

Milena Tatalovic

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"The First Brick of the Berlin Wall Extracted in 1956" – How does Serbia remember the Hungarian revolution 50 years later

I was already at the university when I heard for the first time about the Hungarian revolution in 1956. Because of my recent experience with "the Prague Spring" and the lack of information on this topic in Serbian high school history textbooks (I guess it is not necessary to stress that there is very little about 1956, too), I was kind of afraid about this assignment. So, my surprise was quite great when I noticed how much attention was given in Serbian written and Internet media to this anniversary today . It was nice, for a change, to be "bombarded" with lots of information from many different sides. But, first thing that occurred to me was the difference in reports between Serbian media in whole (excepting the region Vojvodina) and Vojvodina`s (region in Serbia) media.

The main center of the actual celebration, in remembering the revolution, was the town Subotica, which is placed in the north of Serbia (in Vojvodina), very near to the Hungarian border. Before, I will describe the celebration: it is important to know that Hungarians are the largest "national minority" in the northern province of Serbia – Vojvodina, and that relations between Serbs and Hungarians on north are very close but complicated (because of some unsolved issues considering the rights of national minority). In Subotica the notation of the anniversary started already during the second week of October. Reports on the Hungarian revolution in 1956, and the memory of organized adoption of Hungarian fugitives who did not agree with the communist regime, were organized by the Association of Hungarians in Vojvodina and the National Council of Hungarian minority (with help of Serbian parliament). The two main cultural events during this week (the first event was on the 12th of October) were an exhibition of photos (that took place in the City Hall of Subotica) taken during the two weeks during the riot

on the streets of Hungary, and the revelation of a new monument (13th of October) in Palic (place near Subotica) devoted to the memory of the Central Summation place where the fugitives from the communist regime, after the suppressed revolution in 1956, were accepted.



Katlin Silli and Jozef Kasa in the photo exhibition



The speech of Katrin Silli in The Subotica's City Hall



Revealing the monument dedicated to refugees from Hungary, on Palic



The new monument on Palic lake

The Serbian representative was the president of the Serbian parliament Predrag Markovic, the representatives from Hungary were Katlin Silli, president of Hungarian parliament and the leader of the Council of Vojvodina's Hungarians (SVM) Jozef Kasa. On the 14th of October the Academic conference took place in the Subotica's City Hall, and it gathered many well-known sociologists and politicians from Serbia and Hungary.

After reading all articles from Subotica's daily newspapers and reports about these events, the main impression is that one thing is stressed the most – the friendship and mutual cooperation of the two states Serbia and Hungary. There was too much talking about the relationship between our two countries, then actually remembering the days of revolution and its meaning for Europe today – at least that was my impression.



Open perspective-Subotica



Dr. Jozef Sipos from Budapest



Guide- Gabor Kudlik from organization Open Perspective



The conference was held in City Hall

The representatives of both parliaments spoke about the fact that Serbia took over 20,000 refugees from Hungary, and that the embassy of Serbia/Yugoslavia was the place where Imre Nagy sought refuge at the very end of the Revolution. One fragment of the speech of the president of the Serbian parliament Predrag Markovic in the City Hall of Subotica was: “In Serbia, the memory on 1956 is notated as a commemoration of solidarity, between states and between people. After these difficult dates we must rise, on the highest level, dates of solidarity and tolerance, because the ideal in 1956 was – democracy and an independent state, today (so that it can be completed) it is important to add human and minority rights to this ideal. Because Serbs and Hungarians do not only live next to each-other, they live together... ”

It seemed like there was more talking about the current political situation and collecting some political “points” in both countries. The media also adverted on the political situation in Serbia in 1950 and did not fail to mention that Tito, former president of Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, was the first who separated from the Eastern block and Stalin, and by doing so, Yugoslavia was free to accept everyone from Hungary, who was against the communist regime after the revolution.

On the other hand, other written media (especially in Belgrade) were not very interested in the current political situation and the minority rights. Their reports were quite different from Vojvodina’s. The mayor similarity to this entire media – and this refers to the title of my essay – is that they all agreed on the Hungarian revolution being as they called it “the first extracted brick from Berlin wall” – the first hole in the iron curtain. The daily newspaper “Blic” even made interviews with persons who actually had been participants of the revolution:



“You could smell the tension in the air. We all knew that something powerful is going on. One could not ignore the protests from the beginning of the revolution, and we were all so proud... But freedom has come in 1989 too late. Until then, most of the citizens had already forgotten

what freedom actually meant. Today we can see that the government has forgotten what democracy means, and that is humiliating...” [Djula Kis (62)]

One more thing was common to all written media: they all reported about recent riots on Hungarian streets, and the fact that the country is divided between the supporters of the government on the one side, and the right wing opposition on the other. And as occur thing, they mention usurpation over the same tank (taking it on the street, pointing it toward the police) that was used in the revolution 50 years ago against the Soviet army.

One last, for me quite strange fact, is that two Serbian written media reminded president George Bush’s visit to Budapest in June, and his speech to the Hungarian people. They all stressed the fact that the “West” did not do anything to help the Hungarian people, and quoted part of Bush's speech. “The West learned its lesson – those who search for freedom, should help those who already have it.”

Finally, I allow myself to make a few remarks, even if they are exaggerated. Working on this assignment, I literally learned how historical events and political memory can be “servant” to official state politics. I have the impression that memorizing this important anniversary was used to promote some of the main program of national politics. I am not saying that there was no objectivity on medias` side, and that media did not wrote about real events, I am just saying that there should have been more interviews with ordinary people who actually met with these events, documentaries and information about protests in 1956 – probably you would be surprised how many people never even heard about the Hungarian revolution – and discussions about what Hungarian revolution means to Europe today. Or in other words – media should have been oriented more on global context of this revolution, and less on national.

Sources:

Daily newspapers: "Blic", "Novosti", "Politika", "Danas", "Suboticke vesti"

Websites:

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Picture took over from websites:

- Small photos (those which have comments and explanations) were downloaded from website: http://www.subotica.info/eventview.php?event_id=12545. Photographer name is Nikola Tumbas. Last visit 11th November 2006.
- <http://www.b92.net/kultura/index.php?view=2&did=20388> – is a site from which the bigger photo was downloaded (the one with thank) photographer is not known, at least it isn't written on the site. Last visit 10th November 2006.

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