

Bicameralism, Democracy and the Role of the Civic Society

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Speech by Srdja Bozovic, President of the Chamber of Republics of the Federal Assembly of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia



Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased and have a special honour to greet the high-ranking representatives of our host-country and participants in the association of European Senates on behalf of the Chamber of Republics, as the upper house of the Yugoslav Parliament, over which I preside, and on my personal behalf.

Our participation in this conference gives us the opportunity to exchange our views on important issues of cooperation among our countries and to exchange mutual experiences gained in the work of our parliaments, which is of exceptional importance for further development of parliamentary democracy.

First of all, I wish to stress that all three forms of bicameralism, federal, political and socio-economic, have concrete reasons of existence in each state. Thus, in the existing Constitution of FR Yugoslavia, the bicameral parliament is a direct result of the federal organisation, therefore we have federal bicameralism.

This is evident from the fact that the Chamber of Citizens of the Federal Parliament represents all citizens of FR Yugoslavia, and the Chamber of Republics represents its member-states, Serbia and Montenegro, as such. So, this parliament structure guarantees an adequate constitutional autonomy of the federal units. The Chamber of Republics, as the federal chamber, is completely equal to the Chamber of Citizens, as the general representative body, in the execution of all parliamentary functions.

I truly understand the reasons of existence of both political and socio-economic bicameralism of parliaments. The political role which the upper house has in some states, by representing a counter-balance to the lower house, halting it, putting an end to all exaggerations and mitigating unfounded decisions, cannot be ruled out in the choice of parliament structure. On the other hand, modern society is not a unified nation which differs only by political beliefs; it also represents a whole range of business groups, professions, different strata. It is the upper house deputies, elected by the academies, universities, church, trade, industrial and crafts chambers, farmers' cooperatives and other cultural and business institutions, i.e. civil society institutions, that can represent these interests in the most legitimate way.

However, in the process of adoption of the Belgrade Agreement, all these reasons were not sufficient to envisage the establishment of bicameral parliament. We are convinced that this was not a result of unfoundedness or uselessness or non-democratic quality of bicameral parliaments, but of the objective consensus which was only possible at the time. Actually, the intentions of separatist authorities in Montenegro, which became evident through their efforts to weaken both the form and function of the common state, resulted in envisaging a unicameral parliament of the future state union of Serbia and Montenegro, with the final aim of its being a mere transmission of political elites and bureaucracies of Serbia and Montenegro.

He imposition of the delegation system, that is appointment of deputies from the existing republican parliaments to this parliament, is an irrefutable proof. This "false parliament" of Serbia and Montenegro would serve as a basis for making the state merely provisional and would certainly pave the way for a speedy dissolution of the newly formed state union of Serbia and Montenegro.

This is why we insist that the unicameral parliament of the future state union Serbia and Montenegro, which will be established under the Belgrade Agreement, should not be an imitation of parliament, but an expression of full legitimacy and that it should be constituted at direct elections. Our commitment is based on the well-known principle that unicameral parliaments stem from the sovereignty of citizens, it is based on the best European and world practice and democratic standards. This is certainly a precondition for our reintegration in the international institutions on our path to the family of united European states. This is why I expect you, my colleagues from democratic European parliaments, to lend us your support in this commitment of ours. This is the only way for us to be together!