

Seven Days in Slovenia

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Seven days in the Republic of Slovenia was a great eye opener. I knew that the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) disintegrated at the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century but did not pay attention to the details in spite of the bitter wars that cost many lives. Those were days in which wars were equally raging in many parts of Africa and I got sucked into efforts towards peacekeeping in Somalia after Butros Ghali as UN Secretary-General pricked the conscience of the world by pointing out the relative abandonment of the world with respect to the poor man's war in Somalia.

My relative ignorance saw me engage in the nostalgia that Africans of my age have for the late President of Yugoslavia Marshall Josip Broz Tito with my host. Tito when he led Yugoslavia provided support to many African aspirations for independence from European colonial powers. He equally joined the efforts of Africans and Asians who, in refusing to be dragged into the cold war between the defunct Soviet Union with its allies in the equally defunct Warsaw Pact and the United States led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), formed and nurtured a non-aligned movement.

So, my friend, Ambassador Tomaž Lovrenčič, was very diplomatic in letting me know that an African's nostalgia about Marshall Tito will not win me many friends in Slovenia. Slovenia felt cheated in the SFRY and Tito was seen as an anti-democratic leader who missed several opportunities, including joining the European Union when he should have in the 1970s. He refused to have SFRY be part of the EU while alive. He died in 1980 and subsequent to his period, SFRY unraveled. Slovenia had a referendum to leave Yugoslavia and formalized its departure by declaring the Republic of Slovenia on June 25, 1991. This declaration triggered eleven days of war during which what Slovenians saw as Serbia led Yugoslavia used all the weapons at its disposal to fight Slovenians. This for Slovenians was painful because they saw themselves as having paid for most of the weapons, since they claimed to have been paying more given the fact that their economy was relatively more buoyant. And Slovenians suggested to me that the military might had been more concentrated in Serbian hands. Most Slovenians in the SFRY defected to join the resistance. Unfortunately, 66 lives were lost and with the assistance of Europeans, peace was worked out and gradually Slovenia received recognition as an independent Republic that eventually got admitted into NATO and the European Union. The war in the rest of former Yugoslavia became more vicious resulting in leadership from that part of the world and Africans being the only ones to be dragged before the International Criminal Court (ICC) for accountability purposes. I need not remind that United States made it very clear that its own citizens are not subject to the ICC. Later, it added allies like Israel. Equally, the main European powers are practically immune from the court or else, some of them should have been answering to atrocities committed in the Middle East. Enough on so called justice in an unequal geopolitical international order that is pretending to be rules-based.

As I had intimated in my August 31, 2019 posting, I was in Slovenia at the invitation of the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Slovenia to participate at the 14th Bled Strategic Forum. I was one of the extremely few Africans so invited. The CEO of Ghana's Exim Bank and the Ghanaian Catholic Cardinal Peter Turkson who was in the papacy contest in the last exercise were the three out of at least 180 active participants in a gathering of about 1000 that included the Presidents of Estonia and Slovenia, UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights, Jeffery Sachs etc, to the best of my knowledge.

I was on a Panel of 8 that looked at how our world is structured with respect to international politics. The question was whether we have a Rules-based international order or we are experiencing a return to geopolitics. This literally meant that the rule of law, as opposed to power play, is the basis of interactions

at the international level. The Panel of eight with a 9th person as Moderator were mainly Europeans. There were Deputy Foreign Ministers from Iran and South Korea aside from myself as non-Europeans.

Of course, the Europeans, in the large part, agreed that we have a rules-based international system maybe the British participant was a bit nuanced. But the Iranian and myself differed with them. As should be expected, the Iranian Minister dwelt on the USA pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal.

I approached the problem from a theoretical perspective by suggesting that it is not an either or situation as we have both in terms of regional organizations like EU, AU and ECOWAS operating on the basis of rules and we adhere to some rules the dominant powers foisted on the world since the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia through to the structures and institutions that the United States led in putting together at the end of the Second World War that saw a UN and Bretton Woods systems dominated by the US, France and UK with token reach out to Russia and China. I noted that we in Africa are largely rule takers and not rules co-makers in a subservient arrangement in which the stronger few make and violated rules when it pleased them. I suggested that this arrangement is antithetical to a rules-based world and that it would be wrong to suggest a return to geopolitics when we never left such an order. I argued that rules flow out of shared values and that African values are not the same with Western values even though Africans have no choice but to comply with the dominant values. I went further to note that change is happening with China leading a subtle challenge to today's reality which for me is fastly becoming a multi-polar world away from the sole remaining super power status that the US appeared to have when the Soviet Union disappeared. Currently, US power continues to reduce and an increasingly powerful China becomes a second power that is poised for leadership. Another power is Russia as a solid military power that cannot be pushed aside given Putin's efforts in restoring the old Soviet glory to Russia. A united Europe even with Brexit would still be a clear 4th pole of Power with India, Iran and Turkey struggling along to join the major power league. Leadership deficit as opposed to resources will make Africa fail to join the league even though Africa remains necessary for the international system. However, I stressed the need to use the 75th anniversary of the end of the second world war to embark on a genuine dialogue in a convention geared to make necessary changes in a broadening involvement of all towards a sustainable international order or we wait for the probable continued strengthening of China that could define a possible new order on or before 2049.

My able Assistant, Abraham Ameh had posted the details of the streaming of the dialogue on Facebook and through Twitter. These would be useful for additional details. Mr. Ameh has gone further to extract my video contribution into a fraction of the long video of the entire panel. This abbreviated version is hereby attached. My unconventional views were also articulated at three interviews I granted while in Slovenia. A journalist had wondered about how I could have said European values are not necessarily African values. I reminded him of my having illustrated that with an anecdote from the Pacific which is repeated in the video of my contribution. I also referred to the spirit of Ubuntu, in spite of Africans being pushed along by the West on individualism and cut-throat competition.

I did engage in some bilaterals with the Amb. Tomaž led International Trust Fund now simply called ITF. ITF has been involved in enhancing human security in Africa, especially ECOWAS and AU among other places. The ITF is a Slovenian governmental organization that leverages money from other donors given its credibility, to assist in demining and assist mine victims as well as address other aspects of human security. It is a soft power for a relatively small European country that is creditably pulling its weight in the world.

I had the opportunity to exchange views at the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Department handling Africa and other non-European geographical places. I was informed about the annual Africa Day that Slovenia hosts and the possibility of Slovenia having plans on Africa in 2021 when it plans to hold the

European Union Presidency. It was a great diplomatic exchange on wither Africa. We agreed to keep the dialogue going though as an individual that represents no country or institutions.

Iztok Hočeva, my first Slovenian friend whose work in support of ECOWAS early warning system I had known through a mutual friend before being briefed fully at ECOWAS HQ and before I met him in Abuja, had time to show me round Ljubljana. As should be expected in a city of 300,000, one does not have the problems associated with the mega city of Lagos. Clean, well laid out city with a lot of greenery with many tourists especially from Asia. We saw two of the three statues that were left from the socialist era as some efforts had gone into trying to obliterate that phase. The eternal flame that was in place in the socialist era had been extinguished. We went on top of the Ljubljana Castle that suggests people had been on this relatively higher land overlooking a valley that was once a wetland since 12th century BC. It had served several purposes, including as a prison and fort for defense purposes.

I had written about Bled on my arrival on August 31, 2019. I slept in Bled all through. Refreshing beautiful lake with the vegetation around it. Amb. Tomaž drives the approximately 35-40 minutes daily from Bled to Ljubljana. So, I joined him twice. We also had quality time to share knowledge on several issues including the Slovenian strive for independence which he suggested was more of a cultural than political drive, Yoruba and Slovenian worldviews including the works of Wole Soyinka and my introducing Chinua Achebe as well as mentioning the two other Nobel Laureates for literature in Africa. With his interest, we looked at the problem of ethnicity in Nigeria, pastoralists under the pressures of the environment and consequent conflicts in West Africa, including Nigeria. The problem of migration within Africa and from Africa to Europe and the import of technology in our lives as well as it estrangement of different generations.

We went to Bled Villa that had served royalty in the long past before Marshall Tito became the last occupant as he liked to visit with other potentates of his time while they visited former Yugoslavia. Coffee at Belvedere cafe as the sun set on the lake with heavily forested Alpine mountains at the background. And on my last day we spent reasonable time on Bled Castle that was built in 1004 with a clear deed of conveyance on it being dated 1011 A.D. Lovely view from the top. The glacial and tectonic formed lake surrounded by lush heavily forested Julian Alpine mountains as well as a beautiful Golf course that was put in place in 1930 and I am told another 18 Hole Course is close buy. Several nice historical hotels as well as Island on the come into clearer view. By the way, the Island is used also for weddings and the groom is expected to carry the bride up the 99 steps from the lake level into the event hall and Church. This concept is close to the Yorubas "igbeyawo" in which the groom is made to carry the bride, but definitely not up to a gruelling 99 steps. What happens if the bride is the plumpy "orobo" type or in fact the Calabar concept of only marrying out a rounded fattened woman that used to reflect the concept of African beauty before the West distorted our brains and like many things altered our concept of beauty? Ambassador Tomaž indicated to me that the groom could try and carry for a few steps.

Great experience that convinced me that small can be beautiful as in the case of Slovenia that is cherishing its being a small country of 2 million that is part of the larger European Union but equally making impact at the international level.

Arrived Slovenia (Melania Trump's original nation), early on, August 31, 2019 to participate at the 14th Bled Strategic Forum at the invitation of the Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr. Miro Cerar.

Nice to share and benefit from people who are thinking about the world beyond their life time. Obviously different from my country where political leaders are already focused on the next election in 2023 and how to steal from national patrimony with bodies like NIIA and NISER etc., that could have fulfilled a think-

tank role being a shadow of their respective old selves. I will, In Sha Allah, write more about the Bled Strategic Forum next week.

I enjoyed a smooth 40 kms ride from Ljubljana airport to the famous and touristic town of Bled. The airport was simple for a population of two million. We bypassed Ljubljana, the capital city. Along the road to Bled, neat and peaceful greenery dotted the way: pine trees and some clearings for maize and what I assume are vegetables.

Bled has a lake surrounded by hills/mountain range. I understand it is a lake of the combination of glacial and tectonic origins. The lake itself has an Island, having residences with a Church within it with a medieval castle overlooking the lake. The picture brings both into view. Bled used to be a favourite place for admired late Broz Tito who contributed immensely to decolonization in Africa.