

Things are getting back to normal?!

Almost a week has passed since the gruesome wave of violence spread in Kosovo and then in Belgrade, Nis, Novi Sad and other towns in Serbia, tensions also growing in BH, Macedonia... Hardly anyone has remained indifferent to the scenes of tearing down and burning houses, churches and mosques, and all sorts of violence demonstrated by the perpetrators of these actions.

Once more we, faced with the catastrophe, face an uncomfortable feeling of helplessness, with the condition when a reaction is called for and necessary, and the room for it is extremely narrowed.

The appeals to stop violence, condemning shameful savagery in the streets of our cities and condemnation of brutality performed upon Serbian minority in Kosovo, expressions of disapproval, fear, horror at the escalation of conflict, a wish for some other voices to be heard in the overall exaltation and hate speech, to offer some different solution... that is about all that can be done when people are being killed, religious objects are on fire and a huge number of people feel a basic, physical insecurity where they live.

According to the news coming from Kosovo, things are getting back to 'normal'. It's hard to suppress a wry smile at the 'normalcy' that must be. There aren't more than ten people a day dead in Kosovo, no mosques are on fire in Serbia, the situation is 'normal', we can sigh in relief... The stories about possible options for the future status of Kosovo make it to the foreground and it seems that there is no real and constructive solution for this hot potato called Kosovo. Albanian politicians (both men and women?) have offered an universal cure for all social diseases - independence of Kosovo, and Serbian prime minister Kostunica has, addressing protesters in front of the Serbian government building, stated: 'We'll be back to Kosovo!'

One needs to have a lot of good will and benevolence (which, by the way, none of the above mentioned deserve) to glean in the offered **slogans**, oh, sorry, 'solutions', at least some of the social values (respect of human rights, feeling of security based on mutual trust instead of armament race) that would make the life in Kosovo fit for a *human*, be it Serbian or Albanian.

It is also important to recall that the famous democracy, the word many will casually toss around these days, is fortunately not an infinitely elastic term, not a mantra the chanting of which makes for a firm alibi to perform violence and disrespect basic human rights.

One shouldn't forget that there are some more basic and less raped values and concepts, the necessity of which also becomes pronounced in this, nobody knows which in a row, post-conflict or post-war period. Instead of placing all responsibility in the hands of our valiant politicians, let's recognise our own responsibility for the huge violent potential of our society, and also for the shocking lack of empathy and understanding for what has been recognised as 'other' and hostile. Well done for those who can be consoled by the famous sentence 'They're no better either', but these statements only bare the depth and misunderstanding of our problem and certainly don't amnesty us of responsibility. It would be too simple (and inaccurate) to be lulled in a comforting thought about our problem being solely the 500 (or 5000) hooligans who, stronger than the police, orgy in the streets of our major cities, just as it is extremely cynical to state that the basic problem of Kosovo is in a small bunch of extremists who everybody is against, but, there, you know... nothing to be done there... More likely, it would be that the gigantic share of it all lies in the social awareness and the atmosphere both 'here' and 'there', that simply invites to violence and force, terror against a minority and a constant marking of one's OWN territory. And it is also likely that the majority of us has supported it in one way or another

- turning a deaf ear to 'Kill, cut throat, exterminate the Shiptar'; through accepting and swallowing speech of hatred we are abundantly being served in the media, schools, streets; through harbouring prejudices and extremely casual and benevolent relation to them (such as the frequently heard on 'What's the problem with calling them Shiptars?'); through accepting the widespread, conservative opinion that preserving and affirming one's own identity is only possible through detachment and confrontation with different identities; through being lulled into the fairy tales of the heavenly people that loses in peace, but wins in the war and the like; through inability to recognise the entire range of violence and discrimination that people who have identities different from widely accepted Serbian-orthodox national canon are exposed to daily. If we go back just a bit and remember everything that has been said and written about Albanians and muslims for years now, it's logical that now we are in turn a bit confused by the unison condemnations of the mosques being burned down and the statements saying that every last one of us (except, probably, for those 500 hooligans) are ashamed of the violence. If we allow ourselves a bit of cynicism, we can very well ask ourselves what it is that we *as a society* are ashamed of, whether of the hatred that exists or, on the contrary, of the fact that we have allowed the hatred (that is otherwise 'quite acceptable') to be demonstrated in the way which will be plainly visible to the entire world?

Until we've accepted that the statement 'Shiptars are separatists, filthy and ugly, primitive and mean, they multiply' and 'Serbs are butchers, illiterate and base thieves with the aggression in their genes' easily spawn horrid violence; as long as we harbour hatred as a part of tradition and folklore and as long as we don't become aware of the fact that one of the priorities of our societies should be dealing with decontamination of prejudices and the violence-bearing seeds, there will be no good solution for Kosovo, but also not for BH, Macedonia, Montenegro etc. Someone will always be a victim, and from the position of a victim and the feeling of being threatened someone will always reach for the new cycles of violence...

We are ALL responsible for finding the alternatives to violence, to re-examine them and apply them; to bear in mind that the large majority of people is *still* against violence; not to break the feeble bridges of mutual trust; to strengthen them and expand them; to point our finger, as loudly as we can, to the violence around us and to fight against it, to be aware that things will not become 'normal' as long as the basic criterion for 'normalcy' is the lack of killing and setting fires. Let's define ourselves the normal and desired condition of society and to deal with profound problems not waiting for the next escalation of physical violence to make us write appeals and statements... Till next time...

Activists of The Centre for Non-violent Action