
Dr. Mustafa Effendi Ceric

We reject the 'clash of civilizations' idea

On April 15, the Schiller Institute delegation met with Dr. Mustafa Effendi Ceric, the highest Muslim authority in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in his office in Sarajevo. Dr. Ceric, who lived in Chicago for five years, spoke in English. This is an abridged transcript of the discussion.

Ceric: Welcome to Sarajevo, to our community here. I have heard about the Schiller Institute. It did a lot for Bosnia. Thank you for your support.

I visited South Africa a week ago, for ten days. I was in Johannesburg, Capetown, and Durban. You have a Muslim community there. It's a small one, 1% of the whole population, with Indians, Pakistanis, and Malays, from Malaysia. A few Arabs. They have three ministers: minister of justice, minister of health, and minister of forests. And they have 16 Members of Parliament. So, they went out onto the streets asking for an Islamic state. It's very, I don't want to say radical, but—

Then we told them, "Please, be quiet. Put up or shut up," as they say in the United States. "Be grateful that you are here and enjoy freedom, and do whatever you can to help, on behalf of humanity, as much as you can."

Because the state is not the purpose-in-itself. Hegel only wants the state to be the purpose-in-itself. I think that is a great deception for us Muslims, that they are putting in our mouths that we want an Islamic state. We do not have, in the Koran, that there should be an Islamic state; we have only that God's will is to have an ethical and moral society. And the state is an instrument to achieve that. So the state may be good or bad. But your goal, to achieve ethical or moral standards, is there, whether the state is good or bad.

In South Africa, I found something called truth and reconciliation. The blacks want to forgive; but the whites don't ask for this forgiveness. The blacks want to live with the whites; but the whites don't want to live with the blacks. A similarity to us. We have hate in some areas of Bosnia. We have some areas where you are not allowed to be, because of your religion, let's say. We know this problem. Maybe sometimes it's better if you are different from others, so that you can know each other.

Religion defines ethnicity here, not vice-versa. So, Islam defines Bosniacs, if you like, in a cultural way, habits, and so

on. Orthodoxy defines Serbs, and Catholicism defines Croats.

I don't know whether this helps you or not, but this is how it is. This is the reality.

Take one remark which is very indicative: The mayor of the western part of Mostar said, "We don't want a united Mostar, because Muslims are lazy, and we work for them, and they want to live with us, because we do things for them." This is the logic of racism. The same thing. The arguments of the whites are that the blacks are worthless, that they are this, this, this, and this. So, it was a tremendous experience for us in South Africa, although, of course, you can't apply everything.

There is another indication. In South Africa, they say that Nelson Mandela is good, but his party is not. So, they believe only in Mandela. The same thing here. They say that Alija Izetbegovic is a good man, but the people around him are not good. But Mandela said, "No. You cannot say that I am good, but my party's not good. It created me." Why? Because these centers, they know how to create despots, dictators.

Dr. Jozef Miklosko: I think that just the three big religions, Christians, Muslims, and Jews, should cooperate, if the main culture is going to be saved, because all the world is really going in a very, very bad way, and we are responsible, as believers in one God. I appreciate very much your Islamic position, for example, at the Cairo Conference [the 1994 U.N. conference on population—ed.], for the protection of life. There, all Catholics, Christians, and Muslims were on one ship, and they cooperated, and we should do it also in the future, I hope.

We are trying to help Bosnia, to make a lobby for the generous reconstruction of Bosnia, not through some international and multinational financial institutions, which have some conditionalities which are really sometimes very nasty, to pay 17% of the debt of the aggressors, of the Serbs, and then you get some money. What we need is a national bank, a national organization, which can create sovereign banking, a sovereign state, and help people here, especially the children.

In this sense, I hope that Bosnia has a future, and we all, from many countries and many religions, will try to help you. And therefore, once more, we thank you.

I know the pope wants to come to Sarajevo, and I think that he will use it, also, for this question. And we, as Catholics, are shocked, and surprised, and surprised in a good way, about the very positive activity of the pope, his communication with all churches, especially Islam, but also others. Our bishops are very polite and very careful, but the pope is really not, in this sense. And it's good! Therefore, I hope that you will find very good contact with him.

An oligarchical policy

Paolo Raimondi: You touched upon some big issues, also looking back at history, because this provides a very big lesson for what has happened today. You told us that this kind of aggressive war has happened ten times before. I say that



Rejs Ulema Dr. Mustafa Effendi Cerić, the religious leader of the Islamic community in Bosnia-Herzegovina, receives the Schiller Institute delegation at his residence. Left to right: Paolo Raimondi, Theo Mitchell, Ben Swan, Jozef Miklosko, Dr. Cerić, Umberto Pascali.

every time it has happened, it was the result of an oligarchical mentality, an empire dominated by this oligarchical mentality, which does not respect human life. On the contrary, it approaches human life as a number: bestial, expendable.

As you know, the Schiller Institute, at the very beginning of this aggression, raised this political point very strongly. We said, "The Serbs have moved—the Greater Serbs," not the good Serbs. The Chetniks, the Greater Serbs. "They have moved, because somebody, some interest behind them, bigger than them, let them go for some reason." This was a general destabilization of the world, very, very dangerous, and far-reaching as well.

We pointed a finger at the British Empire, meaning not only London, but this network of oligarchs, now very much present in the House of Windsor as a type of institution.

We saw that in the last years. You saw it more than we did, but all the world could see: Lord Carrington, Cyrus Vance, David Owen, and the United Nations.

The game was, as you know, a supranational solution, a breakup of nation-states, to destroy populations, to destroy values, and then to impose a dictatorship.

On top of this, there was a very conscious attempt (this may be why the Greater Serbs did not get the green light to come into Sarajevo) to create, for a longer period of time, a religious war, what they call a religious war. Pit one against the other, because they were working, and they are still working for the idea of a "clash of civilizations."

This is the new word. That Islam should become the new enemy. This is why your fight in the last four years has been so important. There was a betrayal from Europeans, Americans, the West in general. Not the people; the people were

participating with their hearts. But the governments, the institutions—not all the governments, but these oligarchs. They block everything. The United Nations mechanism blocks everything, controls everything. And I think that Bosnia and the Bosnian people, after the suffering of the last three or four years, have the moral authority to intervene.

Ceric: I understand what you're saying. I understand. We didn't want to do this, but this is not by our choice.

Raimondi: Because you kept this fire burning, this light, people can come here now, despite all the problems. Today, we saw this again. You can prove that a multi-ethnic, multi-religious community can exist, based on human beings, and that society can function.

This is what they're battling to destroy, and they've tried many times in this century. These people are really dangerous and crazy. They tried to pit Islam against the rest of the world, or the rest of the world versus Islam, depending on where you sit.

As I said, with your moral authority, we need your help—more than ever. We need your help to help us in changing the West, and the rest of the world, around this battle of principles.

The issues facing Europe

Ceric: If I may speak now, following your comments: First of all, I am very glad that we met. I usually have all these politicians who are always trying to get you something. So you have to be very careful. And all those humanitarians: I pray to God, sincerely, that you never come to the position that somebody gives you aid. Please, pray, and pray for your children, that you don't go around and ask, and live on sympathy. I pray sincerely.

They say that the facts have no mercy. God maybe will have mercy on you, and love, and all this. But the facts—they don't. The facts are: always, in all history, you had one power or two powers, but, basically, two. This is why we are in confusion now. We have only one, the most powerful in the world, the West, because we don't have communism any more.

But, what is the greatness of the greater power? There are two characteristics. First, political power, which is based upon economic power. And these two are based on one single fact, that those who know to appreciate differences among people will be great. The United States is great, only because it knows how to recognize differences of all different ethnic groups, religions, and so on.

As for the Ottomans: You may like them or you may not like them, but the fact is, that the Ottomans ruled this area for five centuries. This is the oldest dynasty in the history of mankind. How? Because they recognized different ethnic and religious groups.

The Ottomans made the Serbs to be a nation. The Ottomans built the churches. You know what happened? The churches that had been built in the fifteenth century, and survived all these tyrannical sultans, have been destroyed now. The Ottomans were able to keep peace here, in this area, with all these ethnic Balkan groups. And all these ethnic groups survived, survived the Serbs. The Turks, the Ottomans, were so strong and powerful at the time, that they could wipe out everything, everybody. But they didn't. But, once the Ottomans closed themselves off and isolated themselves, it was the end.

So I see for Europe, which I am part of—you can hate or you can love Europe. These are two extremes. You cannot be indifferent; because it is so powerful, that you like it because you want to imitate it; and yet it is so deadly, so merciless, that you hate the power that it has. And, if Europe continues to do this, this is the beginning of the end. *But*, when you're powerful, you don't see your decline. This is how it is with great powers.

Islam's role today

People ask me, especially Muslims, "Tell us about Bosnian Muslims. We never hear about them." The Islamic world didn't know about Bosnia; they don't even know certain things about themselves, so how could they know about Bosnia?

But, when it came to be on CNN, they discovered that there are some Muslims in Europe! That was a discovery for them. This is why this emotion came, even though they have problems in Kashmir, Palestine, and all this. But, they forgot everything. "Let's go to Bosnia," because it is in Europe.

And I told them that I didn't know these Bosnians, really, myself. I discovered them, too. Because we were far away from each other. We didn't know each other, even, on the street. Because we lived in a most godless time. In Europe, it was proclaimed that God is dead. Philosophy took over the

religious meaning. We don't know how to speak religiously, and we do not understand each other. This is why we have difficulty: When we speak about this multiculture, people don't understand what you are talking about.

It's not a question any more of how much you believe in God, and how much you go to church. It's a question of respect for the concepts that our fathers had before us.

In Sarajevo, you have these churches, synagogues, in a very, very small area. If somebody asked us now, would you allow the Catholic church to be near the mosque? I don't know what our answer would be. But our fathers based their lives on this belief. We *don't* have religion. It is only a show! We have computers. "We will put everything in the computer." But, it is not in our minds. And, this is why we are suffering.

Why, for example, in the Second World War, did the Serbs, the same Chetniks, not touch the mosques? Yet this time, they destroyed everything. Why? Forty-five years of this alienation from *anything* heavenly, or anything that is God's. Because we are cut off. This is what they call "secularization."

But we have certain moral demands. The difficulty of Islam, is that it doesn't compromise with certain demands of the world in which we live. Islam makes moral demands.

This is why, for example, you have this antagonism, or apathy, toward Islam. This apathy is reasonable, in one way. I know those points that are reasonable. Because those who represent Islam, are very far away from the way Prophet Mohammed taught Islam.

But, the West is making a mistake. You could fight communism, because it was artificial. You cannot fight Islam. I mean, you cannot destroy it. Of course, you can try to control it, to manipulate it. That's different: to corrupt it. But, you cannot destroy it. And this is what they have as an agenda.

The more the West pressures Muslims, the stronger the Muslims will be. The fact is, that all these Bosnians who were *far* from religion—not just Islam, but *every* religion—Karadzic made them stronger Muslims than 50 years of our missionary work in the mosques. Because Karadzic did one good thing for us—God forgive me for saying this. But, he didn't distinguish among the Muslims, whether a person is an atheist or a fundamentalist, or whatever. They killed all those who were circumcised. And that made Muslims stand together as a group, because you need security. You are secure when you come to your group. So, you must be Muslim, whether you like it or not.

What the West is doing, is uniting the Muslim world. Which, from my egoistic point of view, if you like, is good. So I would encourage the West to do this, because it makes people stronger. When you are defiant, if you succeed, then you don't care what they say. The West wants to dominate the world. They want everyone to listen to them, because they don't see the needs of those who are not in the same position.

Europe is lying to us, saying that they want a multicultural life. No. They are lying to us. Yes, you can be a slave, and

have a multicultural life. We will see what the future holds.

Proposal for an international institute

In a small area here, four civilizations meet. Jews are not a big number, but, because of their quality, their influence is very, very great. So, there are no big and small nations. There are only strong and weak nations.

We can pay homage to this witness of Sarajevo and the Bosnia flank. I would like to see an institute, an international institute in Sarajevo, for comparative study of religions and civilizations, to prevent the conflict of civilizations. Sarajevo should be a laboratory for that. Because here, if you want synagogues, you can go; if you want Catholic churches, you can go. You have Orthodox churches? Yes, you can go. You have mosques? Yes.

Students from all over the world could come to this institute, to be governed by different scholars, different backgrounds, to study religion and culture. Because it is different to study Islam in Cairo, than in Washington. Why? Because in Cairo, whatever you say, you are right. For example. It's like in Moscow, they used to say that Americans were saying that they were a free nation, because you could say whatever you like against Nixon. You can offend him, and so on. So, we have more freedom than Moscow. Then, the Russian said, "We have more freedom. In Moscow, you can say whatever you like against Nixon, too."

But here, you cannot do that. In Sarajevo, if Catholics say, "We are Catholics, we want to do—" No, no, no. If I say, "We want Islam here," the Catholics will say, "No, please. We are here." And the Serbs, and the Jews. So, every day I have to prove myself. *Every day*. Every single day. Because from my home to here, I meet Serbs, and Jews, and Croats, and so on. So, I'm not alone.

What I'm trying to say, is that Sarajevo should be a center for such study, to have a good library, an institute, and to have students—our children—who will come. But, not on the notion that we're going to study *against* religion. We've had enough talk against religion. I mean, it's enough. They've said everything.

Dialogue among the faiths

But, let them see what there is, about religion. Our great-grandfathers. You see, Thomas Aquinas was a student of Ibn Sina. He would say, "My master says. . . ." Al-Farabi was a student of Aristotle. He sacrificed even Islamic values for the sake of the wisdom of Aristotle. We know this. Then there was Maimonides, a Jew who was a doctor, a private medical doctor to the Mameluke rulers in Egypt, who wrote a book called *A Guide for the Perplexed*, who wrote about Islamic theology, better (I teach Islamic theology) than the Muslims. He could understand this Islamic religion very well.

And they did have dialogue. You have one interesting point, a dialogue between a Jew and a Muslim. They were disputing about their religion, because everybody says that

their religion is better. And in one statement, they said, "If I lie, I swear to God, I wish to be a Jew. If I lie, let me be a Jew." And the Jews say, "If I lie, let me be a Muslim." You know? But, for them, that was a competition. Who is going to be better, and to show in practice whose religion is better?

Now, we are coming to theological paganism, because people say that only those who have *no* religion can rule the world. You see? Why? Because only paganism can be neutral.

Because I, as a Muslim, am not; and Boutros Boutros-Ghali, he is "very objective," because he is more criminal, of course. And because I am Muslim, I am not trusted. And because you are Christian, you are not trusted. Right?

They put us together, and we cannot agree. We try to prove whose God is more powerful: mine or yours? But, we are proving *ourselves*, not God, because God is one and the same. It's not only that He is one, but He is the *same God* that we are talking about.

But then, we want to have different gods. So, we put gods to fight each other. And we say that we are not pagans, like the Greeks. Yet, of course, we are very, very close to that.

So our duty, if we are concerned about the future of our planet, is *not* how to prove to ourselves how many of us can destroy mosques and churches, but how many people of this pagan mentality we can bring together, to win them over, to get them to make peace with the Creator of the Universe? I think that's our task and our job. And, I see we have a lot to do.



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<http://www.clark.net/larouche/welcome.html>

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