

25 GODINA MEĐUNARODNOG FORUMA BOSNA
/ 25 YEARS OF INTERNATIONAL FORUM BOSNIA

PRVI DIO

FORUM BOSNA

Uredili

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Napomena Uredništva

Uprava Međunarodnog foruma Bosna odlučila je 100. brojem časopisa *Forum Bosnae* obilježiti 25 godina svog postojanja. Kada je završen posao prikupljanja i pripreme tekstova za objavljivanje, zaključeno je da bi taj broj imao preko hiljadu stranica. Zato je Uredništvo odlučilo da te radove objavi u četiri broja 100/22, 101/23, 102/23 i 103/23. Kako će čitatelji vidjeti, tekstovi u ta četiri broja pripadaju različitim područjima kulture, politike i ekonomije, što je u skladu sa zamisli osnivača ove organizacije da u pothvatu dekonstruiranja ideologijski nametanih znanja o bosanskoj pluralnosti omogući istraživačima bavljenje svim temama koje su na različite načine povezane s ontotopološkim pitanjima o narodu i državi. U ta četiri broja uključeno je 68 radova od 72 autora.

Editorial Note

The Board of International Forum Bosnia decided to mark its 25th anniversary with publication of a jubilee 100th issue of the *Forum Bosnae* journal. Once the task of collecting and preparing the texts for publication had been completed, they amounted to more than 1000 printed pages. The editors have therefore decided to publish the texts as a set of four anniversary issues, nos. 100/22, 101/23, 102/23, and 103/24. As the reader may see, the texts in these four issues cover the fields of culture, politics, and economics, expressing the founders' original intention to contribute to the deconstruction of our ideologically distorted understanding of Bosnian plurality and facilitate research into themes and topics that inform the onto-topology of Bosnia, its people, and its state. These four issues include 68 works by 72 authors.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAN PRONK: BOSNIA'S PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Marion Kappeyne van de Coppello

PAST

Minister Jan Pronk. We are sitting here at your home in The Hague together on the 24th of August, 2023, remembering being in Bosnia on several occasions during the war. I would like to ask you a few questions that Professor Mahmutćehajić of International Forum Bosnia has for you for the anniversary volume of their journal, Forum Bosnae, due to come out this fall. What has Bosnia meant to you in your life and career?

My career goes back to the 1970s. That was a period in which I – as a Dutch politician and already a minister from 1973 onwards – was quite involved in the relationship between my country, the Netherlands, and Yugoslavia. We had a very unique relationship in the field of international development cooperation with Yugoslavia, because we saw Yugoslavia as a model for many other countries. There had been major conflicts within the state of Yugoslavia before the Second World War and then during it, but, at a certain moment, the Yugoslavs had been able to come together, bringing stability to their own country, their state, a nation-state, on the basis of sophisticated legal and political constructions that they created themselves. Many different languages, many different nationalities or sub-nationalities, many different religions, all with their different histories, were brought together, I would say, under the leadership of somebody I admired very much at the time, Marshal Tito, in order to have peace. Now, of course, there was still inequality, particularly economic inequality between the

northern and the southern parts of Yugoslavia. But problems were solved at a political level, in negotiations based on national law, and decisions were implemented. We worked together, Yugoslavia and the Netherlands, in the 1970s, within the framework of the United Nations too, spreading a message of peace and development.

Yugoslavia, of course, was also a very important member of the Non-Aligned States – President Tito, together with President Sukarno of Indonesia and others, such as Indian Prime Minister Nehru, had created the group of non-aligned countries. I was thrilled by this, because my feeling was that in the Global South – there was a different terminology at the time – what was needed were forms of emancipation, development, and peace that had not been dictated by the West or the North. And, in the 1970s, it turned out that many countries were thinking in much the same direction. Developing countries, of the non-aligned Group of 77, as it was called within the United Nations – and Yugoslavia was one of the leading countries of the Group of 77 – came forward with ideas on how to build a new future, a new international economic order in the world as a whole based not so much on Western values as on common values. Of course, the values of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods system, were meant to be common, but they had a Western flavour.

Well, I still had these contacts in the 1980s, when I was Deputy Secretary-General of one of the United Nations' organizations, UNCTAD, I met many Yugoslav politicians there. In 1982 we organized a major world conference in Yugoslavia, where countries came together to discuss future financial and trade relations. It was a difficult period economically, a worldwide recession. Many countries were highly indebted. All countries had to adjust their economies to the new circumstances. During the negotiations we tried to protect the interests of developing countries, and Yugoslavia played an important role.

Then at the end of that period, there it was, all of a sudden, but of course you could foresee it: the end of the Cold War. I became a Minister again in the Dutch cabinet in the same week that the Berlin Wall fell down. We were confronted with a totally new situation. We were thrilled because, after the end of the Cold War, it would now be possible to bring forward a message of peace in the world as a whole. No arms build-up anymore. Conservation of the

environment, of nature, sustainable development, and poverty reduction, that was the essence. As a matter of fact, those were the challenges that had already brought the Netherlands and Yugoslavia together during the two decades before.

The euphoria did not last long. A couple of years later, that new situation of peace between countries had changed into a situation in which domestic conflicts were escalating within many different countries. This was not the case only in Yugoslavia. It also happened in many African countries, in Sudan, in Rwanda, in Congo, in Burundi, in Liberia, and in a number of Asian and Latin American countries. Domestic conflict – sometimes based on national differences, sometimes religious differences, sometimes of an ethnic character – escalated into armed conflict. Yugoslavia was unique, however, because it was on the European continent. All the other conflicts escalating into war were taking place on other continents.

I became involved again, because in the Dutch cabinet I held the position of Minister for Development Cooperation and also, for a short period, Minister of Defence. We discussed what we could do and we participated in UN peacekeeping operations in Yugoslavia, bringing food, medical and other care to places where there was a lot of violence and destruction. And there was the United Nations peace operation, with the Dutch Blue Helmets in Srebrenica. I went many times, together with my collaborators, of whom you were one, Marion, to Sarajevo, where we had discussions with members of the government and with non-governmental organizations, trying to help a little to improve the situation in Bosnia itself. But we failed.

I would say we failed particularly when the genocide took place in Srebrenica. I went there with you in the days after, and we saw the women and the children arriving in Tuzla. It was quite clear that the men and the boys had been and were being killed, killed by the Serbs. So, we in the Netherlands felt a certain co-responsibility, because we had not been able to protect the people – which was the mandate given to us by the UN Security Council – together with a strong feeling of solidarity. We had to do everything we could to help the people of Bosnia in particular, but also, victims of violent conflict in other parts of the former Yugoslavia. I, we wanted to demonstrate solidarity not just in the field of development and humanitarian assistance, but also politically.

The question was how to assist Bosnia in particular, because Bosnia was the main victim in Yugoslavia as a whole, how to help keep it alive and become, once again, a model of pluriformity.

Before the war Bosnia had been such a model. a bastion of pluriformity. In Bosnia Croats, Serbs, and Bosniaks, different religions, different cultures had been living together within one community. Bosnia was attacked from outside rather than from inside. When the war broke out, well, how could we help this former nation-state, young, of course, but existing, to stand up again as a model? I met several politicians in the country. One of them was Rusmir Mahmutćehajić. I had many and long discussions with him. After the war, he asked me whether I could help him by funding a project, a forum, a platform for discussion and thinking about the future. And that's what we did – Forum Bosnia. It is a *Bosnian* forum, not a foreign forum for Bosnia. And we were very pleased that we could help.

PRESENT

What do you see now? What do you think of Bosnia's right to exist as an entity? That right is being questioned by others. Do you do you see a role for Europe in this respect?

Bosnia was and is a small country, with different groups within its borders. It is not a foreign construct. It is the result of decisions made in Yugoslavia at a certain moment to have different states, independent, within borders that existed already when Yugoslavia was a federation. In Bosnia, Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs had lived together in the past peacefully. It was, as I said before, a model of coexistence and cooperation. There were differences – definitely – but there was a model. Maybe it was precisely because it was a model that it was attacked by the Croats in Croatia and the Serbs in Serbia. Maybe there was a certain jealousy. And of course, nationalist feelings in these two other states went back in history to before the period of stability that started after 1945. So, if there is any nation which we should respect and cherish, even though there are differences within that nation as an entity, then it should be Bosnia. We must do all we can to keep it all together. Again, it was not a foreign construct, though, of course, the way in which it continued after the war was very much the result of decisions taken under the Dayton Peace agreement.

But it is worth fighting for Bosnia as it is, rather than give up on the idea of a pluriform but common nation-state as some politicians are advocating at the moment, in particular in Srpska. So, let's try to keep Bosnia as it is. And, of course, within Bosnia, political negotiations will have to take place. They will have to reach compromise. They will have to give up some of their own feelings and ideas and wishes. But that is true for all the parts which together make up Bosnia. That's my first answer.

Second, it is even more difficult at the moment than 20 years ago, because of the new situation on the European continent. After the end of the Cold War, we had a new major change – the beginning of a new millennium – which resulted in a new cold war between Russia on the one hand and the West on the other. And you see the war in Ukraine and the many Russian efforts to destabilise other countries in Europe. We have to stand up against these efforts to destabilise Europe by splitting up countries, because that would have a domino effect in many other parts of Europe. So, it is in the interest of Europe and in the interest of Bosnia as it is, as an entity, to withstand this tendency and so maintain, as far as possible at the moment, peace on the European continent as a whole. And that requires cooperation between groups in Bosnia and Europe.

Does Europe have a role to play? I am strongly in favour of Bosnian membership of the European Union. I think it's important for Bosnia. It would create prospects for young people, so that they don't need to leave the country to find jobs or an income somewhere else, which is catastrophic for the economic, social, and cultural future of the country. I think it's also important for Europe. Presently Europe is very reluctant as far as membership of new states is concerned. And I understand that because many of the potential new members of Europe bring their own risks of domestic conflict escalating into violence. Europe wants to be a stable group of countries, the European Union. So, why bring in sources of instability? It is a reasonable question, but I have a different view. The sources of instability are there anyway. At the moment Bosnia is not stable. So, do we in Europe prefer sources of instability *within our frontiers* of the European Union or *at our borders*? The easy solution is to keep them away, beyond the European frontier, but then they still exist. And, nowadays, that offers the Russians, or others, a chance to use and manipulate

those sources of instability. They will escalate and threaten peace. Violent conflict at the other side of European borders will bring potential conflict to Europe itself. In my view, in order to tackle the sources of conflict within those countries, bringing them *in* is better than closing our borders to them. I say this not only so far as Bosnia is concerned, but also with regard to a number of other countries, potential new members of the European Union. I am strongly in favour of an enlargement of the European Union as an alternative to something others are advocating – enlarging NATO by bringing new countries into NATO. In my view, that would be risky, because it would lead to more confrontation and greater chances of international conflict and war than offering them membership of a stable European Union.

So, firstly, it is important for both Europe and Bosnia that Bosnia stays together. Secondly, Europe has to integrate fragile neighbouring countries within its own EU community and assist them to become stable and prosperous. Thirdly, within those countries, and Bosnia is not the only one, people have to work together. And, I would say to the Croats and the Serbs and the Bosniaks, be proud of your history, the history you yourselves created after 1945, when you were able to work together – you kept your differences, politically, ideologically to a certain extent, ethnically and religiously, but you were able to work together economically. You could travel everywhere, you could study everywhere, you could leave the country and come back to it. Yugoslavia was a source of stability. It enriched Europe. So, be proud of that contribution, which you delivered to Europe as a whole. And go back to that state of affairs and show the world that you can live together and that you can resolve your conflicts by political means, rather than by splitting up completely or by fighting.

SREBRENICA, AND ELSEWHERE

We were in Tuzla when the women and children came in, during and after the genocide in Srebrenica, and the Netherlands tried to help in the aftermath of that terrible tragedy. What is your view now on how things have developed since Srebrenica and after the creation of Dayton and the creation of Bosnia as a unitary state?

Let me first say something more about Srebrenica. I felt great guilt. Dutchbat was there to protect. We were not able to protect, but the mandate was to protect and we didn't do it. Those who slaughtered the people of Srebrenica, Mladić and his soldiers, were fully responsible and guilty. But, the Dutch, what about us? As a politician, I felt guilty, because I was responsible, of course, for sending Dutch soldiers as UN peacekeepers to Srebrenica in order to protect civilians. I felt that, as member of government I was co-responsible for the way in which they fulfilled the mandate. We have sent them with light arms equipment only. There are some other excuses as well, but it does not take away the fact that we failed to protect the people and that as a consequence nearly eight thousand Bosniaks were massacred.

So, I felt ashamed and may other people in my country feel the same. However, many others in the Netherlands tried to forget and deny any co-responsibility for the failure. In the Netherlands, we tend to blame others rather than ourselves. This attitude has led to a difficult political climate and I would say it is still difficult. Since 2002, on the 11th of July I attend each year the commemorative events in The Hague, where Bosnian people living in the Netherlands think again about what happened and mention the names of all the newly-found dead, reburied in Potočari. It is a moving event. People in the Netherlands do not deny that genocide took place, but they deny our having been involved in it. Bosnian people in this country put pressure on the press, and on political parties, to rethink, again, what happened and how they should react to it. Some Bosnian people in the Netherlands are active in the fields of education, theatre and art. They have been able to bring the message, but not everyone is listening. There is, again, no denial of genocide, but there is a denial of our involvement, co-responsibility and failure. And there is always a risk that people deny that a genocide even took place. That is what people in Serbia believe, and also in Republika Srpska and elsewhere. This is deplorable and we should not get tired telling the truth in order to prevent that new generations will become indifferent.

However, I would like to offer a word of consolation. I have been involved in many conflicts around the world and there have been many genocides. I was involved at a late stage in assistance to the people of Cambodia. In the nineteen eighties the world didn't even want to know that a genocide had taken place there.

Later on, I was in Mozambique, in Rwanda, in Somalia, Sudan and in Darfur. Two years ago, genocide took place in Tigray, in Ethiopia. Last year it started again in Darfur. Presently there is mass slaughter in Gaza. I could continue. It's always denial, not only of involvement, but also of the facts themselves: "It didn't take place. There were no mass killings, or, anyway, it wasn't genocide". However, and the world has to learn and politicians or opinion leaders or the press or churches or whatever must learn that the victims who say that they are being attacked, that their brothers and their sons have been or are being killed, that their mother or their daughter is being raped – that they speak the truth. The victims are always right. They have the right to speak out, and others have a duty to listen. If we do not fulfil that duty to listen to the victims, then the killings will continue. The cry of the survivors and of the children of the dead must be heard

Now, of course, having fulfilled your duty to listen, you have to set further steps: organise justice, establish courts and trials and offer reparations. To a certain extent all that is taking place, but always too little and too late. That was also the case for Bosnia and Srebrenica. However, and this is another word of consolation, people in Bosnia are not the only ones who are being forgotten. The same applies to victims and survivors of injustice elsewhere.

FUTURE

What is more, you have to think about the future, to create a society, a national society as well as an international society, in which the sources of conflict can be eliminated. Sometimes it's an economic source, sometimes it is the jealousy of one group against another. Sometimes it is a long-standing history, whereby groups have been fighting each other for ages, Muslims, Hindu, Christians, Jews, or, within these religions, sub-religions and ethnic groups. And after the end of the Cold War, the old idea of nationalism became alive again. Nationalism had led to the world wars – the First World War, the Second World War. In order to halt nationalism and war the United Nations were created. Bringing countries together, in which Yugoslavia played an important role, included an effort to keep nations alive, stable and safe, and to make clear, within nation-states that different

minorities should be able to live together. That was the message of the United Nations, based on the rights of minorities and on human rights. Nowadays, nationalism is not only rising again in Europe, but also in the Middle East and in Africa.

Basil Davidson has written a brilliant book about nationalism in Africa. He blames Europe because we had nations, we were fighting each other, and, after the end of the fighting, we created nation-states. And we exported this European idea of the nation-state to Africa, without also bringing the message of stability and coexistence *within* the nation state. This has become a major problem for Africa, because most wars in Africa take place within the borders of individual nation states. These countries are not disputing each other's borders; they are disputing the basis of the nation-state. By applying in Africa during the period of colonisation the model of the nation-state, model as had been developed in European history, Europe has given the wrong example and the wrong message. As soon as African countries became independent, their leaders were eager to follow the example of the colonial empires. Instead Europe should give a different example, the present-day European Union, within which nations are staying together, whereby problems within nations – and they do exist, in Spain, for instance, or in Sweden, where minorities are marginalized, or, even though it is no longer a member of European Union, in the United Kingdom, where there are the problems of Northern Ireland and Scotland and Wales – are being solved at the *political* level. There is never a definitive solution, but there are temporary solutions based on talks rather than fighting. This European example is also valid for all the states in the former Yugoslavia. Taken seriously, it would have consequences not only for Bosnia, but also for Serbia and its relations with Kosovo. It would also have consequences for Albania, Macedonia, Moldavia, Hungary, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Turkey. In all these countries within or just outside Europe we must do all we can to avoid the escalation of the sources of conflict into violence. European integration of nation-states together with integration of all minorities on equal footing within individual nation-states is the only way to establish sustainable peace.

I'm saying this as a has-been. I'm 83 and I have been politically active for many decades, including within the framework of the United Nations. But I'm no longer an active politician. I'm

standing aside. I'm studying what's happening in the world. And people like me should not preach. What we can do is openly admit our own mistakes, so that young people, who have to carry on, know what the possible pitfalls are. It is not up to older people to design the future of Europe. Not in Western European countries or in Bosnia or in the other countries of the former Yugoslavia either. That is the task of young people – it is their future, their culture, their employment prospects, their views on what's going on in the world. They are also the ones who will benefit most, because the present situation of instability and threats and recession is making young people in particular suffer. And it is important for all those countries and particularly, for people in Bosnia, that they be able to get access to good education, if possible in a multicultural framework, so that they can learn from each other's views.

There could lie, in my view, a task for Bosnia Forum, a task to shape the future. You don't have to share other people's views, but you do have to understand them, even if you do not share them – the fact that you know them enriches you. Then you can work together to make the group in which you co-exist with other people, whatever their background, better off. Now that's education. That is culture. It is theatre. It is music. It is also employment. And that is what previous, older generations have to make possible for young people. Older generations very often think too much in terms of their own past interests, and past interests are not future interests. Take for instance, climate change. It is a major threat to all people, everywhere, women, men and children. A threat to old, young and yet unborn people. A threat to people with different colour or belief. All will have to live together, not to fight, but to address together the two main risks for future life on our earth: rapidly increasing climate change and escalating violent wars within and between countries. These are threatening the future of all generations and of young people in particular. When we insist on thinking along the lines of nationalism and self-righteousness, perhaps we are making the survival of future generations impossible.