

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EUROPEAN DAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS FOR BOSNIA

Interview to Svetlana Broz, Chairwoman of Gariwo Sarajevo and author of books about the “good people in evil times” and the subject of civil courage

by Carolina Figini

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What is the importance of the EU Day of the Righteous for Bosnia?

It's extraordinarily important that the European Parliament made such kind of decision according to the request of the citizens of Europe and in Bosnia it is especially important because in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are so many tough nationalist orientated politicians who don't like the idea that we should greet people who belong to other ethnic groups. That's why this kind of European Parliament decision will become the obligation for the politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina who support this idea that you don't have a choice to pay the tribute to all those human beings who risked their lives or risked very much while they were protecting those who were unfairly persecuted because of their different ethnicity or different faith in the war 1991-1995.

Maybe it will become possible to create the Garden of the Righteous of Sarajevo now!

The branch office of Gariwo in Sarajevo will do our best to persuade the politicians about the necessity to create the Garden in Sarajevo city as a symbol for the suffering of the town during the siege and during the war. Oh, well, I hope that in the next months after such kind of European Parliament decision we will have a better chance to convince the politicians and to create this very important Garden and Memorial for all those who rescued human beings in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war and even in the area of Balkans, why not?

What kind of commemorations would you organize on 6th March in Sarajevo? Are you planning any initiative?

We are discussing these days about the possibility to transfer the date of the Dusko Kondor Civil Courage Award on 6th March.

Based on your steady activity about civil courage with institutions from all over the world do you think that Europe remembers the Yugoslavian war enough? Is it sufficiently aware?

It is remembered enough. We use the memory of the war in the former Yugoslavia in the Nineties as a role model for educating the youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina and all over the world, wherever we are invited to hold speeches about this issue because we believe that through this kind of examples like the Righteous we can build more of a civil society in the Balkan region. We draw the examples from the past to educate the future generations.

Have you got some wish for the remembrance of the good people from Bosnia or some figures that you would like to remember?

I have the dream that we will establish the Garden of the Righteous in Sarajevo and the South West Balkans and I hope it will become a reality in the nearest future, so in this case all these people will receive a recognition as they deserve. My wish is to realize a Garden of the Righteous to award these deserving people in Sarajevo.

In this days there was the Mladic trial that was then delayed for a legal hitch, so on the one hand there is international justice and on the other hand there is the memory of good. In what kind of relations do you think these two aspects are involved?

The Mladic trial is about judging such crimes as genocide. It is good that the trial started as a judgement of atrocities. Justice has to be pursued no matter how long we must wait for it. At the same time we have all the people who rejected, refused and disobeyed participating in the genocide and these people should be awarded in the Garden of the Righteous in Sarajevo because they deserve that. They should be our teachers for the future. It is like even in the worst thing that can happen to a society, which is genocide, there was always the individual who resisted, who opposed, who disobeyed, who didn't want to participate in this politically orchestrated madness. And such kind of human being should be our role models for the future.

What are the threats to peace in Bosnia today and how can the Day of the Righteous help overcome them?

Well, the worst threat to peace in Bosnia are nationalist orientated politicians who want to destroy Bosnia. They wanted to do so prior to the war, they did during it and they continue to do so by political means now. So we should replace this kind of politicians with democratic politicians and of course celebrating the Righteous should change the political atmosphere in Bosnia and Herzegovina among the ordinary people because it should contribute to change the whole picture about the ethnic groups. Often among the politicians or clergy are used to blaming one specific ethnic group all at once, but atrocity happened everywhere. The prospective of the Righteous helps us focus on the individual. It is always up to the individual to be good people and to become Righteous.

A comment about the electoral victory of nationalists in Serbia?

The victory is not good for reconciliation in the region, for the image of Serbia in the world as well as for the integration process of Serbia in EU.