

THE NATIONAL AND UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

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NACIONALNA I UNIVERZITETSKA
BIBLIOTEKA

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Sažetak : Autor se zalaže da se u objekat obnovljene Vijećnice ponovno useli Nacionalna i univerzitetska biblioteka BiH. Njegov stav se zasniva na tri razloga, koja podrobno obrazlaže, a koji se temelje na prednosti Sarajeva kao specifičnog multikulturnog središta Bosne i Hercegovine.

There are at least three reasons why the restoration of the National and University Library as a modern working library in the Vijećnica Building should be regarded as an urgent priority by all those concerned with the future of Bosnia - Herzegovina.

The first has to do with the place of the Library in Sarajevo itself. A restored library would resume a rightful place as a central focus of activity for the citizens of the city, becoming, once again, a central meeting place for locals and visitors. Although the building has been partly restored, it remains empty and is thus still a landmark to and symbol of the destruction and cultural havoc caused by the war. A restored library would become a potent symbol of the resurgence of the city's values of cosmopolitan co-existence and the failure of war to remove those values.

A second reason derives from the changing role of libraries in the contemporary world and the opportunities which these present both to Sarajevo and to Bosnia-Herzegovina as a whole. Libraries are no longer merely centres of the printed word. They mount exhibitions, hold conferences, have specialist departments (of oral history, for example) and

develop initiatives in fields such as design and information technology. There was, for example, a recent exhibition in the Australian National Library to which libraries from about 100 different countries sent to Canberra one precious book chosen to illustrate a key feature of their cultural heritage. 'Treasures of the World' was so popular that it had to remain open to visitors 24 hours a day.

The Library in Sarajevo can build on such examples as these. It could, for example, extend and develop its good existing links with other libraries in the region such as those in Belgrade and Zagreb - or indeed all the national libraries of the states of former Yugoslavia. It could do likewise beyond the

the Balkan region - most obviously with the new Alexandrina in Alexandria. It could, in short, become a key point in regional and international networks of libraries. Additionally, on home ground, it could once more become the flagship library of a restored library network across BiH itself - for there are compelling reasons to suggest that it is not just the library in Sarajevo, but the whole library system in the country which needs restoring. On the basis of its linkages with other libraries within and beyond the region it could organise exhibitions, conferences and other events all of which would add attract visitors to the city and add to the visibility of Sarajevo and BiH.

A third reason comes from asking about the future place of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Europe and the world. What sort of economic niches should the country plan to enter? What might its cultural role within and beyond the borders of Europe be? What could it contribute to regional and global political relations? What has any of this got to do with the Library?

The answers to these questions are obviously varied and complex. But we can risk a single sweeping generalisation - which is anyway not particularly original. This is that BiH should seek out a role (or, in fact, consolidate its historical role) in the interpretation of culture. BiH is geographically positioned between East and West, Islam, Christianity and Judaism, and has a history founded on the traditions of all three. It is thus ideally placed to make a distinctive contribution to a world presently torn apart by conflict and lack of understanding. In this context it is worth remembering the positive role which the non

aligned movement played during the cold war. There is, unquestionably, a role for the values and aspirations which that movement stood for.

It would be a striking symbol of its post-war reconstruction effort if BiH were to reposition itself in this way. One could then imagine that the country could provide a space for all sorts of events, meetings and conferences, on this broad theme. Such a programme would inevitably lead to all sorts of linked consequences such as the production of accompanying literature and, of course, accompanying forms of tourism. All of this would contribute to a radical enhancement of the image which some people outside the country have of it and this, in turn, would have all sorts of positive additional economic consequences. BiH could become a centre for types of multi-cultural design, for example. Less formally one can imagine Sarajevo quickly re-establishing itself as a place to go for all those (including students and young people) who were looking to get away from the cultural polarities of today's world and find a space where all the dynamism of multi-culturalism and cosmopolitanism - in music (a field of enormous opportunities for BiH), painting, literature, gastronomy to mention just four likely spheres - are to be found.

The Library could play a substantial role in all of this - as a centre of information and the exchange of ideas and knowledge. It could be the linchpin in constructing BiH as a leading example of the sort of 'knowledge society' which the EU is presently so keen to promote. By making a distinctive contribution to international understanding, cooperation and intellectual development a restored National Library would certainly take a leading role in the re-construction of post-war BiH itself.

How can any of this be taken forward in practice? Now is the time for all those with an interest in the Library to come together to make a concerted effort to push forward its restoration. One recent initiative has been taken by a team of students and teachers from universities and non-academic institutions in BiH, Italy and the UK under the EU's TEMPUS Programme.

A lobby group has been set up by this group which can be contacted at the Library. The purpose of the group will be to mobilise local and international opinion and support so that the Library can once again become the symbolic embodiment of all that is best about the city of Sarajevo and BiH

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