

Speech by Mr. Nenad Šebek

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Health warning!!!

If you are not capable of laughing at yourself... please, shut your ears! If you are not capable of laughing at your own nation... please close your eyes and ears...

If you are think that the 12 Danish cartoonists – together with the Jyllands Posten editor should be hung, drawn and quartered – please save me by leaving the room! I AM going to engage in what some might consider blasphemous. Strange... blasphemous, and yet what I want to tell you is a fairy tale!

ONCE UPON A TIME

Once upon a time in the late 1970s, God looked down upon earth and didn't like what he saw... A world divided by cold war... so many nuclear weapons that they could destroy his creation a thousand times over... So he sent archangel Ronald to investigate. And THUS... the archangel Ronald investigated and told the Lord that there was an evil empire down there and it practiced a terrible thing called Communism. And the good Lord instructed Ronald what to do and sent down archangel Margaret to help him. And... verily... in a few years, Mr Gorbatschow was "tearing down that wall" just as Archangel Ronald told him to do in Berlin. And in a few years Germany was re-united, the communists out of power everywhere and all was good. Well, apart from the Gulf, the Middle East, Africa, some places in South America and some places in Asia. But in good ole US of A and the increasingly united Europe, all was good, democracy and market forces flourished. Well, apart from the Balkans where one country was being torn to bits and pieces. By some eternal, mortal and external enemy? Nope.. by itself.

And so the 1990s ended with one final war in the Balkans but the Good Lord sent the combined NATO Archangels to make sure the right guys win. And it happened. And it was good. And the new millenium started and 10 more member states joined the EU and the Lord saw that all was good on the Earth. Well, at least in Europe. Well, at least in most of Europe. And he allowed 10 more countries to pass through the gates of the EU heaven and everyone was happy. Then, another new demon, Usama bin -Terror appeared elsewhere but the good Lord dispatched archangel George W to deal with him and all was good. Well, except for Afghanistan and Iraq and Darfour and... but that belongs to another fairy tale, and we are anyway talking Europe. Looking again at the troublesome spot of Europe - the Balkans... the good Lord saw that it needed some help and dispatched archangels Javier and Olli to make sure that all of those problematic countries sorted out their democratic credentials, crime and corruption, economies and everything else by yesterday. And they did. And they also passed through the heavenly EU gates and all was good. And everyone lived happily ever after.

So, that was the fairy tale... anyone believe in it?

When I look at the current EU hopefuls, and they all belong to the Balkans... to MY Balkans, I do not see anything that even remotely resembles the fairy tale ending. Oh, I DO believe in happy endings, but I believe in DESERVED... EARNED happy endings. What do I see.. well, I see countries and nations that all agree upon one thing – EU

membership as soon as possible. But... When thinking EU, the average Balkan tax evader thinks of subsidies, not of hard work. Of new labour markets, not painful restructuring of one's own economy. Of security through the magic of EU accession, not through making genuine peace with the neighbour. In other words, he thinks of benefits, not of duties and responsibilities. There is even a schizophrenic state of mind present here... a love/hate relationship. We love, admire and envy the EU because it is prosperous and we feel inferior that we are not there yet. At the same time, and maybe in order to console ourselves, we have built up a superiority complex, thinking that we are above the average EU citizen because he thinks only of material things, and we think about the soul. From here, there is just a small step towards the current prevailing attitude that Balkan nations are being victimized and punished by the rigorous entry criteria – particularly on issues of minority rights. Indeed... archangels Javier and Olli seem to be acting like the “moral truth” and holding out the promised land just to the chosen few...

Looking at each other in the Balkans, we think of the “other” as the bloodthirsty Serb, the devious Greek, the lazy Montenegrin, the stingy Slovenian... oooops.. they're already in the EU, they are allowed to be stingy... Anyways... like all prejudices, these need to be thrown out of the window and replaced with more open minded attitudes: the challenge is how to effect this - without staking a monopolistic claim on the moral high-ground, or slipping into the odd contradiction of a democratic society attempting to force another into being more consensus oriented and democratic. When talking about being ready for EU accession, we are not talking about just getting the laws re-written and wanted war crimes inductees extradited. However difficult it may seem now, that's the easy part. The REALLY difficult part is the changing of the prevailing mindset in the future member states. And that will not happen quickly, it will not happen easily and it will not come cheap. We are not just trying to sell the EU idea here... these guys all WANT to become members of the club. But they want to do it without the proper tie, without paying any membership dues and without the hassle of conforming with the rules. Well, no way Jose says Javier. But let's forget Javier... it is never good if someone else is making order in your house. We need to do that job ourselves. We need to put in MUCH more effort and more importantly, much more genuine and self-critical effort to deserve that membership we covet. We need to look at ourselves long and hard. And we need to change. Truly, deeply, thoroughly. We need to change the society at large.

And the work has to be done here... right here, right now. And.. that is the ONE aspect that I have not heard here today...the one that seems to be missing from the predictions about the Balkans in ten years time. We heard what structural changes need to be done, we haven't heard what we need to change inside ourselves before all those nice dreams and fairy tales come true... Thank you for your patience and please... do not crucify the messenger if you do not like the message.