fascist occupant. However, this law started to be used for the rehabilitation of Quislings and the fascist cooperants. So the part of the extreme right wing started openly demanding the rehabilitation of the president of the marionette government during the occupation, General Nedić. (which would be the same as if France would rehabilitate Marshal Philippe Petain or Norway its Vidkun Quisling!?), the President of Royal Government Dragiša Cvetković who signed the joining of the Yugoslav Kingdom to the Pact three forces or for example notorious warMayor of Belgrade Dragi Jovanović, known for the murderers of anti-fascists and patriots and providing of Nazi racist laws against the Jews!? Serbian parliament went onestep further and by the special decision equaled the rights of partisan soldiers and chetniks' movement which was recently abolished by the Constitutional Court .

The tradition of anti-fascism today successfully and proudly keep the USA as well as Russia and Great Britain and France and many other countries of the world. Keeping the memory of great victory of free world over the fascism is not only the respect of the history.The memory of that struggle is at the same time the inspiration for today politicians and the elite to keep the democracy and develop democratic procedures, respect human and minority rights, to try solving conflicts without wars, and to build up a better world.Anti-fascism is the foundation for the development of the European societies from for example British, French, Russian to even maybe German.

The impression is that Serbia is one of rare European countries whose political and social elite does not understand these processes. And if the historical lessons have not been learned, you keep going through the same situations again.

Maybe there the reason should be looked for why for Serbia the past is more important than the future, and why Serbian society can not move forward, into the future, solving the problems it has got. When political and social elites do not have the ideology, when there are no generally accepted values, when every party and every politician think that history starts with them, when there is no respect for what was done earlier, - then society can not develop, it lives from today to tomorrow and deals with the irrelevant questions. That is exactly happening to Serbia.