
Dr. Mirko Pejanovic

Sarajevo's struggle for human rights

Dr. Pejanovic is a member of the Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina and a leader of the Serbian Civic Council, the organization of the Serbs in Bosnia who resisted the Nazi policies of Radovan Karadzic. He received the Schiller Institute delegation on April 17 at the Presidential Palace in Sarajevo reserved for visiting heads of state. An interview with Dr. Pejanovic was published in EIR, Sept. 29, 1995.

Pejanovic: Yesterday was the first time since the beginning of the war, that I met leaders of other religions. I met representatives of the Islamic community, the Catholic community, and the Jewish community. And this will certainly be a very good beginning.

Religious leaders can do a lot to stop this hatred. For example, the metropolitan, during his Easter speech, included a very strong peace message. It's unfortunate that he was not saying something like this three years ago; but it's never too late to do something good.

Umberto Pascali: Do you think the Orthodox Church in Serbia could free itself from any influence from the Milosevic-Karadzic group? Do you see this progressing also in Belgrade?

Pejanovic: It is very, very difficult. If I were to judge the words which the metropolitan is saying to his believers, and what he said to me, I would say that a new spring is coming. But still, there are a lot of people who work within the Serbian Orthodox Church who are spreading the poison of hatred, although they wear those holy clothes. Among our people, we say that somebody who wears such holy clothes is good for everybody, but sinful before God.

I admire your action, and I'm very grateful to you. The idea of Bosnia perhaps wouldn't be so successful if we hadn't had so much support from people of good will from all over the world. And now, it's succeeded, and we have to be even stronger.

Also, I want to tell you something more about the Serbs living here, in the Federation. They are mostly intellectuals. By their origin, they are members of the families who have lived here for hundreds of years, and most of them have very, very big families, and they entered mixed marriages. In a word, they are cosmopolitans.

The war has done its job, and now the people have a very difficult time. The war brought divisions between people. The Bosniac community has all the institutions, in a national



Prof. Mirko Pejanovic (left), member of the Presidency and president of the Serb Civil Council, greets Schiller Institute delegation member Umberto Pascali at the Presidential Palace.

sense. The Croatian community also. Even the Jewish community does. Church, cultural, humanitarian organizations, political organizations, and NGOs.

What happened to us? Everybody left us. Only we didn't leave ourselves. The priests deserted us. Only now, it happens that the metropolitan is coming to Sarajevo. He left only one priest in Sarajevo, who is not educated to be a real priest.

We don't have humanitarian associations. Nobody sent aid to us. Serbian organizations from all over the world sent aid to Serbia, but not to Sarajevo. But, we survived. The Serbs who live here now, live very difficult lives, especially in the material sense—financially. Ninety percent of them are unemployed. We need help.

By preserving the ethnic structure we have now in Sarajevo, we can reconstruct Bosnia. So we have to convince these Serbs to remain here, to convince them of this, not to think about the idea of going somewhere else.

The Serbs here have a Serbian Civic Council. I am the president of this council, and its main task was preserving human rights. It is actually a model of the American community. Thanks to this fact, we preserved the trust of Serbs here, the Bosnians, and the Croats. That's why we founded an Alternative Nobel Peace Prize. We put aside some money to establish a Foundation for Human Rights. It's only DM70,000 [\$50,000], and we are going to send a letter to you, asking for help to establish this foundation here in Sarajevo, because we think that Sarajevo is a symbol of the fight and struggle for human rights.