

In His Own Words:
Ivo Markovic on his Country

Today the whole world has a negative picture about Bosnia. Bosnia does have a negative side. But can I tell you a little bit about Bosnia? When we talk about this mountainous Bosnia proper -- outside of Hercegovina -- we are talking about people that lived for a very long time in the same territory. Bosnia is very fertile and it can sustain a number of animals. It has good agriculture.

Bosnia has a multi-cultural way of life, since people have lived for a long time in one place. And when they live for a long time in the same spot, they develop their own traditions, their spirituality, and customs. People create their identity and also a moral stability. And that is Bosnia! Bosnia, therefore is immobile... very stiff. Which is very different from Herzegovina. Herzegovina is very quick to change. It has no tradition, no long-term memory in song, poetry, in arts and in tradition. And that is a very significant feature of Bosnia.

For a long time different people were living together but always with one side that was dominant. That created lots of tension and the feeling that we always lived in hatred, dislikes and constant wars. That is false picture of Bosnia. There are elements of that but we have different side of that, a positive one.

People lived with each other as equals. And they haven't even fought as much as the rest of Europe. For example, Muslims and Croats were never in war against each other. They even fought together against Turks and others. So, people learned how to live together and how to appreciate sharing of life.

The people also felt the advantages of multiethnic life and a certain creativity that was born from that. This could be best seen during communism in Sarajevo, a city that is multiethnic, multicultural and multinational. All that difference produced creativity that could be seen in the arts, in rock music for example. That is one positive side of Bosnia that is often overlooked.

A second aspect is that the people realized how important is that all religions live together to create peace. It was very customary in Bosnia, for example, when Catholics are celebrating a holiday, a Muslim or Orthodox cleric would come to eat and drink and express gratitude and happiness that people are praying to God. That is what I did when I would visit Muslims in a mosque. I would express my happiness for their prayers.

In Bosnia, out of that horrible depth in which we found ourselves, we were looking for a step forward. And, with these inter-religious projects, we are managing to make that step.

Bosnia has a lot of surprises. When you travel a little bit longer in Sarajevo and Tuzla, you meet lots of people who believe and are sure that this is a creative, blessed region and that it is something that the modern world is building. I have this kind of experience in Bosnia. I believe in this Bosnia. Even now, for me it would be a betrayal if I don't see that and if I were to remove myself from it.

The contemporary world -- United States and Europe -- have something to learn from Bosnia. Bosnia can be a model, which can help the contemporary world in building coexistence and globalization of the world. This would be something completely different than how Bosnia functions now.