

DAFKE

BANJA LUKA: A LETTER FROM UNDER THE RADAR

THE INAUGURATION OF THE FERHADIJA MOSQUE IN BANJA LUKA MAY 7 2016

THE TWENTY THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF ITS DESTRUCTION



Donald Reeves and Lord Hylton outside the reconstructed Ferhadija Mosque

Dear Friends

Peter Pelz, co-director of the Soul of Europe, Lord Hylton, our patron, Ferre Westermanns, a trained diplomat from the Netherlands, together with our colleagues in Bosnia, Adnan Jabucar, Anel Alisic, and Zoran Dukic and myself were the guests of the Islamic community at the inauguration of the Ferhadija Mosque.

There were around eight thousand people present. The event was well covered by CNN, Al Jazeera, the BBC and many European networks. On the platform by the mosque sat the President of the Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, alongside many muftis and imams, politicians and religious leaders including our friends the Serbian Orthodox bishop of Banja Luka, Bishop Jefrem and the Catholic bishop of Banja Luka, Bishop Komarica. Both gave speeches welcoming the mosque. The diplomatic corps of Bosnia was well represented and we sat just behind them. A message from the Prince of Wales was conveyed to the mufti of Banja Luka, Dr Osman Kozlic who thanked publicly the Soul of Europe for our initiation of the project to rebuild the mosque. He thanked us also privately. As we have been told many times by all the leaders there would have been no Ferhadija without the Soul of Europe. The site had been earmarked to be a car park. The ceremony was interrupted by the late arrival of the Prime Minister of Turkey accompanied by a posse of security officers, intimidating young men in dark suits, white shirts, black ties and dark glasses. The Turkish Development Agency paid for most of the mosque reconstruction, but at the behest of the Soul of Europe the government of the Republika Srpska also contributed.

Listening to the speeches on a mild summer's day celebrating the rising of the mosque from the ashes got me thinking about how we came to be involved. Those of you who follow our activities may remember in 2000 we made a solemn promise to the mufti of Banja Luka to 'help the rebuilding of the mosque'.

We underestimated the difficulties - the visceral hatred by Bosnian Serbs of Bosniaks, the struggle to get planning permission, the efforts to encourage the small elderly Bosniak community in Banja Luka, and the complete lack of interest from the EU and Western governments who regard religion as a private matter, the indifference of NGOs in Bosnia who said that we were wasting our time and should concentrate on workshops for developing civil society. Europa Nostra a leading conservation body only restore existing

buildings, so they were not interested.. The mayor of Banja Luka wondered why a mosque was needed since there were few Muslims now living in the city (not mentioning the reason, that thirty thousand had been ethnically cleansed). We stumbled into a dispute between two Islamic communities, the Turkish and the Saudi, both with influence in Bosnia. There were some outrageous proposals made by the municipality - like having high-rise buildings around the mosque site to hide the minaret. And some Muslims did not want a jewel of the country's artistic heritage rebuilt: its destruction became something to beat the Serbs with. Then our efforts in trying to involve European interfaith groups were not successful: just too difficult we were told politely. Different European Muslim communities said: 'Let them build their own mosques'. A mufti in Trinidad where I was a guest told me: 'All the mosques in Bosnia should be destroyed since Bosnians are not proper Muslims.' Our only successful journeys were to Libya where as part of Gaddafi's plan to come 'out of the cold'. Libya funded our work for three years. 'Take the money and run,' advised Richard Dalston, the UK Ambassador in Tripoli. Libya funded the Coventry Consultation.

From the start we considered the reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque to be part of the rebuilding of communities in Banja Luka. This was the purpose of the Coventry Consultation and the projects which emerged from them. They are described in Peter's book *Dust*, awaiting publication.

I am often asked why we continued with this work given all the obstacles. The answer is simple. We made a promise and kept it. Hence the warmest of welcomes to the Soul of Europe from the people of Banja Luka.

The new mufti in Banja Luka, Dr Osman Kozlic, wants us to help devise programs for conversation between the different communities, to encourage the Ferhadija to become a place of pilgrimage and an inspiration for projects towards 'the common good'. All that may

sound bland but Banja Luka is about as far right as you can get, and the current President would like a separate state which would lead to the break-up of Bosnia. So whatever programs the Islamic community undertakes will be difficult. I have some ideas but they are for future discussion.

Adnan Jabucar brought with him a film crew from Sarajevo who have completed a documentary for Bosnia TV about the Soul of Europe: *Ferhadija, The Untold Story*

https://mega.nz/#!kBoQkRiS!dl1Jl9ksajaDQLDc_uLqI7Q0GW5nAusOS8zIkmG9Bdw

I will be making a Presentation on Bach and Peace-building at Christchurch, Highbury on SATURDAY JUNE 4th at 19.30. Christchurch is at 155 Highbury Grove, London.

Thank you from all of us at the Soul of Europe above all for your support, financial, advisory and spiritual. The rebuilt mosque is a vindication of your trust in us. We are continuing with the project of National Dialogue, plans for making the mosque a centre for reconciliation, and finally to ensure a memorial for those murdered at the Omarska killing camp. Our work continues.

Donald Reeves

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Donald being interviewed inside the Ferhadija Mosque



Donald talks to the crowd outside the mosque



Donald gazing at the Ferhadija Mosque



Donald and Mufti Koslic



Donald and Mufti Camdzic, followed by Lord Hylton, Ferre Westermans and Anel Alisic



Adnan, Lord Hylton, Bishop Jefrem and Donald



Bishop Komarica talking with Donald and Anel



Donald talking to people outside the Ferhadija Mosque at the Inauguration

DAFKE

(Hebrew for IN SPITE OF)



DONALD'S PREFACE

Here is Peter's account of the inauguration of the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka to which we were invited as honoured guests. The event has been well covered in the news programmes of CNN, Al Jazeera, the BBC and many European networks, though our contribution was not mentioned.

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The new mufti in Banja Luka wants us to help devise programs for conversation between the different communities and to encourage the Ferhadija to become a place of pilgrimage and inspiration for projects towards 'the common good'. All that may sound bland but Banja Luka is about as far right as you can get, and the current President would like a separate state which would lead to the break-up of Bosnia. So whatever programs the Islamic community undertakes will be difficult. I have some ideas but they are for future discussion.



Donald being interviewed inside the Ferhadija Mosque with Adnan's film crew
(The carpets were donated by Milorad Dodik, President of the Republika Srpska)

BANJA LUKA: A LETTER FROM UNDER THE RADAR

Apart from the occasional reminder of the Srebrenica massacre and other criminal activities that took place in a war that came to an official end twenty one years ago, news from this particular Balkan region remains scarce. As Adnan Jabucar our colleague in chief from Sarajevo often tells us, the international community lost interest in the country many years ago. He comments that the three million or so inhabitants could easily be shipped around the world with no one noticing, and the country converted into a golf-course, a resort for the wealthy. In fact this would resolve the prickly problem of ethnic and religious diversity. By the time we arrived first in Bosnia in the year 2000 the region was already beginning to disappear under the radar.

As it is, around eighty thousand young people are leaving Bosnia every year. This is a sizeable chunk of any population let alone from a small country which needs them to stay and build. It is the qualified people who emigrate. In this way Western Europe leeches the best people from poor countries, on the one hand complaining about immigrants, and on the other hand ensuring that only the most useful are permitted entry, regardless of how denuded of these crucial citizens poor countries become.

There are three main strata in these kinds of societies. At the top are politicians and businesses, both inter-dependent and who are therefore opposed to a democracy which could remove them from power and also arraign them for their crimes. Below this stratum is the educated professional middle class from whom the young are doing their best to emigrate and build better-remunerated careers for themselves elsewhere in the world. Generally well-qualified, they are the most important element for a society trying to improve its economic performance. Those exceptionally brave and resilient ones that remain do so at a cost to their security and prospects, but show admirable determination to change their country for the better. Despite this thankless and endlessly desperate task, they understand global politics better than most people. They see the bigger picture, and understand how ultimately the world can only survive and progress by cooperation between countries, and the necessity of creating conditions which can improve relations between communities and all nations, big or small. They know that emigration does not necessarily solve problems for the people arriving, let alone what they leave behind. The rest of the country constitutes the third level: people with no resources and therefore who cannot emigrate, and who are mostly unemployed. Those that manage to survive are dependent on help from relatives or friends from abroad. The others commit suicide or die. Numbers are not known because there is shame in this research.

The inauguration of the Ferhadija Mosque occupied most of our time in Banja Luka, but we managed to fit in another failed attempt at persuading the mayor of Prijedor to allow the Muslims a Memorial at the Omarska killing camp, and also have meetings with several members of the steering group for the National Dialogue conference being organized by Adnan in Sarajevo later this year. Lord Hylton accompanied us the whole time, not just out of interest in all our projects but specifically because he is funding the conference.

The persistently poisonous influence of colonial attitudes struck me forcefully on this latest visit to Bosnia. Meetings with all our Bosnian friends there constituted the high point, and they included all three religious leaders who welcomed us with unexpected warmth. However two invasions on this small but significant region of Europe imposed themselves forcefully: the most dramatic happening at the inauguration of the mosque. The night before this particular invasion, an awkward supper with the British Ambassador reminded me yet again that the richest countries in Western Europe act like colonial masters

It took me a few days to sort my impressions, because everything in Bosnia happens with such intensity as to confuse my mind. Then a dream, as fortunately happens occasionally to help me unlock thought processes, fledged briefly last night. Not memorable or clear in detail, the gist of this dream is unmistakable and relevant. At a reception somewhere in Western Europe several dark-skinned young men appeared showing cards, which could have been bank or identity or business cards. Maybe slogans were written on them which I did not have time to examine. The young men did not appear hostile but I woke with not only a sense of dread, but knowing with absolute certainty that they were suicide bombers about to blow the reception up. The dream's meaning could not be clearer. These young men felt like foreigners in their own land, and indicated a mocking resentment of the reception's arrogant and patronising colonial attitudes. They were smiling because they had confidence in

themselves; they were educated professionals who understood the political, socio-economic and cultural situation. They also had the power... to destroy and kill.

The meeting in Bosnia which inspired this dream happened with the British ambassador who had invited the Soul of Europe for supper on the eve of the mosque inauguration. He expected just me, Donald and Lord Hylton; in other words, Western Europeans together having an indiscreet natter about the natives, the silly things they get up to and always needing to be bailed out by us rich countries. However we insisted on bringing our Bosnian colleagues along because, first and foremost, without Adnan the Ferhadija Mosque would never have been rebuilt. His contribution still needs to be fully acknowledged and rewarded with a well remunerated job. He should have been the main guest. Zoran and Anel had worked for a year with us on the failed memorial project at Omarska, and are people of such quality and intelligence, let alone courage, that we felt the ambassador would be delighted to meet, listen and learn from them.

The supper turned into a classic demonstration of patronising attitudes towards the 'natives'. For a start he considered the supper a duty, something called for to acknowledge the success of a project which puts the UK in a good light. Though polite and friendly as one would expect from a diplomat in his position, he showed a surprising lack of social skills and seemed nervous. He spoke incessantly about the nature of his work, although careful not to reveal any information about anything, but enough to let us know his cleverness and skill at dealing with local politicians, in particular President Dodik, with whom he apparently had robust conversations. This means they argued a lot. Having met Dodik, and known about him for years, it struck me that the president would have this ambassador for breakfast. But the ambassador wanted us to know that he had the upper hand. With all this footling talk that told us little, he did not have time to ask us questions or even listen to us, although we tried and occasionally succeeded in getting a comment in edgeways. There were no proper

introductions, so we could not tell him what everyone did, why we knew them, and why they were there. Most classic of all was the seating. He sat at the end of the table as the host paying for the meal, Lord Hylton to his right, Donald to his left, then Ferre Westermans, a student of international relations from the Netherlands who came to listen and learn, and myself, and further down the table at the bottom below me, Adnan, Anel and Zoran, the three natives, who then spent most of the meal talking to each other in Bosnian.

Right from the start of our work in the Balkans I used to get apoplectic about these international attitudes, with Adnan our main colleague always treated like a servant, a mere driver and fixer, the one native allowed in on the party. He would have to listen to opinions and comments which he knew to be ill-informed and frequently insolent, but had to keep his mouth shut. Afterwards he would correct these internationals' opinions, but most of the time I would be embarrassed on his behalf. Our last meeting, with Ian Cliff, the best ambassador we ever met and the glowing exception which proves the rule, Adnan would be again humiliated by a British guest, who assumed him to be a servant who happened to live with us in Crediton, part of the household. Even Ian Cliff looked embarrassed at such an assumption, because this ambassador treated everyone as equals and never once gave the impression of being a colonial interloper, but someone who considered himself to be a guest in whatever country he happened to be. Ian Cliff's first words to us at our very first meeting in Sarajevo were along the lines of 'I am new here and want you to tell me what I need to know.' The present ambassador of Bosnia talked with us as though he knew everything, and certainly more than we did.

Over the years I observed Adnan's attitude to such imperial dynamics, a kind of response which Anel and Zoran also shared: basically to ignore the internationals, politely listening for a while, never unfriendly, but then to carry on their own conversations, refusing to be in the

position of supplicants, people considered inferior and having to appear grateful for any attention paid them.

Ian Cliff knew how to behave. His position as ambassador earned him official respect, but he never played that card, put everyone at their ease and made sure to include everyone in the conversation. However the new and regular kind of ambassador is basically a business representative for his or her country, with no brief for any other activity, let alone support for our kind of ventures. Whereas the first ambassador we met in Bosnia, Graham Hand, used to be forthright, blunt and informed in his opinions, which he shared freely, even to the point of indiscretion, like his American counterpart at the time, ambassadors after Ian Cliff were basically government stooges with no freedom to act independently, but with the strict brief to have as little to do with us as possible. The story of that development is told in detail in *Dust*.

The most informative and dynamic conversations to be had in Bosnia are always between Adnan, Anel, Zoran and ourselves. I observed how Adnan dealt with the tricky dynamics of discussing the National Dialogue conference with Lord Hylton, the funder. On the one hand Adnan needed to show his gratitude, but on the other hand he quietly but calmly insisted on running the project his way, explaining the reasons why the process had to be open ended, for decisions to be made collaboratively, not imposed. There had to be a sea-change in the way decisions are generally made in the Balkans, which are a mixture of dictatorship, lies and corruption. A natural leader Adnan acknowledged that any process for positively influencing politics and society required he resist the temptation to bossily impose his ideas, however hard that might be for him. His thoughtfulness, determination and air of authority while accepting being part of a team impressed Lord Hylton, who understood and accepted this new process. For myself I thought the rest of Europe could learn from Adnan and his team. Far from being a small, inconsequential and subservient region, forever dependent on the

European Union, the last quarter of a century of war, punishment and impotence in the face of international colonialism had forged a generation of resilient intelligent people who would be a credit to any country. Adnan reminded me of a poem by the German von Eichendorff about friendship, which describes a person whose character has been forged in the hardest experiences of life, a person therefore to be utterly trusted. I feel the same about my Bosnian friends, whose stories are told in my book *Dust*.

Adnan gave us an astonishing gift on this visit, certainly the most important outcome. People like him are not only heroic but have a generosity which always comes as a surprise to those of us raised in competitive richer nations where giving, helping and sharing with others, unless it is a charity with all its patronising overtones and doing more for the giver than the receiver, is considered a weakness. Using colleagues from the TV station where he is occasionally employed to interview people on the news, entirely off his own bat without being paid, he made a film about the Soul of Europe's part in the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque, interviewing the religious leaders among others to celebrate what we had achieved, so that the story is now told and can be seen by anyone. Now there exists a record of what we did, not just in our own words, but with testimonies from the most significant people involved. The film is being edited and we will let you know when it is ready.

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Before the inauguration of the mosque we had to fulfil a promise concerning one of our projects in Bosnia that still waited to be completed: a memorial for all those murdered in the killing camp of Omarska. We had discussed this with our friend Mirsad Duratevic, who as a seventeen year old survived the notorious white house torture and killing room, was rescued by a Serb neighbour who took pity on him, hid him in his van, took him to the Croatian border and let him flee to Germany from where he returned after the war ended. A man of

exceptional courage and resourcefulness, he managed to raise a family in his home village destroyed by Serbs, help rebuild it, and at the same time involve himself in local politics to the level of now being deputy speaker of the local assembly. On our previous visit to Bosnia in November 2015 he encouraged another meeting between us and the mayor of Prijedor who had been responsible for the program of ethnic cleansing during the war and by graft and bullying had held on to power ever since, never being punished for any of his crimes from which he abdicated all responsibility. The mayor blocked all plans for a memorial while raising monuments to Serb soldiers who had died in the Second World War as well as the Bosnia War. One of these monuments stands provocatively right next to the killing camp of Trnopolje where women were systematically raped by Bosnian Serb soldiers and militia. The mayor had always argued with us that the time for a memorial to Muslims murdered in his killing camps could only be raised generations in the future when all those involved in the crime had died. Now ten years later he agreed to meet with us for reasons we could not fathom, except that the presence of Lord Hylton might have been a factor, and still considered such a memorial to be provocative. Older and grimmer he sat opposite us at the long polished table in his reception room, and reminded me of a dinosaur. Of all the people we met on this visit he was by far the saddest and heaviest, despite the array of awards for being the best mayor in Europe hanging on the wall behind him. How he achieved these awards tells another story. He managed to persuade the rest of Europe that his town boasted good relations between all the communities, as a result of large numbers of Muslim returnees who were building up their villages and towns nearby with money earned abroad. They came back as an act of defiance, and not for any reason of being welcomed by the Serb community which had tried so hard to get rid of them. International focus on Srebrenica at the Eastern end of Bosnia meant that few people remembered or thought about the mass killings going on

in the Western end of the country. Only the redoubtable Ed Vulliamy reminds the world at any opportunity he is given, but somehow the mayor continues to evade justice.

Donald was at his best at this meeting so important for the Soul of Europe, because our failure to achieve a fitting ending to this project made us feel we had badly let down the Muslim and Catholic communities in this part of Bosnia. The failure weighed on our conscience, and we still feel the need to do everything possible to make it happen. We sat facing the mayor who seemed indestructible, intent on carrying on in his post for ever. Aware of this probably being the last chance to make a difference, Donald attacked with such vehemence that the mayor for perhaps the first time in his life looked put out. This man is used to intimidating everyone and keeping politicians in his pocket. He never expects to be criticised. After his opening speech about the time not being right for a memorial, and that it would cause upset in the community, all the familiar arguments, Donald slammed his fists on the table and shouted: 'We've heard all this before! What's new? Ten years on and nothing has changed.' The mayor hesitated, not used to this kind of attack, then continued to repeat the same mantras, and even became self-pitying, saying that if he were to allow a memorial he would lose his voting majority, and his constituency of Serbs might actually attack him. Donald just kept repeating that the mayor should think of his legacy and allow the victims their memorial. The mayor continued to block this idea. He did however seem more contrite, and even managed to acknowledge that maybe crimes had been committed, but that the perpetrators had all been justly punished. However this meeting could have no positive ending, despite Lord Hylton's innocent contribution, as from a person new to the situation and who could only see the need for justice and reconciliation which would be best served by allowing such a memorial.

Fortunately, before this ultimately depressing encounter, we had met Azra Pasalic, Anel's aunt who had been in Mirsad's job when we visited Prijedor ten years earlier, a strong and

kindly woman who had been balm for us throughout the tough negotiations for a memorial. We felt guilty at our failure and wondered whether she would blame us. Far from it. In fact she warned us not to expect anything from the mayor. The region would have to wait for him to be voted out of office, an unlikely event, or for him to die. She made a point of saying that she missed our process of working with young people, all written about in my book *the white house*. Mittal Steel, now Arcelor Mittal, who commissioned the project in order to secure the undisturbed operation of their mine in the former killing camp of Omarska, had stopped the project on the advice of the mayor just as we had gained the agreement for a memorial from Serbs as well as the survivors, so we lacked funds to continue the work. We had accepted the commission knowing full well the mine owner's self-interest, but seizing any chance to improve relations between the local communities. Azra however did not blame us. In fact she blamed her community, saying that since we had begun the process, it should have been up to them to continue it. A reassuring presence as before and delighted to see us again, her words gave us ballast for the encounter with the mayor that followed, especially his intransigence.

On the way back to Zagreb we considered the high and low points of our visit, and commented sadly on our persistent failure with the mayor. Adnan, still driving, turned and looking us straight in the eye declared: 'Not at all!' He had never met the mayor before but judged his character shrewdly. 'After ten years you came back and gave him a hard time. You made him uncomfortable for an hour, maybe even for the rest of the day and night. That was worth it!'

There may have been truth in his observation because although the mayor had told us he would certainly be attending the mosque opening with his friend and ally President Dodik, he did not in fact turn up. Dodik entered with his entourage of minders and sat throughout the ceremony, even listening tight-lipped to the Turkish Prime Minister deliver a blistering

warning to the Serbs, afterwards declaring, with some justification, that this event was not the right time for politics.

I hoped that Mayor Pavic might have suffered a sleepless night out of guilt and did not feel up to a public occasion in support of the Islamic community he had so ruthlessly persecuted. But more likely he never intended to come. As everyone told us after our meeting with him, including Mirsad with more right to comment than anyone, all we can do is wait for the mayor to go.

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Apart from the mayor and the British ambassador, all the meetings we had encouraged, inspired and even surprised us.

First the Serbian Orthodox Bishop Jefrem who had always been the most difficult person to reach let alone bring on board welcomed us warmly. Not only did we not need to persuade him to come to the mosque inauguration, he had been invited and would give a speech. We expected a difficult meeting but in fact he enjoyed our visit so much he would not let us leave. Sitting in his palatial new house, all polished marble and gold leaf in grand rooms and staircases which make Buckingham Palace look pokey, he allowed Adnan's film crew to interview him about our role in Bosnia and according to Adnan spoke movingly and generously about our contribution. Delighted with the reconstructed mosque he declared simply that now Banja Luka could have a proper postcard, meaning that the mosque, the Catholic and Orthodox cathedrals could be seen together, as in the past they used to be shown. He sat on a throne surrounded by portraits of past bishops, a grim looking gallery and all framed elaborately with gold leaf to match the ceiling, candelabras and furniture. He did shyly comment on the excessive opulence, saying that it probably didn't fit with his job, but I also remembered that his favourite place was the monastery at Stuplje, deep in the

countryside where he looked forward to retiring to a modest room with a single plain bed beneath icons where he could meditate and pray far from the world. Then I also remembered a song by Schubert about a monk who from his humble cell watches crusaders passing by on the road to glory and comments that in his solitude he also experiences the drama of the spiritual life as tumultuous as any of their adventures.

Catholic Bishop Komarica also attended the inauguration and spoke movingly about how the reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque, along with other places of worship, helped all the communities to live with respect together. At our meeting the day before we went through the familiar litany of complaints about lack of Catholic returnees. Lord Hylton put it bluntly to the bishop that maybe people didn't want to return because they were leading better lives elsewhere. A journalist explained to us that returnees collected compensation money then would sell their property and move back to where they had emigrated. Bishop Komarica too gave a fulsome tribute to our work in Bosnia for Adnan's film.

Mufti Camdzic whom we had fought so hard with in the early years of our time in Bosnia because of his impatience at being without any mosque, turned out to be the happiest of all to meet us again. My book *Dust* describes our times with him in detail, because our relationship with the Islamic community was symptomatic of Europe's dealings with Muslims in general, constant mutual suspicion and endless testing to build even the minimum of trust. He gave the most moving tribute of all for the film. Adnan who usually remains detached and almost cynical in his response to people, especially leaders, admitted to being deeply moved by the mufti's words.

Having embraced us with a fierce intensity, squeezing my hand hard, the mufti declared that without us the mosque would not have been rebuilt. He then insisted we have a meal with him at his home in Sarajevo on our next visit there. Remembering the magnificence of the

feast his wife prepared for us on our previous visit this is an invitation we have every intention of accepting.

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Two invasions haunt the history of the Balkans going back centuries, the Ottoman and then the Austro-Hungarian Empires, and each of them keep repeating, one most dramatically at the inauguration of the Ferhadija Mosque. After the Dayton Accord twenty one years ago the EU took control of the region, and again an Austrian as the High Representative occupies the most important post in Bosnia. However the educated and liberal-minded Valentin Inzco is well aware of this historical baggage and keeps such a loose rein that the people complain he is not doing enough. They accuse him of allowing corrupt politics to continue, keeping the country weak and perpetually in hock to stronger economies in the rest of Europe.

The repeat second invasion crashed into the inauguration of the Ferhadija Mosque. The ceremony began with mollifying speeches from religious leaders, including the Catholic and Orthodox bishops, and politicians, led by the High Representative welcoming this event as a sign of healing and co-existence between the different communities. A gathering of twenty thousand people had been predicted but only eight thousand turned up, but still a good number for such a small town. We were sat with the ambassadors in front of us, and behind us a large gathering of muftis from all over the Balkans and Turkey.

Half an hour into the ceremony the new mufti of Banja Luka ran out with several nervous advisers. Evidently someone of importance had arrived. Then, suddenly, in the middle of the Orthodox Bishop's speech the people stirred in growing excitement. Making a grand entry into these sober celebrations Prime Minister Davutoglu from Turkey rushed in surrounded by a small army of minders and assistants. To cheers from the crowds facing the mosque from across a field separating them from the main guests, the Turkish Prime Minister took over

proceedings and delivered a rabble-rousing speech, shouting for up to half an hour, five times longer than any other speaker. The hesitant translation from a nervous and not particularly skilled interpreter allowed us to understand only snippets, but all of them provocative and challenging. Whereas the previous speakers talked about peace and harmony, the Prime Minister surrounded by fearsome burly Turkish minders in dark glasses standing tall and glowering menacingly over the heads of the assembled guests, delivered not-so-veiled threats and spoke of the seventy five million Turks ready to protect the Islamic community of Banja Luka : ‘When you bleed, we bleed.’ No mention of the mosque being a symbol of cooperation let alone reconciliation. I buried my head in my hands and shouted ‘Shut up! Shut up!’ but his booming voice drowned me out. The speech did however explain how the Ferhadija Mosque reconstruction came to fruition. Our own work on the mosque stalled in 2006. We had managed to raise money for the foundations from the Republika Srpska government to be followed by further donations, and from a few European countries, a trickle of cash which saw to the cleaning of the stones found in a waste dump outside Banja Luka, and the start of building. In 2006 Davutoglu himself visited the town and was shown the half built walls. Moved by this sight the future Prime Minister of Turkey promised to help the Islamic community complete the reconstruction, so thanks to his generous help the task was fulfilled. For this reason Banja Luka had to allow him the spotlight which he seized aggressively.

Fortunately the nre mufti of Banja Luka understood the purpose of the mosque as being a sign of reconciliation, and had acknowledged our part in its reconstruction, naming Donald personally in his opening speech, and asking Donald privately to establish opportunities for dialogue. The people seemed to pay more attention their mufti than to the sound and fury of Davutoglu’s speech. Nevertheless the sight of his chief minder, a giant of a man, must have reminded those who had read the *Bridge over the Drina* by Ivo Andric of the monstrous

Turkish overseer who over several blood-curdling pages tortures and slowly crucifies a Serb dissident. This was precisely the opposite message needed at the inauguration of this significant historical monument.

All I could think was: ‘Where were you when the Muslims of Bosnia needed you?’ Turkey had not protected the Islamic community in the Bosnia War, which is why the then Grand Mufti of Bosnia, Reis Ceric, turned for urgent assistance to the Saudis and the Mujahedin who came to his community’s aid. History of empire and unfinished business clouded politics and also left a toxic legacy much in need to healing.

Reis Ceric seized the opportunity of having the last word at the ceremony. This upset us. It should have been Mufti Camdzic who fought so hard for the mosque to be rebuilt. Reis Ceric had in fact obstructed the project, reckoning Banja Luka to be a town lost to Muslims, not seeming to care for the harassed survivors. Mufti Camdzic would have continued the mollifying sentiments of the other religious leaders. Reis Ceric however continued the rabble-rousing begun by the Turkish Prime Minister and ended the proceedings by reciting a lengthy prayer from the Koran in the tones of a general exhorting his soldiers to victory in battle.

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During our visit Adnan introduced us to three of the National Dialogue steering board members: Dinko from Bihac who ran an independent television station and focused on environmental issues, Ramiz and Miki both from Tuzla who were professionals committed to the project. To our relief they impressed Lord Hylton. Zoran and Anel from Prijedor also intend to be part of the National Dialogue. We had met several other members of the steering board on our previous visit, Serb women with experience of running successful NGOs. This group was committed, intelligent and experienced at handling internationals as well as politicians.

I enjoyed observing Anel and Adnan, the leaders of two Soul of Europe projects, in conversation, meeting at last, both well informed, experienced and ambitious. Anel's interest in going into politics is still hampered by Serb dominated Republika Srpska blocking Muslims from this career path. He comes from a politically involved family. As well as Azra Pasalic, his uncle, an MP in the National Assembly, used to help and advise us on our Omarska Memorial project, but had sadly died from cancer recently. Adnan had once thought of entering the diplomatic service, and would make a first-rate ambassador. I still see that as a possibility for him in the future. Anel and Adnan talked mostly in Bosnian, but when they chose to speak English they were discussing the role of politics in the project, and the best process of making the radical changes to their country's political system. Conversations with these people are always the main event for us at every visit we make to Bosnia.

I had always been conscious of the tricky dynamics being a project director and they being managers, working under us, the fact that we put them in danger, and also that they might come to be dependent on us. On the contrary, they make it clear they worked with us by choice, and considered themselves friends as well as collaborators, and our equals in every way. The fact that we brought funds was important to their survival, but they always made it clear it did not buy their independence of thought and advice to us.

Adnan's generous gift of a film indicated above all that he considered himself a partner and not an employee of the Soul of Europe. This is why of all the celebrations and kind words from everyone there, this personal project of his moved me the most. It hit me several days after returning home. At the time it occupied most of his time, working with a crew of three consisting of a gentle, kindly but probing woman interviewer and two cameramen who enjoyed following us around as much as we did their presence. He is now editing the film and telling me how great it will be, and I simply don't have words to thank him enough.



Donald talks to the crowd outside the mosque



Donald gazing at the Ferhadija Mosque



Donald and Mufti Koslic



Donald and Mufti Camdzic, followed by Lord Hylton, Ferre Westermans and Anel Alisic



Adnan, Lord Hylton, Bishop Jefrem and Donald



Bishop Komarica talking with Donald and Anel



Donald talking to people outside the Ferhadija Mosque at the Inauguration