

Jovan Divjak is gone...

Farewell Jovan, zbogom prijatelju



“Sarajevo, his love” ... Jovan Divjak was devoted to his city, which he defended during the Bosnia and Herzegovina war. His courage and his ideals earned him the hatred of those who believed that the country belonged to them, and who thought they could exterminate a people with impunity to secure their supremacy. I met him (him and his mischievous smile) in 2005 when Faik Dizdarevic took me to Sarajevo (where he had buried his daughter Françoise during the war), and on a tour of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Tuzla, Mostar, Banja Luka. We wanted to mobilise people all over the country to attend an international meeting in Sarajevo... A wonderful conference that will stay in our hearts and minds forever, where Jovan spoke about what he was doing to reconcile the Bosnian people...



He took us up into the hills where snipers had hidden and showed us the tunnel that connected Sarajevo to the outside world, saving its inhabitants from starvation, so that we wouldn't "forget about Bosnia" after the tragedy... Such emotion. But his greatest pride was having contributed to cultural renewal amidst the war. People need to read, sing and talk even more than they need to eat, he would say. He spoke French, apologised for mistakes he didn't make, and told story after story about his traumatised, war-torn region. A Bosnian Serb, he gave his time and his heart to the country he loved, and to save children – to help those orphaned by the war – be they Bosnian, Serbian or Croatian. He wanted to educate them, to teach them about others, about peace and friendship. A difficult task considering that hatred had seeped even into school playgrounds.

Deeply humanist, he claimed that he didn't do politics. And yet, my dear Jovan, you did politics as it should be done! And you tried with all your strength to change the world. You watched with friendly interest what we were trying to achieve with Confrontations, and you cultivated difference as a source

of enrichment and a promise of a better world to come. When, on 3 March 2011, you were arrested in Austria for “war crimes”, accused of a crime you had not committed, you began to reflect on the “bridge” we could build with Confrontations between France and Bosnia-Herzegovina. You were arrested because you had tried to protect Bosnians from barbarity and genocide, at the same time as criminals like Madlic and Hadzic who had perpetrated the Srebrenica massacre (when 8,372 men were torn from their wives and mothers and buried in mass graves). We had to find a way to fight back against all the haters who were so shamefully marching for the criminals' release.



So, Philippe Herzog, my dear Franco-Croatian husband, and I petitioned the European Parliament and the community institutions, collecting the signatures of 62 prominent figures on an open letter – including, to their greatest credit, Presidents José-Maria Gil Roblès and Nicole Fontaine, Franco Bassanini, Joachim Bitterlich, Catherine Lalumière and Michel Rocard... My friend Jack Ralite, François Tanguy, the director of the Radeau Theater, and I organised a press conference in early July in Vienna, where you were being detained under house arrest.



We met with Roberto Alagna there, in the little bistro you took me to. I confess I was a little jealous – but so very happy – when Angelina Jolie came to collect you in her private jet and take you triumphantly back to Sarajevo on 2 August. Jack is dead, and now you have left us too. Life goes on, and persons like you we have loved – role models for our children who will never get the chance to know you – leave us behind.



We will always remember you and, having watched the memorial service held for you in Sarajevo on 13 April, then the honors that were given to you at the cemetery, I know that others will too.

You were admired, respected and loved by so many. And I know you will be missed by the people of Sarajevo who would stop to greet you as you walked along the avenue in the Old Town. You wrote a farewell letter, beautiful and solemn, just like you. I am publishing some abstracts here, along with the poignant song about Sarajevo that we listened to while watching photos of your life.



You came to Confrontations Europe's 20th anniversary celebration, just before the tour of the Balkans that we were organising at the time. You were there with us again, challenging us over and over. Because peace had not yet been restored, and Bosnia-Herzegovina was not yet a member of the European Union! You were worried because tensions were surfacing again, and you were right. Today Europe is fracturing and reconciliation will be difficult. The solidarity that should be guiding all our actions during the health and economic crisis is not forthcoming. But we can promise you this. In the time we have left to find each other again, reunite Europeans and rebuild our civilization, we will be guided by action, not words. Farewell, dear Jovan.

Claude Fischer Herzog,

Honorary President of Confrontations Europe
Director of ASCPE, Les Entretiens Européens & Euraficains

Jovan leaves us a message of love

Thank you for being here to support me on my journey "to a better world", as we traditionally say. My time on this earth was very pleasant, happy and fulfilling.

I was a good and honest man, a human being in the best sense of the word. And modest of course. That is how my mother Emilija and my father Dušan raised me. It is also how my wife Vera and I raised Želimir and Vladimir. The happiest moment of my life was when my grandson Gregor wrote to me: I'm proud of you granddad.

My father taught in Bela Crkva (Romanian Banat) from 1941-1944, and in Krajina, Bosnia, where I started primary school. My "Mother Courage" divorced my father and sent me to the Belgrade Military Academy because she couldn't afford to pay for my education. I served in Tito's guard in Belgrade, studied at the École Militaire (military school) in Paris and served in Sarajevo from February 1966 to 1997, first as Territorial Defence Commander of the Mostar sector, and then in the Territorial Defence of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Dear members of the Bosnia-Herzegovina army... that was the most distinguished period in my career. Be proud of the part you played in defending Bosnia-Herzegovina within its historical borders and protecting a civilian and secular community. Instil these values in your children... Our most precious achievement

over the past 27 years has been helping to educate children and young people in Bosnia-Herzegovina — those who have been traumatized by war, are disabled, have special needs or live in the Republic of Srpska. An educated young man can be of help to himself, his family and the community.

My dear Sarajevans, thank you from the bottom of my heart. I was one of you, with you through the good times and the bad. They were days full of love, mutual respect and appreciation. May Bosnia hold me in its embrace, safe in the love I take with me.

Extracts from the letter read by his grandson Gregor at the Sarajevo National Theater on April 13, 2021.

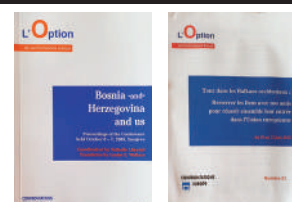
Listen to the love song to Sarajevo and look at the photos from Jovan's life

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBd623K6oro>

The video is from TVSA and published with permission

To find
on our site
www.entretiens-europeens.org

- **Bosnia-Herzegovina and us, L'Option de Confrontations Europe N°22, 2006**
- **The tour in the Western Balkans:** forging closer ties with our friends in order to succeed together their entry into the European Union, *L'Option de Confrontations Europe N°31, 2012*
- **62 personalities mobilize for the release of Jovan Divjak**
- **Interview of Claude Fischer by Café Babel:** <https://cafebabel.com/en/article/serb-general-and-bosnia-defect-jovan-divjak-under-arrest-since-march-5ae007b7f723b35a145e257d/>



Continue Jovan's action, join the association «Education builds Bosnia-Herzegovina»:

OGBH - Dobojska 4, 71000 Sarajevo +387 33 710 580; +387 33 710 581; ogbh@bih.net.ba - <http://www.ogbh.com.ba/fr>