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DR JELICA MINIC, DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL, SARAJEVO

Many countries around the world with the similar destiny as that of South East European countries prospered. One needs to know what is realistic, which path to follow, what partnerships to establish, how to launch resources available to the region which are far from negligible – from human to nature resources and political credits the skilful statesmen in our region too manage to utilise in some of these objectively troubled countries and societies

There is always hope

In the uncertainty still existing in the EU in terms of its basic monetary, fiscal, economic and also political issues, our political elites found their so much desired time out. As sleeping on unmerited laurels on many occasions turned into waking up on a barrel of gunpowder, continuous reconsideration and self-criticism are the condition for using common sense and citizens and for the overall welfare of interested politicians. Where are we in terms of practicing the good aspects of developed democracies and when it is necessary to consider the complexity of interests of other in order to voice and achieve ours in the best possible way – [we discussed this in the] interview with Dr Jelica Minic, who for years worked at the Belgrade Institute of Economics and was Secretary General of the European Movement in Serbia and civic activist, Assistant Foreign Minister of Serbia and Montenegro, and is presently the Deputy Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), located in Sarajevo.

MONITOR: *With the insights you have after working for the RCC for four years, how do you estimate the risks for sustainability of peace and prosperity in South East Europe? Having in mind Kosovo, BiH, [The Former Yugoslav Republic of]Macedonia ...*

MINIĆ: With regards to economic growth, South East Europe, with the exception of Turkey, faced challenges over the past two decades from which it will recover for a long time: armed conflicts, political tensions, devastation of all areas of real economy, deindustrialisation, poor privatisation, high unemployment, high indebtedness level, erosion of all social and educational institutions, poor governance, corruption, organised crime, fragile democracies, and on top of it all global crisis, draughts, fires, haunting snows, coupled with some floods and earthquakes – no plague, cholera or tsunami, for the time being.

However, life goes on, there is always hope, and many countries worldwide with similar destiny managed to revive themselves and prosper. One needs to know what is realistic, which path to follow, what partnerships to establish, how to launch resources available to the region which are far from negligible – from human to nature resources and political credits the skilful statesmen in our region too manage to utilise in some of these objectively troubled countries and societies. It is very important that over the past ten years various regional structures are being established, including the Regional Cooperation Council, which need to

support and are already supporting consolidation and implementation of substantial potentials of the entire region, especially those of the so-called Western Balkans. The region is gradually being integrated into the EU and NATO, which are the backbone of security and prosperity for the region, despite all current crises in these structures.

There is no magic wand that would solve everything over night. The solution is to plough a plot every day and sow the seed of cooperation and growth, and not only the seed of division. There is plenty enough of everything in this region for all those living here if the cake of social wealth is continually enlarging, while annuitant elites do not invest all their energy into taking the biggest piece for themselves (one of the first lessons of the basics of economy).

Finally, there are no unsolvable issues in social and political relations, if one accepts that solutions are many and that not everybody can be equally a winner at the sometime, at the same place and in the same way. The question of all questions for me is: are we leaving our children with the heritage of new wars in some gloomy place or freedom to act, freedom of movement, education and networking in as big an area as possible?

MONITOR: *Vladimir Gligorov recently said that SFRY went bankrupt two times during the 1980's. To what extent is the economic crisis, both global and our local, a security risk factor?*

MINIĆ: Economic crises are always a security risk factor. Existential crisis depreciates all criteria and presently this is evident all around us, in the EU to which we strive and in the U.S. which is undoubtedly the contemporary economic power. When political structures lose control over the financial system, when energy lobby around the world steps over the weakened political brakes, when there is a critical mass of the unemployed, hungry and homeless, when military structures seek guarantees for their own existence and expansion, much larger countries than ours have serious problems to reconcile all those agitated interests. And it is the easiest to externalise the problems – take them somewhere outside.

MONITOR: *On the other hand, how dangerous is this political “stability” guaranteed by patriotic and authoritarian authorities? Are the EU and U.S. wrong to indulge problematic regimes developed upon very primitive understanding of democracy?*

MINIĆ: As Churchill used to say, well they do not live here with us. They are looking for a partner for a good arrangement, leading to a long-term goal. The players change – they are all temporary. One needs to operate with a group of complex issues and design priorities in addressing them. From this perspective, the one with the result is important. Political sympathies do not exist – it is the interests that are exclusively operating. Today – a friend and protégé and tomorrow – an enemy and outcast. The one who understands this has a longer shelf life. Those that prove being long-term needed are those that last the longest.

The second target group is business. Development of a fine political climate serves business links and this is the experience that proved itself many times, not only in the region.

MONITOR: *With the insight you have, to what extent is the U.S. interested in the Balkans future? How much are political interests intertwined with those of business in this respect, as there are often indications, and even evidence, that unreserved political support is in return accompanied with business advantages. These days, there were many articles about*

alleged links of companies owned by former U.S. politicians and military commanders with Kosovo authorities...

MINIĆ: Each war is a battle for resources or control over the roads leading to those resources. This is also true with regards to war alliances and the principles of division of trophies. Since the ancient times, crusades, and up to the present day. And one can hold various flags and different emblems, represent holy goals, which change over time. The issue arises when the direct participants fail to understand the context, and fail to see among the holy goals those that one lives of. Balkans is all the more interesting, i.e. non-interesting – what is there and leading to whom. Political upgrade seems to be a priority, as journalist – those that inform us via media – do not have the experience of a geologist, land surveyor, road worker or railwayman and do not look at the country from satellite.

MONITOR: *The government in Serbia changed. The parties and leaders that were defeated on 5 October now dominate. But there are also those that were among the winners. The caution on the part of neighbours, apart from Montenegro, is evident towards the new Serbian authorities. Is this going to be a more long-term state of disregard, with expectation of an apology as in the case of Josipović since there are still issues that need to be jointly tackled?*

MINIĆ: We all learn. The elected government may not be the ideal one. But its election was an explicit punishment of voters for the previous one. If everyone understood this and learnt something out of it, then it is good for both Serbia and its neighbours.

MONTENEGRO'S WEAKEST LINKS

MONITOR: *Montenegro commenced its negotiations with the EU by opening Chapters 23 and 24 related to the rule of law and democracy which will not be closed until the end of negotiation process. This should mean that without aligning and regulating these, the country will not be able to progress further and that these are the “weakest links “of Montenegrin state?*

MINIĆ: These chapters will be the basis for commencement of negotiations for other candidates too, including Serbia. There is nothing exclusive in the case of Montenegro, but your statement on the “weakest links” is true, judging from the progress reports on the EU accession of Western Balkans countries which is published by the EC every autumn. This is also the result of experience from negotiations with Croatia – do not leave the most difficult for the end. Generally, this is about the perception of the region – the rule of law is not on a very high level and so this issue is opened straight away. Although, the countries have done much to improve legal and institutional frameworks, but the application of what has been adopted is still unsatisfactory.

RECONCILIATION

MONITOR: *How did the citizens, and how politicians, understand the process of reconciliation among the countries established on the territory of former Yugoslavia? Can*

apologies of the heads of state replace the expectations of those citizens that suffered damages by the dissolution of state and wars?

MINIĆ: Apologies are always important, at least as a symbol of repentance. They influence the general climate between the traumatised societies. Apologies are one thing, forgiveness the other and forgetting the third. Crimes must not and cannot be forgotten. Their suppressing leads to new conflicts. Thus, the recent past inevitably has to be part of everyday effort to heal the wounds and traumas, but must not make it impossible to the new generations to cooperate, provide mutual support and develop mechanisms that can prevent some new conflicts. New generations should be given the values of reconciliation, repentance and forgiveness – this is how the modern Europe was built where we wish to be equal players.