

INTERVIEW WITH “POBJEDA”

October 21, 2018

1. *The situation in the Western Balkans is very complicated. China is investing in roads and infrastructure, Turkey is investing in tourism and apartments, Russia is interfering in internal affairs and paying lots of money to opposition parties who do not support the EU and NATO. The EU is just standing aside, sending messages that reforms must be done. Is the EU not involved enough? Your comment?*

MH: The most important leverage that the EU possesses is the lure of eventual membership. The accession criteria are rigorous, and the special Stabilization and Association Process for the Western Balkans is well thought out. I understand that carrying out reforms can be frustrating, but they are necessary. Of course, it would be desirable for the EU – and the U.S. for that matter – to get more involved in a positive way in the economic and political life of the aspiring countries. That doesn't change the fact, however, that carrying out the reforms remains essential, both for eventual entry into the EU and for the intrinsic benefits that successfully completing them out will bring.

2. *Montenegro has entered NATO, and we hope that we will become part of the EU soon. Do you think that in the near future we can expect an enlargement of the European Union?*

MH: If the “near future” means fewer than five years, then my answer is “no,” unless a highly developed country like Norway or Switzerland were to apply for membership. But the chances of that happening are nearly zero. It's easy for me to counsel my friends in Montenegro to have patience, but patience, in fact, is called for. Your country has already made great strides forward – much of it connected with the NATO accession process – and if you continue on a reform course I have no doubt that you will join the EU at least by the middle of the next decade.

3. The interference of Moscow is very dangerous in the whole region. Can we expect that Russia will try to repeat its actions of election day 2016 in Montenegro?

MH: It's impossible for me to read Vladimir Putin's mind. I strongly suspect that he planted the thought of "aggressive Montenegrins" with Donald Trump during their Helsinki discussion last July. I also believe that Putin is angry that the 2016 coup attempt failed and that Montenegro subsequently joined NATO. He certainly is trying to prevent Macedonia's accession to NATO. My sense is that another Russian-inspired coup attempt elsewhere in the Balkans would only be a last resort after other tactics like disinformation and bribery had failed. It would be nice if Russia had something positive other than natural gas to offer the region, but it doesn't.

4. The referendum about the name of Macedonia was not successful. How do you see the future of that country?

MH: I would characterize the referendum in Macedonia as partially successful, not unsuccessful. While it is true that participation did not approach the desired 50%, it is also true that the vast majority of those who did vote cast their ballots in favor of the agreement with Greece. I strongly hope that the Greek and Macedonian Parliaments will approve the agreement. As Prime Minister Zoran Zaev has said, "the agreement once and for all confirms and strengthens the Macedonian ethnic and cultural identity, the Macedonian language, the Macedonian nationality ... (and) guarantees the security of the country". I might add that the agreement enjoys nearly unanimous support from Albanian Macedonians. Moreover, a ratified agreement would open the door to NATO membership for Macedonia and give a boost to its economy from foreign investment.

5. *Why are the Balkans not more visible in the USA? There are no investments from the USA in this region. Can we say that we are not stable enough for American investors?*

MH: Well, first of all, there *are* significant American investments in the Balkans. Could there be more? Of course. I am not a businessman, so I won't speculate as to the disincentives to investment in the Balkans. It's no secret that some Balkan countries are more stable than others. Some countries constitute a larger market than others. The strength of the rule of law varies in the region. As a consequence, although corruption is widespread in the Balkans, some countries are more afflicted with it than others. I keep returning to the absolutely fundamental necessity for reforms. They are the foundation for attracting more foreign direct investment.

6. *Do you expect changes of borders in the region that could bring another war to the Balkan peninsula?*

MH: I assume that you are alluding to the much discussed possibility of a border realignment between Serbia and Kosovo. It's not easy to tell two sovereign countries that they shouldn't enter into a voluntary bilateral agreement. Nonetheless, in my opinion the potential negative ramifications elsewhere in the Balkans -- especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Macedonia -- of such an agreement would outweigh any positive gains. Every single country in Europe has at least one racial, ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority -- all of whose rights are protected by several international covenants. Look, I'm an American, and I believe that my country's incredible diversity is its greatest strength. In the Balkans, Montenegro has done the best job of integrating its minorities. Striving for ethnic "purity" is not only futile, it's stupid.