

In memoriam - Danas 26.3.2011.

## BUILDER OF IGMAN BRIDGES

In a humorous interview published by magazine NIN few years back, Zika Kovacevic was asked what would he like to be said on his funeral. Zika replied:

“Lived and died.”

This humorous reply could be applicable in case of many people, but not in his case. Between his “lived” and “died” there is so much that hardly fits into several lifetimes, and he managed to make all in one.

Zika was a curious person with a broad field of interests, huge intellectual potential, great energy and honesty rarely met among people of our times. On Zika's computer desktop, there was motto standing all the time: “Not a day without a line drawn”. He followed that motto tenaciously. When he wasn't on the field or somewhere in the region with fellow Igmanians, he always started his day in front of the computer. His intellectual workshop has produced capital works in various fields: diplomatic negotiation, which became a part of the curriculum on many diplomatic academies throughout the region, linguistic matters, very highly evaluated by experts, published in several editions.

Zika was certainly one of the most valuable people in this part of Europe, who bestowed upon us in Igman Initiative his reputation, energy and honesty, for which we now express our eternal gratitude. He was *spiritus movens* of this movement for normality in times when being normal was not normal. He was with us from the very beginning, our trademark, man who's name opened all doors for us, including those of Presidential Cabinets. Even those who disagreed with him, respected him. He participated in all Igman Initiative sessions, all the way from the first session that was held in Banja Luka to the most recent, 21<sup>st</sup> held on May 29-30<sup>th</sup> last year in Sarajevo, where this era of Igman Initiative was celebrated. That date was set six months earlier than usual in honor of Zika's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Thanks to certain fortunate circumstances, there were some positive developments in the region in the meantime, which made this Igman Initiative session a historic event during which four Presidents met together for the first time to announce a new era in regional relations. For each Igman Initiative session, Zika prepared the analysis of normalization of relations between Dayton Triangle countries, accompanied by proposals for acceleration of this process. All his speeches were compiled and published in the book “Bridges of Igman Initiative”, which was promoted after the ceremonious Igman Initiative session in honor of this eighty-year old youngster, as one of the promoters called him.

On Igman Initiative paths of peace, even in his late age and fragile health, Zika traveled with us everywhere. Without complaint he endured the ride in an old car all around the Balkan wilderness. Thus, he reached Pristina, Trebinje, Dubrovnik, Vukovar and other places covered by Igman Initiative activities. In all those places, spirit of good will and wisdom brought by Zika was spreading around, enlightening for all of us gathered around Igman Initiative. In all those places, at least small advancements toward normalization were achieved every time, which created a joint contribution to the process of transformation of this region into a more livable place, both for us and for future generations. That is how Igman Initiative, once a group of “traitors” in their own countries, earned its reputation and became a desirable partner to the national governments, as well as on the highest levels in European Union. Zika's role in this process was immeasurable.

Great men are always remembered by their great deeds, as well as by little things they did as ordinary people. Alongside his great intellectual and moral capacity, Zika managed to remain ordinary person with great charm and endless wit. That's why everyone in Igman Initiative liked those informal, usually evening hours, the relaxed atmosphere full of humor, where Zika used to give his own special contribution. For us, those moments were like oxygen chambers, giving us strength to face the cruel everyday struggle that followed afterwards. Among those moments, there were also traditional antifascist gatherings held in month of May on Mount. Fruska Gora, where all members and friends of Igman Initiative from around the region gathered to spend good time. All that will be remembered also by Zika's jokes. Now, when Zika is no longer with us, those antifascist gatherings will never be the same.

On one occasion, Zika said that he held many functions in his life, some of which he decided to slowly retire from due to his age, but that he'd never retire from his role in Igman Initiative. To the last day of his life, Zika was committed to Igman Initiative. Even just before his last day on earth, we expressed interest in Igman Initiative's future plans and activities.

Zivorad Kovacevic, our Zika, is no longer with us. Memory of this remarkable man's reputation, energy and honesty, as well as memory of wonderful moments we spent together in friendship he honored us with, will forever keep our hearts warm.

Aleksandar Popov,  
co-president of Igman Initiative in Serbia