

Prof. Dr. Oliver Antic, Ambassador of the Republic of Serbia

“Reading Dostoevsky”

On May 9 2020, in your esteemed newspaper, Leonidio Paulo Ferreira's text entitled "When was the last time you read Dostoevsky?" was published.

The article nicely presents different ways of influence of European culture and customs around the world, even in those parts of Asia where Dostoevsky lived and worked. The publication of the text coincided with my re-reading of a book by one of the cleverest authors, called "A Writer's Diary". Perhaps, especially today, it would be useful and, above all, instructive, to remind ourselves of what Dostoevsky wrote about Europe back in 1873, especially because being part of the European heritage and culture is not a one-way process. On the contrary, Europe, or with today's vocabulary - EU, should also, for its part, make a certain, not great, effort to embrace all those who have been and are part of the European heritage and culture, and not only that only new and new requirements, criteria, measures are coming from the EU... Dostoevsky writes only about Europe's attitude towards the Russians, but what he said can, without a doubt, be applied to many other nations.

Dostoevsky, first of all, asks the question whether Europe can understand "our artists" at all? He says, "a very large number of paintings are sent to the Vienna World's Fair", but from which point of view will they be evaluated? Translate e.g. Ostrovsky and his comedy "We are our own people", in the best German or French language and direct it on the European stage - "I have to say, I don't know what will turn out". I have always held that "Gogol cannot be expressed in French." Gogol was translated together by the Frenchman Viardo and Turgenev, who "probably knows French very well", but the outcome of the translation was this one: "Gogol literally disappeared".

All this warns, writes the great thinker and writer, of those mistakes of Europeans in "their obvious tendency to judge us by the bad, and perhaps explains the persistent, general, on some nasty and strongly direct feeling based hatred that Europeans have for us "..., And this is explained by the "eternal, ancient, old objection addressed to us: that we are supposedly not Europeans at all... We, of course, are angry and try our best to prove that we are Europeans... ". "Material interests rule over sublime ideas, and in them children are brought up separately from the ground and far from the natural truth, in disrespect or indifference to the fatherland, they are learn to feel ridiculous contempt for the people"... Here is the beginning of evil: in that transmission, inheriting ideas, in that centuries-old national suffocation of every independent thought, in the notion of the position of Europeans, which can only be achieved with the obligatory condition of disrespect for oneself"...

Isn't it similar today in the middle of the EU? Some from the north recently qualified those from the south of the EU to just "drink wine and chase women"! They refused to use European funds for the purposes for which they were intended, to help those who were hit by a great misfortune! Didn't President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa ask whether Europe is in solidarity or not? And Prime Minister Antonio Costa was forced to warn such people of their unacceptable behavior with the harshest words?!

The EU cannot and must not be just a community that sees its essence through "coal and steel". No community in history has lasted for a long time, if it has not developed common art, literature, science and justice (righteousness) from its nucleus, and that means nurturing the principles of understanding others, tolerance for others and solidarity with others.