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2017



IN MEMORIAM



Nikola Tasić
(1932—2017)

I can speak of the recently late Nikola Tasić, an archaeologist and balkanologist of international renown, a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, in several capacities: as his friend, as his collaborator on many projects of the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, as his successor as director of the Institute. Nikola Tasić came from a distinguished family originally from the town of Vranje, and was a nephew of another member of the Academy, Djordje Tasić. Archaeologist by education, he spent most of his active career in the Institute for Balkan Studies: he was among the first members of the Institute's scholarly staff after its reestablishment in 1969, its scholarly secretary, deputy director and, finally, its director, from 1989, with short breaks, until the end of 2012. Even when he pursued other important activities – as director of the National Museum in Belgrade (2001–2003), professor at the University of Novi Sad (from 1986), secretary-general (2003–2007) and vice-president (2007–2016) of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts – Nikola Tasić was in the daily habit of coming to the Institute to meet his colleagues and friends, to enquire about the affairs of the day and the progress of the projects and, when needed, to offer advice and support.

I first met Nikola Tasić in 1984, during preparations for the Congress of the AIESEE in Belgrade, where he, as deputy of the director of the Institute, Radovan Samardžić, carried most of the organizational work load. As one of the congress secretaries, I was in daily communication with him, which gave me the opportunity to notice not only his great organizational skills but also his rare gift of communicating with his colleagues, senior as well as junior, both warmly and competently. A natural gentleman, self-possessed but affable, he won everybody with his graciousness. With Nikola Tasić, whatever matter was in hand, even the most complex one, was solved with unusual ease, without tempers flaring, and so was every problem, however big, as has been the tradition at the Institute for Balkan Studies established by his predecessors, Vasa Čubrilović and, especially, Radovan Samardžić.

Along with pursuing his own scholarly interests, Nikola Tasić used his organizational and communicational skills for expanding the network of friends and partners of the Institute at home and abroad. Owing to his commitment, our contacts and bilateral and multilateral projects with related institutes in Sofia, Bucharest and Thessaloniki grew in number and international collaboration intensified. The established ties proved to be firm and steady. They were not completely severed even in the difficult last decade of the twentieth century, when Serbia was under cultural and scientific sanctions. Nikola Tasić's office was visited by a number of scholars of different profiles. Unwilling to break scientific collaboration with Belgrade, they came to express solidarity or to propose projects which would start once the sanctions were lifted. It was on his initiative that an important conference of the directors of the institutes for Balkan studies from the region was held in Belgrade in 1995, setting the course for future bilateral and multilateral cooperation. His political engagement in the struggle for democracy in Serbia in murky times was a shining example of an intellectual effort to contribute to the common good and recuperate democratic traditions of Serbian society. This brave engagement earned him further repute in the public eye both at home and internationally.

Nikola Tasić was a member of many national and international committees and associations: Committee on Archaeological Research of Vinča; Committee on the Encyclopaedia of the Visual Arts; Gallery of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts; Centre for Balkan Studies of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Matica srpska; Institute for the History of Vojvodina; National Committee of the AIESEE; International and Inter-Academic Committee on the Prehistory of the Balkans (Heidelberg); National Committee of the International Union for Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences (UISPP); International Association for the Study and Dissemination of Slav Cultures (MAERSK); International Council of Thracology.

Lastingly concerned with the Balkan dimension of our past, from archaeology to anthropology to history and art history, Nikola Tasić insisted in his

communication with renowned foreign institutions on international and, whenever possible, multidisciplinary projects of the Institute for Balkan Studies. Owing to his high personal reputation and good connections in the academic world not only in the Balkans but also in Europe at large, he was able to secure funding for various research projects and for many scholarly conferences that the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts hosted during his directorship of the Institute for Balkan Studies. He was always willing to rely on personal acquaintances among archaeologists and balkanologists made in the course of the work on bilateral projects for establishing or deepening the Institute's collaboration with similar research institutions in Austria, the Czech Republic (Czechoslovakia), Poland, Russia, Georgia, Hungary, Germany, Italy, France, Macedonia. Moreover, always supportive of junior researchers, he provided them with letters of recommendation which almost unfailingly ensured funds for study stays abroad or foreign scholarships.

Opposed to any kind of mythomania, Nikola Tasić was always measured and moderate in his thought and action, free from even a tingle of academic jealousy and, even more importantly, he felt a commitment to the common good, so rare nowadays. Nikola Tasić in fact had a special mission: to make it possible for all people he worked with to reach their maximum scholarly potential, to be given the opportunity to prove themselves and gain recognition in whatever their field. The unwavering support, advice and assistance he provided both as director and as a mentor in usual and especially in critical situations meant so much to those who had just embarked on the uncertain path of doing scholarly work.

Nikola Tasić insisted on having the Institute's more important publications published in foreign languages or at least as bilingual editions in order for the results of domestic scholarship to become accessible to the international academic community. As editor-in-chief of the Institute's multidisciplinary annual journal *Balkanica*, on the other hand, he insisted on having as many renowned foreign contributors as possible in order to enhance its quality and diversity and further its international visibility and reputation.

Owing to Nikola Tasić, seemingly incompatible disciplines could team up on a major national or international project with a view to coming up with a broader, more layered and, if possible, more comprehensive picture of the Balkan past. Therefore, his scholarly staff recruitment policy was focused on maintaining the multidisciplinary character of the Institute for Balkan Studies and on strengthening individual disciplines for long-term projects.

Even when burdened with other responsibilities, as two-term vice-president of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, Nikola Tasić continued to keep a protective, fatherly eye on the work and progress of the Institute. As chairman of its Scientific Board, and then, until his death, of its Management Board, Nikola Tasić contributed to its work with his experience, expertise and advice, ever will-

ing to help to renew or expand bilateral agreements with related institutes from Moscow to Sofia, or to procure funding for one or another project.

To me, personally, it was a great privilege to be able to gain not only his trust but also his friendship in the twenty years of our working together, from 1992, when I joined the Institute for Balkan Studies. To him, the Institute for Balkan Studies was something of an extended family which he watched over caringly, open to its members' personal fates and dilemmas. And this feeling of trust was reciprocal: he frequently shared with us, his colleagues, the importance of the lifelong support of his wife Vera, his pride in his son Nenad, who follows in his footsteps, and words of praise for his grandchildren, Lenka and Nikola, who no doubt were the light of his life.

Dušan T. Bataković