

DYING TO GO TO STRASBOURG

My Struggle with Croatian Courts

Ranko Bon



Motovun, Istria

March 2015

In memory of John Milton, one of the first to argue for
the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely
according to conscience, above all liberties

Modest, industrious, benevolent, temperate, artistic: is
that how you would have men? *Good* men? But to me
that seems only the ideal slave, the slave of the future.

From Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Will to
Power*, New York: Vintage Books, 1968, p.
195.

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION: MY PLEA TO THE COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN STRASBOURG (March 17, 2015)

I am appealing to the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg because I have exhausted the legal means available to me in Croatia. In particular, I am appealing against the charge of insult by Slobodan Vugrinec, the former mayor of Motovun. I am also appealing against Croatian courts that help the likes of Vugrinec in political repression against those who criticize their policies. Libel and insult cases have been one of the favorite weapons of politicians, and they have been victorious all too often.

In 2008 and 2009, Vugrinec took me to court first for libel and then for insult. In 2009 he also arranged yet another libel case against me by the Municipality of Motovun. All this was done in preparation for the municipal elections in 2009.

Vugrinec and the Motovun Municipality lost the libel cases, but he won the insult case at the Municipal Court in Pazin in 2010. All of us appealed to the Regional Court in Pula, but the original decision was upheld in 2011. Then I appealed to the Constitutional Court in Zagreb, and the original decision was upheld once again in 2014. I learned about it only a few days ago. Thus my appeal to the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

In 2009 I likened Vugrinec to a cockroach while I was talking at a gathering of green activists about his undemocratic ways. It was a metaphor for working in the dark and behind closed doors, as I put it on that occasion. Of course, the metaphor had no effect on the municipal elections in 2009, when Vugrinec was elected mayor of Motovun for the third time in a row. Surprisingly, neither the meaning nor the effect of the metaphor were taken into consideration by the Croatian courts.

Now, Vugrinec took me to court because I was one of the outspoken critics of golf development in Istria and the rest of Croatia at the time. The development was a part of the worldwide real estate boom in the early years of the new millennium, and it concerned a large number of apartments and villas rather than golf as such. The development was not sustainable, but the political hierarchy from Istria to Zagreb was very much behind it. Ivan Jakovčić, the former governor of Istria,

worked closely with the former prime minister, Ivo Sanader, to promote golf. As a picturesque medieval town, Motovun was to offer one of more than sixty golf courses across the country. Vugrinec chose the court as an instrument of political repression against me, and it can be safely assumed that he had all the political backing for it all the way to the top of the hierarchy.

Vugrinec got legal help from the office of Goran Veljović in Pula. The same office represented him personally, the municipality, and the investor in Motovun golf. The same office represented many other golf investors at the time, and it was close to the governor and his political party. In addition, Veljović's office wrote the golf law that Sanader rammed through the Croatian parliament. It was a law of eminent domain, which treated golf as an activity of national interest, no less.

The judge selected to officiate in this case was Denis Hek from the Municipal Court in Pazin. He was known to be very close to the Istrian Democratic Assembly, the governor's party. Again, the governor and his party were enthusiastic supporters of golf on the Istrian peninsula, where more than twenty golf courses were planned at the time. Hek was at their disposal for cases like those lodged against me.

Over the years, I learned that the ultimate reason for political support of golf development across Istria and Croatia as a whole had roots in corruption and organized crime going all the way to the top of the political hierarchy once again. Politicians and their friends were to become investors in golf by means of foreign investment companies like the one that operated in Motovun at the time. It was a money-laundering scheme, whereby money illegally deposited in foreign banks would be invested in golf development. The politicians used their influence in Croatia to prepare the paperwork for the profitable endeavor. With strong political ties in Austria, the Croatian politicians had Austrian banks at their disposal, as well.

In short, I am a victim of political repression with corruption and organized crime in the background. As many had noticed before the real estate boom subsided in 2008, I was in real danger for my opposition to unsustainable golf development. If the barrage of court cases failed to shut me up, other measures would have been used. Luckily for me, the real estate boom came to its end in 2008, the very year Vugrinec had lodged his first court case against me.

In support of these claims, I offer a selection of pieces from my *Residua* (www.residua.org). Accumulated over seven years, this testimony has turned into a veritable book. Arranged chronologically, the selected pieces offer a lot of detail to all my claims. I cannot but hope that the whole book will be of value to the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. This applies not only in my struggle with

Vugrinec, though. When it comes to human rights, courts in Croatia need an overhaul. And soon.

CROATIA SPELLS CONFLICT OF INTERESTS (October 3, 2008)

Politically and administratively, Croatia is a bizarre country. Only consider the key players in Motovun's golf development, which is currently being vetted by the state, regional, and local authorities. This is a protracted and complex process, but one of its features is abundantly clear.

The investor is Jupiter Group, a fund management company from London. Used to development in risky places such as the Caribbean and Russia, they hired the Croatian Civil Engineering Institute (*Institut Gradjevinarstva Hrvatske*) from Zagreb to produce the environmental impact study of the proposed development. The Institute's director, Jure Radić, used to be Franjo Tudjman's minister of construction. He teaches at the Civil Engineering Faculty of the University of Zagreb. The Institute straddles the academia and commerce, and it is one of the most profitable commercial outfits in Croatia with strong performance on the Croatian Stock Exchange. Not surprisingly, it is believed to be the center of the Croatian construction lobby.

Next, the environmental impact study is submitted to the Croatian Ministry of the Environment, led by minister Marina Matulović-Dropulić, who is one of the Institute's commercial partners and owner of a large segment of its shares. Following the law, she puts together a commission to vet the study, but she soon intervenes in its work to ensure that the investor's interests are not jeopardized by expert judgment about development in a very sensitive place like Motovun. Although the commission is ultimately split, the study is deemed by the minister to have been successful.

The environmental impact study then comes to Motovun, where it is open to the public for scrutiny and discussion. The mayor of Motovun, Slobodan Vugrinec, also serves as deputy mayor of Vrsar on the western coast of Istria, thus effectively holding two jobs and spending too little of his precious time in Motovun. The town council that will ultimately decide what to do with golf development includes many members who stand to gain directly from it by the sale of their land. This is why the mayor has selected them for the council in the first place. One way or another, the mayor and the council will do their best to limit and marginalize public discussion of golf development in

a town considered for inclusion in UNESCO's World Heritage sites together with its historic surroundings.

Parenthetically, Jupiter Group plans to build a settlement with five-hundred beds within sight of Motovun, whose historic core now holds three-hundred permanent inhabitants. Among other strategic resources, the new settlement will use a large amount of water in a region increasingly susceptible to drought on account of rapid climate change. Golf itself will use agricultural land of high quality, which will be subjected to a plethora of herbicides and pesticides right next to Motovun Forest along the Mirna river, which is famous for its rare white truffles, as well as a wide variety of wild animals.

Before it moves to detailed urban planning, golf development will also be vetted by the regional authorities. Governor of Istria, Ivan Jakovčić, will be directly involved in this process. It was he who had placed the mayor of Motovun in his post to promote golf development, and it is he who has promoted it for at least a decade in the context of the privatization of state land. In major developments, such as golf in Motovun, the state land is leased for a period of many years, while the private land adjoining it is sold outright to foreign investors. The spatial or physical planning process preceding individual development projects is widely used in the region to ensure that leasing and sale go hand in hand. In accordance with the Croatian law, agricultural and urban land use can be switched in the planning process without informing the owners. This holds in spite of the fact that the value of agricultural land is about ten times lower than that of urban land.

Croatia is a bizarre country, indeed. Foreign investors and state, regional, and local politicians regularly collude to achieve their joint objectives, which are carefully hidden from public view. In the process, conflict of interests is rife. In fact, Croatia spells conflict of interest.

TILTING AT WINDMILLS (October 20, 2008)

I am spending much of my time in the battle against unsustainable golf development in Motovun, and my efforts are slowly coming to a head. The environmental impact study of the project is now open for public scrutiny, and the public discussion of the study is to take place in the municipal offices tomorrow afternoon. Several environmental activists of some renown in Croatia will join me for the event, and we hope that the media will cover it well. Following the discussion, I will carefully arrange all the comments that may have a legal bite, and then I will organize the members of the international association concerned with Motovun's sustainable development, which I formed a year ago, to send these comments to the relevant authorities. Immediately after the public scrutiny, I will organize a big press conference in Zagreb and make sure that all the key environmental activists in Croatia are

present. This will be a media splash, as well. With some luck, the foreign investor and local politicians pushing golf development to the west of the town will scale down their expectations, or perhaps even give up the misguided project altogether. But the probability that this will happen is so small, so minute, so infinitesimal, that I cannot but think of old Don Quixote every now and then. Yes, I am only tilting at windmills just like he did.

THE MAYOR AND HIS STOOGES: AN ELECTRONIC-MAIL MESSAGE TO THE MEMBERS OF MOTOVUN – ECO TOWN (October 22, 2008)

How did the public discussion of the environmental impact study of golf development to the west of Motovun go yesterday afternoon? Hard to put a finger on, but here are my impressions. Slobodan Vugrinec, the mayor of Motovun, and his stooges won. How is that possible? He played the public discussion as though it was a political rally rather than a meeting at which concerned citizens can ask questions about the content of the study itself, as the law specifies.

Together with all the environmental activists from Istria who joined me at the public discussion, and there were five of them, I asked specific questions referring to the study. The mayor and the representatives of the team from the Croatian Civil Engineering Institute (*Institut gradjevinarstva Hrvatske*), where the study was prepared, were supposed to answer these specific questions, but the mayor kept taking broad swipes at all the environmental activists present. As the meeting progressed, he took ever-greater liberties, too. He ended up insulting us and threatening us with legal action.

At some point a young journalist from one of the local newspapers, who was in Motovun for the first time in that capacity, noted that all the people asking questions were against golf, at least in the form in which it was presented in the study, and she wanted to know whether anyone present was for it. This was what the mayor must have waited for, for he immediately asked all the present to vote for or against golf. I protested several times, saying that there was no place for voting at the public discussion, as well as that many of us were for sustainable golf, but this is when the silent majority joined the mayor in full force. They were all from surrounding villages. One of them said that he was forty-five years old, but that all of those against golf put together had not spent so many years in Motovun. As strangers, we had nothing to say about the future of the town. All the local chauvinists applauded at this escapade. Of course, not a single supporter of the mayor had absolutely anything to say about the study itself, which they most likely had not even browsed through, either. All my protestations were in vain. The mayor and his stooges celebrated their victory late into the night.

Although a handful of members of Motovun – Eco Town were present, there were not enough of us for this strange game. Given the nature of the public discussion, this should not have been a problem, but the mayor successfully turned the meeting into a political rally, which is why all those silent villagers were there in the first place. Had I known that something like this could ever happen, I would have pleaded with the members of the association not to miss the meeting. Too late for such thoughts, however.

It is clear by now that all our questions concerning the study will be dealt with rather casually by the mayor and other politicians further up the hierarchy. They can manipulate the planning process as they see fit, and yesterday's public discussion will be only a minor glitch on their path. And so I must admit that I feel rather discouraged at this stage. The probability that we will achieve anything at this stage is so small that one cannot but ask whether it is worth the effort. Or this is how I feel the morning after.

MY RESIGNATION (October 23, 2008)

This morning I resigned as president of Motovun – Eco Town, which now counts one-hundred and thirty-six members from sixteen countries. Fifty six members are from Croatia. For the record, twelve members live in Motovun full time, while nineteen come to their houses in town only periodically. In an electronic-mail message to all the members, I thanked all of those who had offered me moral support after the Tuesday meeting in connection with the environmental impact study of golf development to the west of the town, but I went on that I did not feel I was the right man for the job any longer:

Although I had done everything I thought had to be done, I now feel that I have underestimated the political savvy of the mayor of Motovun and his helpers further up the line, and that I have therefore led the association in the wrong direction. This is a political game, and it should be played accordingly. For better or worse, however, I am not about politics.

I added that I hoped that someone among the members would be willing to take over the presidency, for the association would otherwise die. But I wonder what an organization such as ours can achieve in this ugly political climate. It seems to me that the only viable alternative at this junction would be an independent political party that would take on the local politicians at the upcoming elections, which are scheduled for May 2009. I would be perfectly happy to advise this party on matters of spatial or physical planning, real-estate policy, and sustainable development, but I would not wish to deal with politics as such. As I said in my message to the members of Motovun – Eco Town, I am not about politics. And I will never be.

Addendum (October 28, 2008)

Since my resignation, I have received many an electronic-mail message from the members of my association. Many of them are thankful for all I have done to date. Some are a bit worried about my wellbeing in the wake of the dreadful meeting. And a few are doing their best to persuade me not to quit before the game is over. I have responded to each and every message, focusing now on this, now on that, depending on the original text. But I have concluded all my missives with a few words of heartfelt hope: Jupiter Group, the British investor in golf development in Motovun, is unlikely to do anything at all in this area within two to four years due to the worst economic crisis that has hit the world since the Great Depression. This is the greatest boon for us at this juncture. And we can only hope that we will be much better prepared by the time investors come back to this marvelous town. So far, no-one has challenged my assessment of the situation.

THE FIGHT FOR MOTOVUN (November 6, 2008)

Have I given up the fight for Motovun a bit too quickly? The question pops up in my mind every now and then, and then it takes me a while to push it away. Each time I remind myself of all the stages in the fight, of which three were crucial. Each of them took about a year. And everything started almost exactly three years ago, when I learned what sort of future was planned behind closed doors for the town and its surroundings. The stages are worth revisiting now so as to repel that pestering question once and for all.

I started with an international petition in English and Croatian asking several key politicians, including the president and the prime minister of Croatia, to ensure that Motovun develops in a sustainable way. “I Love Motovun” was its name. More than sixteen thousand people from sixty-two countries signed it on the World Wide Web. The signatories included forty-eight people from Motovun, of which less than a half were true locals rather than newcomers.

Next I opened a forum in Croatian to inaugurate a sustained discussion on sustainable development of Motovun. There I offered extensive guidelines for such development, which focused on tourism and organic agriculture. “The Forum of Green Istria” attracted about forty regular members, of which at most a quarter was from Motovun. Again, no more than a few were true locals rather than newcomers. Although many others visited the website regularly, they remained silent.

Last I formed an international association concerned with sustainable development of Motovun. The official language on its website was English. “Motovun – Eco Town” attracted nearly one-hundred and

forty members from sixteen countries, of which nearly sixty were from Croatia. One more time, at most a third of that number was from Motovun, and only a few were true locals rather than newcomers.

The petition was considered to be an empty gesture by the politicians because it had no legal basis. In other words, they were not forced by law to do anything about it. The goodwill shown by so many people around the world was simply irrelevant. The forum was thought to be a dud because few local people joined it in earnest. This is a fair point, but the locals at least had a chance to voice their concerns about their future. And the association can be judged a failure because all the newcomers to Motovun and foreigners have little or no legal power in Croatia. When it comes to power, Croatia is about the law and nothing but the law.

Returning to my question, I do not think that I have given up the fight for Motovun all that quickly. Three years, three different strategies, and three websites behind me, I cannot come up with any alternative way of fighting for the town and its environs that I am good at. Which is not to say that they do not exist, of course. My own fight behind me, I can only hope that someone else will pick up the fight for Motovun and try all the alternative ways forward. And there must be many, indeed.

Addendum (November 9, 2008)

For completeness, I should add here my texts in Croatian for the on-line edition of *Regional*, an Istrian monthly whose editor was kind enough to make them a regular feature last year. All told, I wrote sixteen short articles that appeared over some six months. Together they counted ten-thousand words. This series went into a wide range of issues pertaining to the environment in the broadest sense of the word. Motovun came into focus from time to time, but only as an example I knew well from personal experience. The most dispiriting part of this failed attempt to get in touch with the so-called general reader were the comments left by anonymous readers. Although a few of them responded in an appropriate manner, most of the comments were no less than inane. Some were outright malicious. Most of them, I suspect, came from Motovun, too. In the end, I gave up in disgust. At any rate, this was my fourth unsuccessful attempt to promote civil society in Istria so as to ensure sustainable development for Motovun.

WELCOME TO MOTOVUN! (November 13, 2008)

I would never have thought that the mayor of Motovun, Slobodan Vugrinec, is a fan of my *Residua*. The way he welcomed me to Motovun years ago would suggest otherwise, for sure (“The Color of My House,” August 17, 2003). Anyhow, this morning I got a hefty piece of registered mail summoning me to the Municipal Court in

Pazin on December 1. Vugrinec is suing me for slander on account of a piece of mine published on my website (“Croatia Spells Conflict of Interest,” October 3, 2008). To make matters worse, the same piece also appears on the website of Green Istria, an association concerned with green issues on the peninsula.

The first warning of legal action came at the public discussion of the environmental impact study of golf development to the west of Motovun on October 21 (“The Mayor and His Stooges: An Electronic Mail Message to the Members of Motovun – Eco Town,” October 22, 2008). At the meeting, the mayor demanded my apology for slander, which I refused to give. I told him that we should discuss such matters in the presence of our lawyers, and that the public discussion should concern only the study itself.

Now, the court case concerns the fourth paragraph of the offending piece, in which I claim that “the town council that will ultimately decide what to do with golf development [in Motovun] includes many members who stand to gain directly from it by the sale of their land,” as well as that “this is why the mayor has selected them for the council in the first place.” Of course, all this is very difficult to either prove or disprove, for the Istrian political shenanigans are intricate beyond compare. Interestingly, the members of the council are not suing me; rather, the only suitor is Vugrinec himself, and that only as a private person, not as a public official.

For all the emotional distress he has personally suffered, Vugrinec demands twenty-thousand kuna plus legal expenses, which would add up to some three-thousand pounds sterling at today’s exchange rates. Tomorrow I will meet with a lawyer recommended by some friends, and I will discuss with him all the options I am facing. However, I am most inclined to paying everything outright and getting rid of the court case in one fell swoop. As I now know that the mayor is a fan of my *Residua*, I sincerely hope that he will be pleased with my pragmatic approach as soon as he stumbles upon this piece. Surely, I would hate it if my readers suffered any emotional distress on account of anything I have written!

Addendum I (November 14, 2008)

Seeing that I am rather despondent by the latest turn of events in Motovun, many of my friends and acquaintances are trying to bolster my morale. “Don’t give up without a fight,” some of them say or write. Strangely enough, these were the parting words of the lawyer I hired this morning to represent me in this pitiful case. Perhaps a few years my junior, he did not strike me as someone out for the money, either. In fact, he seemed to be genuinely interested in serving the justice. “Don’t give up without a fight,” I keep repeating under my breath ever since our meeting.

Addendum II (November 15, 2008)

“Don’t give up without a fight,” it kept buzzing in my mind all day yesterday, “don’t give up without a fight...” This morning I already offered a plan of counter-attack to my lawyer. This would be another case of slander, of course, but a much more serious one. Much, much more serious. Besides, the evidence is so much more palpable, and in Croatian. Much, much more palpable. But enough of this at this time and place. After all, the good mayor is a fan of my *Residua*. My sincere apologies to all the other fans, though. They will have to wait a while longer to learn about it all.

Addendum III (November 26, 2008)

Yesterday I called my lawyer to set up a meeting before the court hearing on December 1, but he told me that the hearing was postponed. He heard it from the judge himself. Apparently, a much more serious case needed attention as soon as possible. This morning there was nothing from the court in my mail, though. Although the language of the summons is pretty awful, threatening all sorts of things in the case I fail to appear in court for the hearing, chances are I will not be notified of the postponement until after the designated date. I am doing my best not to feel anxious about all this, but I am getting anxious nonetheless. Should I call the court and ask about the postponement? Or should I call my lawyer again and ask him about all this? The trouble is that I feel that I am at the mercy of a judicial system of an African country, rather than a European one. God only knows how they deal with nasty criminals like me in Swaziland, Mozambique, or Nigeria—countries where political freedom is roughly at the same level of development as in godforsaken Croatia.

Addendum IV (November 30, 2008)

It is Sunday, but I still called my lawyer just before noon. “Sorry to bug you at this time,” I stammered, “but I haven’t yet received anything from the court concerning the postponement of the hearing scheduled for tomorrow.” He told me that I should not worry. “But when will the hearing actually take place?” He told me that he would let me know sometime tomorrow. “I plan to go to Zagreb for a few days,” I stammered again, “and it would be good to know when I should return to Motovun.” My lawyer was sympathetic, but not very much. “As I said,” he cut my questions short, “I’ll call you tomorrow.” How do I explain to him that my anxiety is, well, existential? How do I tell him that I do not trust the legal and judicial systems in this bizarre country? How do I explain that I feel like fish out of water? Having been a judge, a public prosecutor, and a lawyer in Istria, he cannot possibly understand any of my real concerns. Do I need a psychiatrist, instead?

THROUGH THICK AND THIN (November 19, 2008)

The news that the mayor is suing me for slander is gradually spreading around Motovun and its surroundings. As is the news that I might leave Motovun one day. Coming in the wake of the ominous division between locals and strangers, which the mayor cunningly forged, many people who have moved here recently are considering their options, too. Or so they are telling me. Some of them are planning to spend their winters elsewhere. Out of the tourist season, Motovun is a ghost town, anyhow. Many of them are thinking aloud about selling their houses when prices come back up in a few years. As most of these people are foreigners rather than only strangers, like me, they realize that it may take many years before they will have any rights in Croatia. In the meanwhile, they will be at the mercy of the surly locals. The funny thing in all such conversations is that I always end up by doing my best to calm the good people down. Through thick and thin, our only hope is to stick together, or so I keep repeating.

ANOTHER GHOST TOWN (November 28, 2008)

Little by little, Motovun is turning into another ghost town typical of central Istria. The enthusiasm of the last few years has petered out. Many young or youngish newcomers, who have delighted us all with their arrival, are now talking about their options. Most of them want to spend winters somewhere else, and some of them are thinking about moving out of the town altogether. The growing local sentiment against newcomers, Croatian and foreign alike, undoubtedly plays a part in all this, but there are many other reasons for the exodus: xenophobic Croatian laws concerning residence and work, low level of economic development of Istria, and the ever-deeper economic crisis that now threatens the economic base of the peninsula: tourism. Chances are that Motovun will have to close during the winter months. Out of the tourist season, all cafés, restaurants, shops, and rooms or apartments for rent are only losing money. Little by little, the streets and squares of the town will be taken over by ghosts as soon as the weather turns sour.

IN PRAISE OF THE CROATIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM (December 1, 2008)

A bit more than two weeks ago, on November 13, I received registered mail summoning me to a hearing in the Pazin Municipal Court scheduled for today at one o'clock ("Welcome to Motovun!" November 13, 2008). This morning at ten o'clock I received registered mail from the same court informing me that the hearing got postponed for some unspecified reason to January 16, 2009, at nine o'clock. The court has given me three full hours to adjust to this new information,

which only shows that Croatia is indeed a state based on law. Smooth and precise, its judicial system operates like clockwork.

PUSHING FOREIGNERS AROUND (December 2, 2008)

A few weeks ago I got an electronic-mail message from a foreign couple living not far from Motovun. “It fills us with indignation how people are treated by a bunch of idiots who do think they are able to play god because of a frightened community without any civil courage around,” they write in connection with local authorities that have been pushing them around. Today I got a message from another foreign couple living close to the town, as well. “We are among those who have started talking about selling and leaving—something that we would have thought unthinkable a couple of years ago,” they write in response to “Another Ghost Town” (November 28, 2008). As I report there, I hear such words from many foreigners living in or around Motovun. The best I can do under the circumstances is repeat over and over again that we have two things on our side: the world economic crisis, which will prevent idiotic development in these parts, and the eventual entry of Croatia into the European Union, when the local authorities will have to stop pushing foreigners around. But am I convinced in my own words? Not really, for I know exactly what I would say to a foreign couple considering buying a house in Istria: “Are you crazy?!”

CROATIA’S DEMOCRATIC RECORD: A LETTER TO CROATIAN PRIME MINISTER IVO SANADER (December 3, 2008)

Following a spate of brutal police measures to repress those who disagree with government’s policies in Croatia you have just declared in the parliament that this is a democratic country with broad freedoms. You are quoted in the press as saying that “no-one should be persecuted or taken into custody for thinking differently.” But is this really the case? Is Croatia a country in which one is free to think differently?

As a matter of fact, Croatia’s democratic record is marred by a large number of writers brought to court for slander. As the press regularly reports, slander is one of the favorite charges of those in power against those who criticize their actions. A while ago it was Predrag Matvejević who was brought to court on such a charge. A few days ago it was Miljenko Jergović who reported similar threats. And these are only the best known among Croatian writers. The very law concerning slander is a shame for Croatia, but the government and those close to it keep using it quite regularly to repress those who think differently.

I, too, have been brought to court on slander charges for criticizing government policies in my municipality in Istria. My criticism appeared on a private website with literary content and in English language, which is rarely visited by Croatians. And all I wrote in a few sentences was that the mayor of the municipality and the municipal council were in a conflict of interests regarding the sale of land to a foreign investor engaged in unsustainable golf development. Having lived in the United States and Britain for most of my adult life, I have never imagined such a charge possible in a democratic country with broad freedoms you claimed in the parliament.

Croatia is at an impasse. Either you will follow up on your claims about democracy in Croatia with a thorough review of all repressive laws, which will subsequently be changed in accordance with democratic traditions of the western world, or you will limit yourself to hollow claims that no-one in the western world will take seriously on account of those very laws. The choice is entirely yours.

ISTRIAN GOLF LOBBY: A LETTER TO CROATIAN PRIME MINISTER IVO SANADER (December 4, 2008)

I wrote to you only yesterday about widespread repression in Croatia, but here I am again with further information about the nature of this repression, at least in my own case. This letter is but an *addendum* to that which I sent you yesterday. Today's *Glas Istre (The Voice of Istria)* carries a leading article about golf development in my municipality in Istria. One of the key claims in the article is that the new Croatian law concerning golf, which is about to be passed by the parliament, is an Istrian product. Namely, it is the Istrian golf lobby that is squarely behind it.

The article claims that a law firm from Istria has had major input in the new law. One of the leading lawyers from the firm is cited as saying that it has indeed played a significant part in the drafting of the law, which was entrusted to one of your ministries. Reportedly, among the firm's clients there are a number of investors in golf development in Istria. Chances are the law firm is also representing the foreign investor in golf development in my own municipality.

Now, guess who is representing the mayor of my municipality, who has sued me for slander regarding conflict of interests in golf development? The very law firm from today's article in *Glas Istre*. Which only goes to show what kind of rôle the mayor is playing in the Istrian golf lobby. And which also shows the very nature of the repressive government regime in this country: under the cover of law, politicians at all levels of government are colluding with investors, domestic or foreign. And they are colluding across the board with the help of the Croatian judicial system, which has long been under careful

scrutiny of the European Union because of its repressive nature. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

THE GOLF LAW (December 16, 2008)

The Croatian parliament yesterday passed the golf law, which was drafted by a law firm that represents a number of investors in golf courses throughout Istria, including the one in Motovun. It provides the investors with all the weapons of eminent domain, which the local government can wield against all those who do not want to sell their land at the right price. Golf is now raised to the level of a strategic national interest, and the new law got the same treatment in the parliament. The prime minister and his government pushed it through at a clip as though it was about national defense rather than a mere sport, no matter how posh. In short, the Istrian golf lobby is victorious once again. And how. With the golf law behind it, it is free to go about golf development on the peninsula as it pleases. Any further resistance to unsustainable golf in Motovun is now meaningless. As well as dangerous to all those who persist in it against all odds, for the Croatian national interests are at stake. Amen.

FEELING INCREASINGLY INSECURE: A LETTER TO CROATIAN PRIME MINISTER IVO SANADER (December 22, 2008)

First of all, thank you very much for your response of December 8 to my letters of December 3 and 4, 2008, which I have received *via* electronic mail from your chief of staff, Ms. Katarina Fuček. Let me add that I was away from my electronic mail for a couple of weeks, as well as that I am responding to your letter at my earliest opportunity. It is my hope that this last letter will give you a clear understanding of the seriousness of the situation I now face.

I am glad to learn that my letters have been forwarded to the minister of the interior, Mr. Tomislav Karamarko. I sincerely hope that he will do whatever needs to be done to stop the Croatian practice of taking writers to court for slander whenever someone in power finds their comments the least bit offensive. Once again, my comments appeared on a private website with literary content, and in English. According to all the evidence available to me, this site is rarely visited by Croats. Taking me to court for slander in such a case is hardly a widespread democratic practice in the western world, and Croatia will certainly have to change its legal procedures regarding this particular type of offence before its entry into the European Union.

In the meanwhile, I must admit that I have been feeling increasingly insecure in the country of my birth. Having lived in the United States and Britain for most of my adult life, and having moved back to

Croatia only five years ago, I must say that I now feel ill at ease in this repressive environment. Every day I read about widespread corruption in the courts. Apparently, judges regularly collude with those in power, and for money. How do I know that my slander case is not fixed well in advance? How do I know that the Istrian golf lobby, powerful as it appears to be at this particular time, is not in control of the Istrian courts, as well? After all, it has managed only last week to get its highly controversial law on golf passed by the Croatian parliament as though it concerns no less than national security!

Now, I am thus seriously considering renouncing my Croatian nationality so as to ensure my personal safety. That is, to ensure that I am better protected by a European court as a British citizen. In this connection, I am already seeking legal advice both in Croatia and abroad. And I may soon seek protection from the British embassy in Zagreb.

Be sure that I will make my decision most public, however. As a person of renown in academic and artistic circles around the globe, I am certain to get the attention required to ensure that justice will eventually prevail, but not under the suspicious Croatian law. I will do whatever is in my power to bring to light the way writers are treated under that law. Most important, I will do my best to ensure that all sorts of abuses of the Croatian judicial system are brought to a close as soon as possible.

Addendum (December 23, 2008)

Less than twenty-four hours after this letter was written and dutifully sent to the prime minister I learned from one of the leading Croatian newspapers that the minister of the interior is currently engaged in slander cases with no less than two intrepid bloggers. Both of them had offended him personally, and he could not but retaliate with legal action on account of all the emotional pain he had suffered, just like the mayor of my dejected little hilltown. And he is supposed to be on my side in my pending slander case! Me, just another silly blogger!

SMACK BETWEEN NAMIBIA AND SAMOA (December 22, 2008)

I just received an electronic-mail message from a friend who is very well aware of my keen interest in Croatia's rightful place in the world. He sent me a link to Transparency International's (www.transparency.org) latest compilation of its well-established corruption perception index. Out of one-hundred and eighty countries, Denmark is first and Somalia last. No surprises here. And Croatia is in the sixty-first place, smack between Namibia and Samoa. Not bad, not bad. The way things are going, though, such a lofty score may well be a thing of the rosy past. Somalia beckons ever more invitingly!

“MERRILY INTO 2009!” (January 2, 2009)

Thus the front page of *Glas Istre (The Voice of Istria)* in large letters in its first issue of the year. The picture behind this title shows New Year’s fireworks in downtown Pula, the main Istrian city. Just underneath is my picture with solemn words: “Ranko Bon Sued for Slander.” Midway into the issue, there is a hefty article whose title blares in the largest font reserved for this purpose: “Motovun is Suing Ranko Bon for Slander.” The article itself is rather confused, but it is clear that only the mayor, Slobodan Vugrinec, is actually suing me. As well as that he is now urging members of the Motovun Municipal Council to sue me in turn, for only individuals can sue for slander under the Croatian law. Merrily into 2009, indeed.

Addendum (February 9, 2009)

Apparently, I was wrong about the law. The Municipality of Motovun sued me, as well, and for exactly the same crime for which the mayor had sued me. Actually, they are asking for the same amount of money, too. The only difference between the two suits is that there are no emotional pains mentioned in the second case. Municipalities are above such human failings even in Croatia! My lawyer does not appear to be much concerned about the new suit, though. “Autogoal,” he chortled under his breath and waved his hand dismissively when we last met.

THE REMAINING THORN (January 6, 2009)

I have spent most of the day inviting all and sundry to my trial at the Municipal Court in Pazin, which will take place on Friday, January 16, at nine o’clock. In addition to all sorts of environmental activists in Croatia and abroad, I contacted the leading Croatian newspapers, and asked them to send their journalists to Pazin. As a matter of course, I copied the Croatian prime minister and the governor of Istria, as well. For better or worse, I have no contacts in Croatian television companies. My invitation has gone out by electronic mail, and it is my hope that a couple of key websites will pick it up within a day or two. If everything goes well, the World Wide Web will triumph one more time in this backward political environment. As the traditional media are under the thumb of politicians at all levels of government, this is our only hope. And this is precisely why the Croatian politicians have recently turned tooth and nail against the World Wide Web. It is the remaining thorn in their hide.

SOMETHING TO WRITE ABOUT (January 8, 2009)

Over morning coffee, I am talking with Horst Schneider and Mura Kalčić about my upcoming trial in Pazin. Horst is most concerned

about my predicament, and I am trying to make him laugh. “Heck,” I wink at him, “I will have something to write about!” When he smiles, I feel that I am on the right track. “Imagine,” I continue with some enthusiasm, “I will be able to write about my judge, a certain Denis Hek!” Now Mura throws up her arms and laughs out loud: “I know him!” Horst and I look at her, question marks over our heads. “I do know him,” she laughs again, “and he is a really nice guy!” Now Horst, too, is laughing. Truth to tell, I feel a bit better about my trial, as well. The court in Pazin suddenly becomes a bit more acceptable, a bit more humane than only a moment ago.

Addendum I (February 9, 2009)

A few days after this was penned I learned a couple of additional things about the judge I now habitually call mine. Most important, he is a staunch supporter of the political party that rules Istria ever since independence—that is, almost twenty years now. And this is the very party that has been holding all the reins of power in Motovun, as well. In addition, he went to school with the mayor’s younger brother. Apparently, they are good friends still. This is what I learned a week or so before I found myself in front of the judge. During the court proceedings, he struck me as professional and fair. Tall and burly, he even struck me as an affable fellow in his spare time. In short, no complaints on my side, at least for the time being. I can only hope that this is how I will remember him for years to come. As I said, now he is my judge, too.

Addendum II (October 5, 2015)

Although I am not eager to add anything on the subject of Denis Hek, my Pazin judge, this piece and the first *addendum* are irksome in their jolliness. So many years later, there is nothing jolly about my experience with the Croatian courts. And Hek remains the only judge I have met in person, which makes him a *sui generis* personification of the entire judicial system in my mind. Everything I have learned about him in the intervening years is that he has been one of the most eager judicial supporters of the Istrian Democratic Assembly, the leading political party on the peninsula since independence. Whatever the party needs done in courts, legal or otherwise, will be accomplished by judges like Hek. My case was thus sealed before it even started. I had to be thwarted in my fight against crooked golf in Motovun, Istria, and Croatia as a whole, and he was there to do his bit. And by law, no less. Predictably, all the higher Croatian courts ultimately agreed with Hek’s original decision, which was that I was guilty of insult, but not of libel. My only and last chance at this juncture is the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, but Hek and people like him will ultimately be untouched by that court’s final decision, which I expect sometime next year. The judicial system in Croatia remains the bastion of the political system. And an impregnable one. Something to write about, to be sure.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS DEFINED (January 10, 2009)

It has just crossed my mind that I am being sued for writing in my *Residua* about the conflict of interests in the Motovun Municipality and Croatia as a whole because those who are suing me have no idea what the term actually means. According to Webster's, for example, the term stands for "a conflict between the private interests and the official responsibilities of a person in a position of trust, as a government official." It does not mean that something untoward has actually happened, but only that it may happen because of the inherent conflict between private and public interests involved. To wit, the most likely reason why all manner of conflicts of interests are rife in Croatia is that no-one understands the very concept! Or is even interested in it.

Addendum I (January 11, 2009)

My ruminations about the concept of conflict of interest came a day or two after a major article appeared in the local newspapers about a man who recently founded a private firm with the same remit as the public organization he leads in Istria. Incidentally, the two organizations deal with the development of golf on the peninsula. Not surprisingly, the man is close to the governor of Istria. To the astonishment of the journalist, however, neither of them sees any conflict of interests in this case. And neither of them has any intentions of doing anything about it. Apparently, both of them believe that a conflict of interests may arise only if something untoward were to happen either in the public or the private firm led by the same man. Mind you, Istria prides itself on being the most developed region of Croatia!

Addendum II (February 4, 2014)

The name of the man who runs both a public and private company promoting golf in Istria is Branko Curić. The name of the Istrian governor in question is Ivan Jakovčić. He has been replaced by Valter Flego as governor, but he still heads the leading political party on the peninsula, the Istrian Democratic Assembly. And all of them keep promoting golf to this day. In particular, Curić is as active as ever. And still on two stools, as it were. As for the conflict of interests, forget about it. It does not exist. The concept itself is meaningless, that is. And that is all there is to it.

AN INVITATION TO A TRIAL (January 10, 2009)

Concerned with the legal pickle in which I found myself, Vjeran Piršić, a friend and a Croatian ecological activist of note, recently wrote to Žarko Puhovski, a professor of political science and a Croatian human-rights activist of note. "Concerning Bon," responded Puhovski tersely, "only two things can help—a good lawyer and a good deal of public

noise.” And I have followed his advice to the letter. Having already hired the best lawyer I could find in Istria, yesterday I agreed to appear this Monday at a press conference in Pula organized by some of the Istrian greens, and then I wrote a one-page statement that I will distribute to the journalists who appear at the event. For greatest effect, I gave it a theatrical title: “An Invitation to a Trial.” An invitation it is, too, for I wish as many people as possible to witness first hand the travesty in Pazin this Friday. Having let it sit for a day, so as to make sure it would be just right, I put the final touches on the statement this afternoon, and then I started sending it to all and sundry *via* electronic mail. So far, I have sent it to all the major newspapers, to all the major websites dealing with news, to all the major organizations dealing with ecology and human rights, and to a whole bunch of influential ecological and human-rights activists in Croatia. By way of thanks, I sent a copy to Puhovski, as well. And now I am sitting with a glass of wine in my hand and waiting for that noise to begin. I can almost hear it already.

LIKE ALICE IN WONDERLAND (January 12, 2009)

I cannot judge how today’s press conference in Pula will be judged by those who learn about it through the media, or how many of them will eventually choose to come to my trial at the end of this week, but I will remember it by a phrase that I repeated several times during the proceedings: “I feel like Alice in Wonderland!” That phrase felt almost soothing whenever I invoked it, too. It felt like truth itself. It illustrated my situation better than any long-winded explanation, no matter how carefully thought out or how well phrased. Yes, I now feel like Alice in Wonderland. What will the Queen do next? Where is that silly old Rabbit? Will I have another chance to talk to the wise Caterpillar? Can I trust the Mad Hatter? How in the world can the King of Hearts ever serve as a judge? The Croatian legal system in a nutshell.

Addendum (May 30, 2016)

So many years later, I still feel like Alice in Wonderland in Motovun, Istria, and the rest of Croatia. The phrase thus feels soothing to this day. Political turmoil at all levels of government seems to be unending. Laws keep changing without any rhyme or reason. And the economy is plodding along with fickle tourism at its very core. Wherever one looks, the insecurity combines with incompetence and mischief, which turns into outright malice often enough. Under the circumstances, I would not be surprised by anything at all. New court cases for libel and insult might come my way any day now. My house could always be taken away from me because I have not paid some bills of which I have not been informed. Or I might end up in jail on account of my writings that border on treason, like this one. Nothing would surprise

me, to be sure. Like Alice in Wonderland, I would just cope with the funny world around me to the best of my ability.

SMACK BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA (January 14, 2009)

This morning I cannot sleep. It was still dark when I woke up, but the quagmire into which I have fallen kept buzzing in my mind. Late last night my lawyer called me to tell me that I now face two court cases for slander: one from the mayor of Motovun, and another from the municipal council. They, too, feel deeply offended by my ruminations about the widespread conflict of interests in Croatia, in which I have mentioned them in passing ("Croatia Spells Conflict of Interest," October 3, 2008). I do not know yet how much money all of them want from me, but it is now clear that the two cases will take a long time to disentangle.

Ever since my lawyer called me I cannot forget the several recent international indices that compare Croatia to other countries. And I keep repeating the score to anyone who would listen to me. In terms of the United Nations' Human Development Index, in 2008 Croatia fell between Latvia and Argentina, whereas it was between Uruguay and Costa Rica in 2007, and between Uruguay and Kuwait in 2006 ("Smack Between Uruguay and Kuwait," December 6, 2007). Next, in terms of the World Bank's Doing Business Index, Croatia fell between Guyana and Nicaragua in 2008 ("Doing Business in Croatia," September 10, 2008). Then, in terms of the Index of Economic Freedom compiled in 2008 by the Heritage Foundation, Croatia fell between Nepal and Tajikistan ("Smack Between Nepal and Tajikistan," November 13, 2008). Finally, in terms of the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, in 2008 Croatia fell between Namibia and Samoa ("Smack Between Namibia and Samoa," December 22, 2008). For some reason, all these indices offer me some solace in my bizarre situation. At least I can locate myself a bit more precisely on the map of the world.

Of course, this morning I am not sure what use I will have of Latvia, Argentina, Guyana, Nicaragua, Nepal, Tajikistan, Namibia, and Samoa when I enter the Municipal Court in Pazin this Friday morning. How will the names of these exotic countries, which keep buzzing in my mind ever since last night, help me cope with the court proceedings, which are now so much more complex than they were even yesterday? Would it not be much easier if I admitted to myself once and for all that I now happen live smack between the devil and the deep blue sea?

LIBEL RATHER THAN SLANDER (January 14, 2009)

A few days ago I was contacted by a British journalist who lives in Budapest and writes business and economic stories about Hungary, but he also writes about the countries in the region, primarily Slovenia. His main media outlets are the *Financial Times* and Economic Intelligence Unit. He was interested in my troubles with the court, about which he learned from one of the members of Motovun – Eco Town, but he immediately warned me that placing an article on such a topic would not be easy. We have exchanged several electronic-mail messages the last few days. At any rate, the first of his messages that I received this morning starts with a “small point,” as he put it. “In English,” he writes, “slander is spoken, and written is libel.” He added that many British and American people confound the two terms. “I stand corrected,” I responded to the British journalist at once. And so, I have been sued for libel rather than slander.

GREEN PARTY – GREEN ALTERNATIVE (January 15, 2009)

Thus the name of the Istrian political party in whose stead I am now forming a cell in Motovun. I already have plenty of members. We will join the upcoming local elections, which are due in May, and I expect we will do much better than the political pundits may believe. In particular, I expect a number of young people to join the party, for it is their future that we are most concerned with. One way or another, this turn of events would not be imaginable without the intrepid mayor of Motovun. Had he not pushed me into the court, I would have become an ideal political subject well before the elections. Silent.

Addendum (January 16, 2009)

I printed this piece out, pasted it on a card I got from Corrine and Martin Harwood for Christmas, and sent it to the governor of Istria, Ivan Jakovčić, just after the court proceedings in Pazin earlier today. The card shows a black-and-white photograph of a black woman someplace in the American South. Judging from her dainty white hat and white sandals, she is coming out of the church. Her hands thrust forward, she is caught at the moment when she is taking a big step from a mowed lawn onto a wide road covered with deep mud. The text that accompanies the picture is attributed to an unknown scriptwriter from Hollywood: “Ever notice that ‘what the hell’ is always the right decision?” The governor will surely appreciate my plucky missive.

CAGED, MUZZLED: AN ELECTRONIC-MAIL MESSAGE TO KESTER EDDY (January 17, 2009)

Let me admit at the outset that I feel trapped like an animal. And muzzled, too. The cage feels small, ever smaller. It is the law regulating defamation. Apparently, it is so nicely formulated that practically anything can land you in court. At the moment, I face two court cases regarding the same piece of writing (“Croatia Spells Conflict of Interests,” October 3, 2008). The first is by the mayor of Motovun, and the second by the Motovun Municipality. Imagine, they are represented by the same law firm!

The very same law firm represents the Istrian government, as well. Also, it represents a number of investors in golf development on the peninsula. This is the Istrian golf lobby, as I like to call it, but it stretches all the way to the prime minister, who has pushed through the parliament a law about golf written by the blessed law firm. The law allows for expropriation of land needed by golf investors in the case its owners do not want to sell it since golf is now considered of strategic interest in Croatia. It is on a par with national defense, no less.

Now, I cannot say a word about any of this because I fear that the divine law firm will also sue me. That would be the last nail in my coffin, too. As I do not know a single journalist in Croatia who would be willing and able to expose this tangle of conflicts of interests, I hope that you could help. The European Union must be made aware of the endemic nature of this problem. Croatia spells conflict of interests in every imaginable form.

DEMOCRACY ISTRIAN STYLE (February 10, 2009)

When the Motovun branch of the Green Party – Green Alternative was set up three days ago, we had fifteen members. This was pretty close to the minimum number needed to satisfy all the legal requirements for such an organization, for there are all kinds of functionaries and committees that must be there from the very start. By now we have two more members, I am happy to report, and tomorrow I expect to get yet another one. By mid-April, when election lists will be drawn, I hope we will have about thirty members. This number will be sufficient to secure an election list to reckon with. With some luck, we will secure a few seats in the municipal council, for many more people will vote for us than will join us outright.

Why would people not join us even if they sympathize with our party’s goals? Out of deep fear, to put it simply. The leading party, in power since independence, has everyone by their most tender parts by now. Some people stand to lose something while others stand to get into trouble if they make a single wrong political move. That is democracy

Istrian style. And the leading party is vigilant beyond compare. Every single transgression is punished within days. Nay, within hours.

How do I know all this? I have talked with many people since I have decided to get into politics, which was a few months ago. It does not take them long to figure out that I would like them to join the Green Party. And many of them tell me exactly where they stand within minutes. “I am still studying,” says one in a lowered voice, “and I know that I would have hard time finding a job anywhere in Istria if I joined your ranks.” Of course, the same party has been in power ever since independence not only in Motovun, but on the entire peninsula, as well. “My business is all I have,” says another close to a whisper, “and I would have all kinds of difficulties with the municipal administration if I joined you.” And so on. “But,” everyone I talk to concludes their story with almost the same words, “I am sure to vote for you.”

Whenever I hear such stories, I just nod in silent sympathy. There is nothing else I can do, anyhow. The fear these people face is very real. I cannot but wonder about democracy in Istria, though. Will it ever come to this fear-ridden peninsula? Will these people ever free themselves from the clutches of political parties that do not shy from terrorizing everyone in sight for years on end? Will they rebel at long last and cast their chains away once and for all? Sadly, I cannot even start answering these questions. At the moment, they strike me as unanswerable.

Addendum (December 18, 2015)

Much of this piece is about the leading political party in Istria at the time, which is the same as the leading political party on the peninsula to this day, but its name is not mentioned even once. How come? Not to beat around the bush, the name of that magical party was not mentioned out of sheer fear. I was already in court with the party in question when this piece was written, but my legal troubles were only starting. Anyhow, the party in question is the Istrian Democratic Assembly. At the time, Ivan Jakovčić was at its helm, and he ruled it with a big smile and an iron fist. Not for nothing were so many people in Motovun afraid to even talk to me before the municipal elections in 2009, let alone to join the Motovun branch of the Green Party.

HOPELESSLY NAÏVE (March 25, 2009)

Tomorrow afternoon I will speak at a conference dealing with the hidden aspects of golf development in Croatia, and so I have been mulling over my talk for a few days now. How to shape it? Where to place the emphasis? At the moment I am leaning toward talking about my experiences upon my return to Croatia after so many years abroad, mainly in America and England. My surprises, that is. These were

shaped over the last few years by events in Motovun, Istrian peninsula, and Croatia as a whole, in that order.

The first thing I would like to say is that I have been surprised by the lack of democracy in my new home. Golf development came to Motovun through opaque processes of spatial or physical planning followed by vetting of the environmental impact statement submitted by the investor. The Croatian law requires only a minimum of democratic involvement in these interrelated processes. Throughout, the municipal, regional, and national authorities involved stubbornly stuck to that bare minimum. Although golf development would have a tremendous impact on Motovun and its surroundings, reaching well beyond the municipal boundaries, few people in the area have ever complained about the lack of democratic decision making.

The second thing for tomorrow's conference is my surprise at the extraordinary openness of the lobby supporting golf development in Motovun, Istrian peninsula, and Croatia as a whole. I have been quite stunned by the fact that the same law office in Pula brings together as clients municipal and regional authorities involved and investors in golf development. The same law office has shaped the law regulating golf development in the country, as well. Besides, they are representing the mayor of Motovun and the municipality in two separate suits for libel brought against me. Such a transparent network of client relationships would be unimaginable in democratic environments I have witnessed in America and England.

Of course, my two surprises are two sides of the same coin. Opacity of decision making and transparency of power are actually inseparable. In short, Croatian democracy has a long way to go. But this is what worries me slightly about tomorrow's talk. Will anyone at the conference understand what I am talking about? More to the point, will anyone understand my two surprises? Coming from this country, most participants are likely to conclude that I am hopelessly naïve about everything that has been happening to me ever since my return to Croatia.

Addendum (March 26, 2009)

Everything went splendidly at the conference early this afternoon. The trick with my talk was to start by admitting that I was hopelessly naïve concerning Croatian affairs of all sorts. This timely admission made all the difference. There was much laughter, too.

THE NEXT HEARING (March 30, 2009)

My lawyer just called me to let me know that my next hearing at the Pazin Municipal Court, scheduled for April Fools' Day, had been cancelled. He learned a few minutes earlier from the lawyer of my

opponents, the mayor of Motovun and the Motovun Municipality, that the mayor had recently had a car accident in which he had suffered badly enough to reschedule the hearing. Apparently, his hip is broken.

Everyone in Motovun already knows about the accident, of course. After the last meeting of the municipal council a few days ago everyone went to one of the local drinking holes for a few shots. According to the grapevine, this is their habit. The mayor got a bit tipsy and called his younger brother to drive him home to Vrsar on the western coast of Istria, but the brother ended up by driving off the road not far from Motovun. That is one version of the story, though. The other is that the mayor called his brother only after he drove off the road in his brother's car, and the brother took the responsibility to save the mayor from police investigation just before local elections. This may be nothing but malicious gossip, it goes without saying. At any rate, the mayor's injury seems to be serious enough to call off the court hearing.

I am sorry about the mayor's predicament, but I am quite glad about the postponement. The day scheduled for the hearing happened to fall on the eighth anniversary of my mother's death. As she was born in Pazin, too, this particular day was especially difficult for me. As far as I am concerned, there could not have been a worse date for the hearing. Anyhow, the court will inform me in a few days about the date of the next hearing. It will be perfectly fine with me, I am sure.

THE MOTOVUN GOLF SAGA (April 2, 2009)

How best to sum up the last chapter of the Motovun golf saga? This is not an easy job, for the narrative is getting murky. And ever murkier. Perhaps the best way to get a feeling of what is going on is to follow the articles published in *Glas Istre (The Voice of Istria)*. Ever since the fateful public discussion of the environmental impact study of golf development in Motovun on October 21, 2008, Maša Jerin has written all of them. A brave journalist, she has held onto the case quite tenaciously for months. From her account of that meeting in *Glas Istre* on October 23 and 24 it is clear that it was a sham. The mayor turned the event, which was supposed to be dedicated to an orderly discussion of the study itself, into a political gathering where the citizens were supposed to vote for or against golf.

The first noteworthy event after the so-called public discussion was Jerin's announcement on January 22, 2009, that the president of the commission vetting the environmental impact study, Dr. Velimir Šimičić, was effectively fired by the Ministry of the Environment. Well known for his 1995 study promoting golf in the context of Croatian tourism, which was battered by the war, he was opposed to excessive development in Motovun. The Ministry of the Environment, which set up the commission, used his retirement from the Ministry of

Tourism at the end of last year as an excuse for removing him altogether. He was shocked, of course. Jerin's article clearly showed that the whole vetting process had stretched way beyond the legally required period, showing that the responsible ministry had difficult time pushing the study through.

On January 29, 2009, Jerin announced that the commission, now headed by an official from the Ministry of the Environment itself, passed the study, although three out of nine members in attendance were opposed to it. Dr. Šimičić was present on his own request, but he was not allowed to speak at the meeting. On February 1, 2009, *Glas Istre* published my letter to the editor in response to the news in which I argued that professional judgment of commission members could not be subjected to voting as each member was responsible for a particular domain—such as cultural heritage, agriculture, or golf itself. The opinion of three out of nine members of the commission still makes the study unacceptable. This letter I also sent to the Environmental Minister, Marina Matulović-Dropulić, but she has never responded to it, as is her custom.

Jerin's article of March 17, 2009, announced the Ministry's decision to accept the environmental impact study of golf development in Motovun, but this announcement was still unofficial. This was followed by her article about the official announcement of the acceptance by the Ministry on March 26, 2009. This second article also announced that Green Istria, a leading green non-governmental organization on the peninsula, would take the Ministry to the court for all the irregularities in the vetting of the environmental impact study. And there were many such, indeed, over a period of more than a year from the first meeting of the commission, which took place in Motovun on March 20, 2008.

In the meanwhile, Jerin has published a large number of articles about golf in Istria. She has tried to show that golf does not necessarily come with all the apartments, houses, and villas attached. In one of these articles she investigated the situation in Slovenia, where in more than a dozen existing golf developments there are few buildings attached beyond the usual clubhouse and a few other facilities required by the sport. She showed quite persuasively that the argument that golf cannot pay for itself without the apartments, houses, and villas, which is the mantra of all investors into golf in Croatia, does not hold water.

What will happen next? This is very hard to guess. The legal process between Green Istria and the Ministry of the Environment may take years. The upcoming local elections may change several of the key players in golf development in Motovun. But the global economic crisis is likely to have the decisive impact on the Motovun golf saga. Although Jupiter Group, the investor from London, will do whatever can be done to get all the papers allowing it to build one day a whole village next to historic Motovun, they will do so primarily because of

the resale value of these papers. Once the crisis is behind us, they could well be worth a mint once again. But here we are talking about years. Perhaps as many as five years, too.

Addendum I (June 16, 2009)

On my last visit to Zagreb I was introduced to a man very close to a number of people in top government positions. The person who introduced me to him knew he had something interesting to tell me concerning the Croatian branch of the British investor in golf development in Motovun. And I was hardly disappointed. The man claims that the money seeking investment outlets in Istria and Dalmatia, where Jupiter Group operates, actually comes from top government officials in Croatia. The British investor may be experienced in attracting such investors, but otherwise it is only a convenient front. Of course, the top government people are doing their best to make sure their investments make a good return on their own soil. Although I am far from a fan of conspiracy theories, this twist to the Motovun golf saga strikes me as perfectly plausible. It surely explains pretty well why I am now in court for writing about the collusion between foreign investors and state, regional, and local politicians (“Croatia Spells Conflict of Interest,” October 3, 2008).

Addendum II (June 21, 2009)

Few people I talk to about the possibility that golf development in Motovun involves top government officials as investors, too, fail to mention that I may be in considerable danger for bringing all this to light. I always reply that I am quite conscious of the danger, but that I hope that it is reduced to the extent that I am outspoken about everything, including the danger itself. My *Residua* is my shield, as it were. If anything would happen to me, the culprits would be obvious enough. The only problem I face in this regard, I add prudently, is the libel or slander law, which limits my ability to point my finger at the culprits I am reasonably sure about. Anyhow, a good police inspector would have no trouble nailing them down. All he would need to do is follow the money once again. Simple! Or so I would hope.

STRAIGHT FROM THE FOREST (April 13, 2009)

Having spent a few hours toying with the etymology of *furešt*, the Istrian word of Venetian origin for “foreigner,” “stranger,” or “outsider,” I am hardly any wiser. To my surprise, there is no vocabulary of the Istrian dialect on the World Wide Web. Vocabularies of the Venetian dialect are there, all right, but they are not very instructive on this matter. The Italian *forestiero* for “foreigner,” “stranger,” or “alien” does lead to an interesting find, though. Based on the Latin root standing for “outside,” it also connects to *forèsta* or “forest,” which apparently has the same ancient

root. That is, once upon a time all foreigners, as well as many other ghastly things, came straight from the forest. But why would I spend hours on such pitiful trifles? Because this is where I am coming from according to many an inhabitant of Motovun and the surrounding villages. Straight from the forest, indeed.

Addendum I (April 14, 2009)

This morning I found an electronic-mail message from Tomo Krajina from Poreč, who has contacted me *via* the feedback function on the *Residua* website. “It is not true that there is no Istrian vocabulary on the web,” he writes. “You can find it on www.istarski-rjecnik.com.” He concedes that the site is a bit awkward, though, as it requires registration. “It does not contain the word *furešt*, either,” he concludes, “but this is still better than nothing.” I thanked him for the information and pointed out that I must have missed this site because I was searching for this particular word only rather than a vocabulary of the Istrian dialect as such. At any rate, I can only hope the magical word will be added to it soon.

Addendum II (April 15, 2009)

The plot thickens. Today I received another feedback message from my website, this time from Mirjana Poropat, who does not mention where she is from. At any rate, she did find the word *furešt* on the site mentioned, but only when she searched for *stranac* or “foreigner” in Croatian. Otherwise, the word is not available. As she quips, the navigation of the vocabulary is not exactly according to Jacob Nielsen—an author, researcher, and consultant on user interfaces on the World Wide Web of quite some renown. My only remaining hope is that the vocabulary will eventually be enriched with the etymology of the magical word in line with my painstaking research. Straight from the forest, once again.

ELECTIONS, ELECTIONS (April 23, 2009)

The situation surrounding the upcoming local elections in Motovun is, well, chaotic. A few days before election lists are to be submitted to the relevant authorities, we still do not know how many lists there will be. That is, how many parties are vying for power. According to the Croatian law, independents can come up with such lists until the last day. Similarly, we still have no idea who will be running for mayor. With the exception of the candidate proposed by the Social Democrats, and supported by the Green Party – Green Alternative, no other candidate for mayor is known at this point in time.

To simplify things for the voters, Social Democrats and Greens will sign today a coalition agreement at a press conference in one of Motovun’s watering holes. The Green Party could not get more than

one place at the municipal council, and the coalition agreement thus guarantees one place for the Greens. At the same time, this guarantees that surplus votes do not go to the leading party, Istrian Democratic Assembly, which has been in power for nineteen years already. According to the Croatian law, most of the surplus votes go to the leading party, which means that separate election lists for Social Democrats and Greens would most likely give away an entire place on the council to their common opponent.

By the beginning of next week we will know exactly where we are. And so will the voters. We will know how many lists we are facing, as well as how many candidates for mayor there are. The election campaign will then run through mid-May, when the elections are scheduled. This will be a funny period, no doubt. Both hopes and fears will be growing by the day. Many people here believe that they stand to gain or lose a great deal depending on which way the elections go. One hopes to get a plot of land for a new house, another fears that his son's stipend will be revoked, and so on. In a community where few have much, all this adds to a lot. The only good thing is that there is less than a month till the election day.

THE NEXT ELECTIONS (April 24, 2009)

I feel kind of elated today. And my feelings are due to things entirely political, I must admit. The coalition agreement with Social Democrats behinds us, all the Greens on the election list have been registered with the authorities already. Now we are official. The election campaign can start. But my elation comes from elsewhere. This is the first day of preparations for the next elections. Four years from now we will be in an entirely different position in our town. By then, green issues will become paramount. And the Green Party will be running alone for the first time. A young person will be at our helm by that time. In 2013 we will do pretty well, I am quite sure. If everything goes as it should, we will take two or three seats on the municipal council. Green Motovun will no longer be but a hopeful slogan.

THE CAMPAIGN IS ON (April 29, 2009)

The election lists have appeared in the local newspapers this morning. The campaign is on. Happily, there are only three lists in Motovun: Social Democrats and Greens running together, Istrian Democratic Assembly, which has been in power here for nineteen years already, and Independents. A greater number of lists would only confuse the electorate. Also, there are only two candidates for mayor. One represents the coalition between Social Democrats and Greens, and the other represents the Istrian Democratic Assembly for the third time in a row.

By comparison with previous election years, the Greens and the Independents are new to the voters. But few people in Motovun will be thinking about what any of the parties actually stand for. Their goals and programs will be nearly irrelevant. Instead, everyone will be looking at the names of the people on the three lists, as well as their relative positions on each list—that is, the likelihoods that they would make it into the municipal council. As the municipality is tiny, everyone knows everyone else.

A quick comparison between the election lists shows that the Istrian Democratic Assembly is relying most on tried and tested people from previous administrations. No surprises here. The incumbents are embattled, and their list shows it perfectly clearly. The Independents are completely new to politics in this town, and it will thus take everyone a little while to figure out who is who on the list, as well as why. The coalition between Social Democrats and Greens is somewhere in between, with the exception of the Greens.

The most important next step is to form yet another coalition between the parties opposing the incumbent Istrian Democratic Assembly. According to the Croatian law, the Independents cannot enter coalitions before the elections. However, the law permits post-election coalitions, which can be formed before the elections. Such an agreement, signed in front of invited journalists, would make it clear to the electorate that the incumbent party is most likely to be driven into opposition in the municipal council. This would change the politics of Motovun for the first time in almost two decades. And the outlook is bright.

Addendum (May 5, 2009)

After some deliberation, the Independents decided not to accept the post-election coalition offer from the coalition of Social Democrats and Greens. They say they wish to see what the elections will bring them before reconsidering such a move. This bodes ill, though. The elections will be followed by fierce horse-trading, in which the ruling Istrian Democratic Assembly will have an upper hand. When it comes to horse-trading, they are pros. After years in power, they have much to trade with, too. The way things look at the moment, nothing much will change in Motovun. Thanks to the Independents, I must say. In spite of their claims that they want to change everything about local politics in the town and the surrounding villages, they are most likely to achieve precisely the opposite.

OUTRIGHT BEWITCHING (May 11, 2009)

Less than a week before the local elections, nerves are starting to fray in Motovun. Not surprisingly, those affiliated with the incumbent

party, the Istrian Democratic Assembly, appear to be the most jumpy. And therefore the most unpleasant in public and private altercations of all sorts. They stand to lose the most, it goes without saying. Judging by the sentiments of so many people in the municipality, it is quite likely they will have to give up a whole bunch of council posts, which may turn them into an opposition party after many years in power. And power is so very sweet, if not outright bewitching. Having specialized in lucrative real-estate transactions of all sorts, a few of which are still pending, they are starting to bare their teeth. The best their opponents can do at this point is to keep calling for peaceful and orderly elections. As well as elections that bring out as many people as possible. For the end of a murky era is in plain sight already.

Addendum (May 14, 2009)

Just a few days before the elections, the incumbent party has started playing dirty. God knows what else is going on at the moment, but an attempt to smear my reputation is now afloat. A compact disk with doctored footage of my talk at a recent gathering of greens in Zagreb is doing the rounds in Motovun and the surrounding villages. The smear itself is not worth much attention, though. It shows perfectly clearly that the panic is already gripping the Motovun branch of the Istrian Democratic Assembly. As a sign of what is to come a few days from now, it can be only welcomed. They will be trounced.

AS FOR GREENS (May 18, 2009)

In broad outline, the elections in Motovun went pretty much as I expected. To begin with, the Istrian Democratic Assembly got six out of thirteen posts in the municipal council, while the Independents got four posts (“Barring Surprises,” May 7, 2009). Also, the Istrian Democratic Assembly got the mayor, but he will not have the majority in the council (“The Mayor *versus* the Council,” May 8, 2009). Perhaps the only surprise is that the coalition between Social Democrats and Greens got only three posts in the council, whereas I expected at least four. As I was fourth on the coalition list, this means that I have not made it into the council. That is, the Greens have not made it into the council, either. Everything will now depend on the cooperation between the Independents and Social Democrats minus Greens. At the moment, many people are rather optimistic about the post-election coalition between the two opposition parties, but only time will tell how well they will work together. As for Greens, they will have to wait until next elections.

POLITICAL SAVVY (May 21, 2009)

The results of the local elections are out since yesterday, when they appeared in the local newspapers. In Motovun, 597 people voted out

of the electorate of 934. Due to various irregularities with a few election papers, 583 votes counted. The Istrian Democratic assembly got 275 votes, the Independents 159, and the coalition between Social Democrats and Greens got 149 votes. This translates into six, four, and three posts on the municipal council, respectively. Interestingly, the election results for Motovun reflect the situation in Istria as a whole. By comparison with the previous elections, the Istrian Democratic Assembly lost votes, but it is still in the lead. The Social Democrats, who coalesced with Greens in a number of municipalities, also lost votes, but not as many as the leading party. And the Independents collected most of the votes lost by the two leading parties. Across the region, much now depends on the political savvy of the Independents, most of whom are new to the game. In Motovun, we keep our fingers crossed.

HELP, HELP! (May 26, 2009)

If Motovun rumors are to be trusted at this treacherous moment, my third court case is now being quietly concocted, this time for slander proper. I used some strong words in my presentation of Motovun's golf story at a meeting of environmental activists in Zagreb two months ago, and a recording of the event found its way onto the World Wide Web. Taken out of context, a clip from this recording turned up in town a few days before the local elections a couple of weeks ago. Circulated surreptitiously by one of the leading lights of the incumbent political party, it became a weapon against political change. Of course, the gist of my message got pushed to the side, if not entirely out of view ("Hopelessly Naïve," March 25, 2009). The new court case will therefore revolve around the so-called public discussion of the environmental impact study of golf development under Motovun, my humorous rendering of which is captured by the camera. However, the public discussion skirted the law beyond any reasonable doubt ("The Mayor and His Stooges: An Electronic-Mail Message to the Members of Motovun-Eco Town," October 22, 2008). Once again, the court case will bring to light the wholesale repression of political dissent in Motovun, Istria, and Croatia as a whole. Monty Python's "Holy Grail" surfaces once again: "Help, help, I am being repressed!"

CONTINUING CONCERNS WITH CROATIA'S DEMOCRATIC RECORD: A LETTER TO CROATIAN PRIME MINISTER IVO SANADER (May 27, 2009)

I have written to you on December 3 and 22, 2008, about Croatia's democratic record, which is marred by the abuse of slander or libel law to thwart political opponents. On December 4, 2008, I have also written to you about my particular case, as well as pointed out the connection between legal charges brought against me and the activities

of the Istrian golf lobby, many actors of which are represented by the same law firm in Istria.

Now, your chief of staff, Ms. Katarina Fuček, has written to me on December 8, 2008, that she has forwarded my letters to the minister of the interior, Mr. Tomislav Karamarko, but I have not yet heard from him after so many months. In the meanwhile, I am facing not one but two court cases, one by the mayor of my municipality in Istria, and another by the municipality itself. Both of the cases are for the very same piece of writing on my private website and in English language. In addition, I now have reason to believe that yet another slander or libel case is being prepared against me in my municipality. Unable or unwilling to treat me as their worthy political opponent, which I certainly am, they are systematically persecuting me in a thoroughly undemocratic fashion.

I hope that you and your minister of the interior will consider my letters carefully and respond to them in due course. It is high time to put an end to the political abuse of slander or libel law in this country. Let me add that I am prepared to bring this form of legal abuse to the attention of the European Union's authorities concerned with Croatia's progress toward membership. The country's democratic record is surely at stake.

THE NEW MUNICIPAL COUNCIL IN MOTOVUN (June 18, 2009)

Motovun got its new municipal council yesterday evening. The councilors spent a bit more than an hour constituting the council. After swearing in and promising in public to serve all the citizens of the municipality to the best of their ability, they voted on several key council posts. There were about ten observers present, including a journalist from the local newspaper. Everything went splendidly. Although the proceedings were rather boring, there was much hope in the air. The key to the new era is the coalition between the Independents, Social Democrats, and Greens, which has a slight majority in the council over the Istrian Democratic Assembly.

For two previous mandates of four years each, the municipal council was dominated by the Istrian Democratic Assembly, to which the mayor belonged, as well. Whatever he wanted to do, the council would ratify without much ado. It became a voting machine. During yesterday's proceedings, the new coalition demonstrated that such a voting machine could be used whenever needed. But all members of the coalition are ready to work with the mayor and all the other councilors for the benefit of the municipality. The voting machine will be used only when absolutely necessary.

Buoyed by the meeting yesterday evening, this morning I submitted my first letter to the new municipal council. I wished it successful

work for the benefit of all, and then I proceeded to a rather personal matter. Namely, I pleaded with the council to withdraw the second suit for libel that I now face at the Municipal Court in Pazin. The first suit was submitted by the mayor of Motovun, while the second came from the municipality as a whole. Of course, it was rammed through by the mayor, and his voting machine responded just as he pleased. Both suits are to the shame of the Croatian judicial system, I explained in my letter. No court in a democratic society would accept a libel suit based on a claim that some government officials were in a conflict of interests. For me, at least, the fate of my plea will be an excellent indicator of what is to follow with the governance of Motovun in the next four years.

Addendum (September 17, 2009)

It took three full months for the new municipal council to consider my earnest plea. But my second suit for libel is still with me. Only three council members, all of them Social Democrats, voted to drop the suit. Given the coalition with the Greens, their vote did not surprise me. But the vote of the Independents, with whom there is yet another coalition in opposition to the Istrian Democratic Assembly, certainly did. Their council members argued that the suit had nothing to do with the new council, as though it came from the previous council rather than the municipality itself, which they now represent. As I said earlier, my plea is an excellent indicator of what is to follow with the governance of Motovun in next four years. The council coalition appears to be heading for the rocks.

A MATTER OF THE PAST (July 2, 2009)

I was right in the center of Zagreb when the news of prime minister's resignation started spreading early yesterday afternoon. Mobile phones were ringing all around the crowded Bulldog Bar terrace, where I was sitting with a few friends at the time. Everyone was quite stunned. Prime ministers do not resign every day, not even in Croatia. As people around me were discussing the consequences under their breaths, my mind immediately shifted to Motovun. What will be the consequences of the unexpected resignation on golf development within sight of the enchanted hilltown?

The connection between the mayor of Motovun, the governor of Istria, and the prime minister of Croatia in golf development is obvious enough. From the very first day, every single move in the process of building a hulking golf resort right next to one of national cultural treasures was controlled from the top. The key ministers involved in the process had to be coordinated, and the prime minister was always there to keep an eye on everything. If it is also true that many of the top government officials were involved in a money laundering scheme through the British investor in Motovun's golf resort, as well as many

other similar developments across Istria and Dalmatia, coordination from the very top was rather essential.

What is in store, though? Is the prime minister's resignation the beginning of the end of golf development in Motovun? Although there are too many unknowns in this murky venture, I would surely guess so. The Croatian government will be in turmoil for weeks, if not longer. Other resignations are soon to follow. The new prime minister will take months to bring all the reins of power together once again. In the meanwhile, some shady deals will fall by the wayside. On top of everything, Croatia is currently doing very poorly in tourism, its sole "export" sector worth talking about, which means that the economic crisis will only get worse after the busiest summer months. Next year is likely to be much worse for tourism, as well. All in all, chances are that golf development in Motovun is a matter of the past. Phew!

THE MOTOVUN GOLF SCAM (July 16, 2009)

A bunch of people ought to rot in jail for their part in the Motovun golf scam, which is now ripe for a court worthy of that name. But, as is nearly always the case, only those close to the bottom of the crooked hierarchy stand a chance of suffering for their wrongdoings, no matter how petty or even unsuspecting. How do I feel about this propensity in human affairs? I would love to see the most powerful punished first and most of all, but I happen to know best those least powerful among the assorted culprits. Some of them I still greet in the street of my hilltown. To tell the truth, the pleasure of seeing justice done would still be considerable. In a few cases, it would be no less than overwhelming. Although the Motovun golf scam surely deserves a better ending, who can play with deeply-rooted propensities in human affairs?!

Addendum I (July 18, 2009)

The people I have in mind may be quite dangerous. Thus I have written a note to be passed to police investigators in the case anything happens to me one way or another. This document lists all the people who may be involved in the scam. It goes from the top to the bottom of the government hierarchy, plus a few of their professional helpers. The note has been sent to a number of people around the world, including several international journalists aware of my writings about the scam. Although I hope that all this will turn out to be unnecessary, it is always good to be prepared for the worst case. After all, close to a hundred-million euros are involved in the Motovun golf scam, and few people are likely to take this much money very lightly. In addition, the scam may involve more than half-a-billion euros in Croatia as a whole, about a half of which involves golf development. Much money, indeed.

Addendum II (July 20, 2009)

The original piece ended up printed out and pasted on another postcard addressed to the governor of Istria, Ivan Jakovčić. I love to send him postcards from time to time. I do hope that he appreciates my unflagging devotion. For my postcards are not only funny; they are rather informative, as well. As the address of my website is prominent on my postcards, I also hope that he visits it when he has some spare time. Funny and informative it surely is, and especially in connection with the Motovun golf scam.

THE RIGHT WORDS (July 19, 2009)

The best way to get the answers to many puzzling questions concerning golf development in Motovun is to search the World Wide Web with the right words or phrases. When they are combined in propitious ways, the answers practically jump at you. Here is a random list of some of the best search words I have stumbled upon thus far:

Hypo Alpe Adria, Marina Matulović-Dropulić, Interpol, Goran Veljović, Liechtenstein, Jörg Haider, money laundering, William Crewdson, Ivan Jakovčić, Croatian Civil Engineering Institute (IGH), Ivo Sanader, Jupiter Adria, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Zdenko Leko, Klagenfurt, Jure Radić.

The results of the search are so fascinating that it is very difficult to abandon it at will. In fact, I could hardly sleep from all the answers jumping at me before I eventually dragged myself to bed last night. This morning I woke up unusually early, but I could not go back to sleep any longer. I was back at my computer in a jiffy, and this is where I have stayed most of the day. And all that is required is to combine the search words or phrases in propitious ways.

Addendum I (September 17, 2010)

I have stopped reading Croatian newspapers, but I cannot avoid hearing about the latest news from my friends and acquaintances who still read them. One of them just showed me an article in today's newspapers about an Austrian team of investigators who came to Croatia in connection with a number of search words above. It is as though they have gotten wind of my *magnum opus*. At any rate, they keep explaining to everyone they meet that they are after criminals in Austria rather than criminals in Croatia. Would that such a Croatian team of investigators would ever visit Austria, though.

Addendum II (December 13, 2010)

Now that Ivo Sanader, the former prime minister of Croatia, is safely in Austrian jail, many of the key words from last year are popping up left and right in the Croatian newspapers, which I cannot but read on occasion after the prime minister's belated arrest. Hypo Alpe Adria is topmost among them, followed by Klagenfurt, Jörg Haider, money laundering, and Liechtenstein. The others are sure to pop up in no time, and especially in connection with the Croatian golf scam. What I find amazing is that it has taken such a long time for the key words to start connecting. The Croatian police establishment is notoriously corrupt. But what is wrong with its Austrian or Bavarian counterparts? Are they, too, corrupt to boot?

Addendum III (January 15, 2015)

Looking back, my "random" list of search words relating to golf development in Motovun and Istria in general remains unexplored by the police establishment. Surprise, surprise. Although Hypo Alpe Adria has gone through many trials and tribulations, the bank is still a mystery. Most important, many of the players in the crooked golf game are still walking free. Ivan Jakovčić, the former governor of Istria, is under investigation for corruption, but in connection with polo development in Motovun rather than golf. Goran Veljović, the lawyer behind golf in Istria, is not even under investigation yet. The same holds for Jure Radić, the former minister of construction in Franjo Tuđman's times and the current director of IGH. He is forgotten by the police, it appears. And so is Zdenko Leko, the Croatian director of Jupiter Adria, a shady British firm behind golf development in Motovun. Ivo Sanader's demise saved them all from well-deserved prosecution. So many years after his fall, I cannot but feel despondent. "There ain't no justice," I feel like mumbling under my breath. Justice is but a pipedream, anyhow.

Addendum IV (September 10, 2016)

Well, the news of Jure Radić's death just came my way. To the best of my knowledge, he has never been investigated by the Croatian police, secret or otherwise, about his involvement in the country-wide golf scam. And it has been eight years already since the onset of the global financial crisis and the collapse of the real estate boom worldwide, including the Adriatic coast. In short, he got off the hook the easy way. Such is life. Justice is for the birds, to be sure.

FOR THE HELL OF IT (August 25, 2009)

My next appearance in the Municipal Court in Pazin is scheduled for September 8, a mere fortnight from today. Ostensibly, I am facing the mayor of Motovun for libelous writing about the conflict of interests

surrounding golf development and the sale of municipal land (“Croatia Spells Conflict of Interest,” October 3, 2008). In fact, I am facing wholesale corruption in Croatia, where golf development has been seized by the politicians from top to bottom as an opportunity to profit from the sale of land in the hands of the state (“A Matter of the Past,” July 2, 2009). The corruption reaches well beyond Croatian borders, it goes without saying (“The Right Words,” July 19, 2009).

So, what do I do? This time I am eager to go on the offensive, but I am aware of the forces facing me in Motovun, Istria, Zagreb, and beyond. Awesome they surely are, as are their stakes. But can I help derail the lucrative land grab they have had in mind from the very start?

To be honest, as the ghastly expression goes, I very much doubt that anything I manage to do will have much impact. Together with the political crisis in Croatia, the global economic crisis is a much tougher opponent to crooked golf development than I can ever become. Still, I am eager to go on the offensive for the hell of it. In the last analysis, this is the only good reason to confront the bad guys anywhere, including Croatia. If I make the slightest of dents in the money-laundering scheme behind golf development in Motovun, so much the better. But that small gain is, as it were, incidental. There is joy in the fight as such. Besides, if anything funny happens to me, all the relevant authorities will know exactly where to look: the fake foreign investors in golf development. Follow the money, you idiots!

LUSTRATION (August 28, 2009)

About three years ago I asked the municipal office to give me the list of all people in Motovun whose land was either urbanized or deurbanized in the process of spatial or physical planning for purposes of golf and polo development. One can build on urbanized land, which makes it about ten times more expensive than land on which one cannot build. Deurbanized land thus drops to only a small fraction of its original value. As golf and polo development were deemed to require concentration of urbanized land, many pieces of land scattered throughout the municipality were deurbanized. Curiously, the owners of land do not need to be notified about such an important change. The Croatian law thus opens many an opportunity for abuse of the planning process at municipal level.

Unusually, the mayor of Motovun responded to my request in two weeks only. I waited for many of his answers for two full years. Anyhow, he explained that the municipal office could not satisfy my request, as the record of changes from urbanized to deurbanized land or *vice versa* was not kept during the planning process. This was most curious, indeed, but I let the whole issue wait until better times.

Today I sent a proposal to the Municipal Council in which I argued that a commission should be set up to inquire into all the instances where land was urbanized or deurbanized in the planning process. The commission's goal would be to come up with the list I originally requested from the municipal office. This list would clearly show who gained and who lost in the planning process. By way of justification of my proposal, I mentioned that I was aware of a number of people who were hurt in the process, but who were afraid to do anything about it for fear of retribution.

As a matter of fact, all people I personally know who have lost urbanized land in the planning process are foreigners. As their land was thereby returned to agricultural use, they gained property that Croatian law explicitly prohibits. Foreigners cannot own agricultural land in this country. The people I know have been able to turn things around through courts, but they are still not willing to come out in the open with their stories because of their fears. In a highly bureaucratized environment, every collision with the municipal office can lead to protracted legal battles, which the people in question wish to avoid at all costs.

Now, my proposal today is no less than revolutionary. As the Municipal Council is now dominated by a double coalition of Independents, Social Democrats, and Greens, there is a good chance that an inquiry into the planning process will be conducted sooner or later. This inquiry would open for inspection everything done by the Istrian Democratic Assembly, the leading party throughout the planning process. Of course, the party's representatives in the council will do everything that is in their power to thwart the inquiry, but their hands will be tied now that they are in the minority. One way or another, my proposal opens the way for a *sui generis* lustration in our municipality. And lustration is what we surely need if this community is ever to regain its balance after two decades of political and economic manipulations initiated with Croatian independence.

Addendum I (August 29, 2009)

Most of the day today my *Residua* website was dead. My browser kept informing me that it could not open the page because the server stopped responding. Most informative, indeed! At once I wrote to Paul Bazay, who put the site together, but there was not a peep from him. He lives in Calgary, Canada, which is seven hours behind Motovun. At any rate, the site came back to life about an hour ago. Alleluia! But I must admit that I have felt quite suspicious about the whole thing all the while. And on account of this piece, which I believe has quite some punch. My friends who know better about the World Wide Web kept telling me that no-one could sabotage my site, but I kept feeling rather mistrustful. Come to think of it, should I sew the mayor of Motovun for my budding paranoia?!

Addendum II (July 21, 2010)

At long last, today I got an answer to the proposal sent nearly eleven months ago. The document itself is quite curious. It is not addressed to me, although my name is mentioned in it. It bears a strange title: "Conclusion." In addition, the conclusion was reached by a board dealing with planning issues on July 10. The letter I received was stamped yesterday in the Motovun post office. Why such a delay? This will be another bureaucratic mystery that will remain unsolved.

Now, the conclusion was signed by the president of the municipal council. Technically, he and I are still members of the ruling coalition of Independents, Social Democrats, and Greens formed after last year's municipal elections. The coalition seems to be long dead, though. I have not been invited to a single meeting for many a month. Also, I have not been otherwise informed about the coalition's work practically since its formation. Everything I ever learn about its work is through local newspapers.

The conclusion has three short paragraphs written in a bureaucratic style that takes a while to fathom. The first says that the board dealing with planning issues is endeavoring to ensure that all matters pertaining to its field of activity are conducted publicly and transparently. The second paragraph says that the municipality is not dealing with proposals such as mine, but that I am welcome to examine the planning documentation in my own time, which is my right under Croatian law. And the third says that the process of spatial or physical planning in the municipality has been conducted in accordance with all appropriate Croatian laws. Splendid.

Of course, it makes no sense to respond to this "conclusion." It is bureaucratic to boot. The municipality is closed to me, perhaps forever. However, a copy of the document will now go to the highest Croatian office dealing with corruption and organized crime. This office is already informed about my own list of people in Motovun whose land was either urbanized or deurbanized in the process of spatial or physical planning for purposes of golf and polo development. And the list is most interesting, indeed. Enough said, though.

CROATIANS AS FOREIGN INVESTORS IN CROATIA: A LETTER TO CROATIAN PRESIDENT STJEPAN MESIĆ (August 30, 2009)

Now that the Croatian government seems to be on the verge of collapse, I am writing to you in the hope that you can do something about an alleged case of organized crime of staggering proportions, of which I have become aware only recently. Of course, you and your office will need substantial help from law enforcement services, but

you seem to me to be the only one in this country to whom I can write at this moment about this important matter.

From sources close to the highest officials of the Croatian government I have learned that a British investor in tourist development in Istria and Dalmatia is only a front for money laundering by highest government officials in this country. I have become aware of the alleged connections through my involvement in environmental protection of Motovun and its surroundings, where this particular British investor is engaged in golf development. When I recently learned about the alleged money-laundering scheme, everything became clear to me. The scheme brings together all pieces of the jigsaw puzzle.

The investor in question goes under the name of Jupiter Adria, which is allegedly part of Jupiter Group, a fund management company in London. However, from sources close to the City in London I have learned that Jupiter Group does not recognize Jupiter Adria as part of its organization. Jupiter Adria has a seat both in Luzern, Switzerland, and in Zagreb. One person connecting London, Luzern and Zagreb is William Crewdson, who serves as a company director both in Luzern and Zagreb. The leading Croatian person in Jupiter Adria in Zagreb is Zdenko Leko. I have recently tried to get in touch with both of these gentlemen, but without any success.

Now, Jupiter Adria has reported intentions to invest some six-hundred-million euros in tourist development in Croatia, of which about seventy million are intended for golf development in Motovun. If my sources close to the highest government officials in Zagreb are correct, a large portion of this money would actually come from Croatia itself *via* banks abroad that have their branches in the country. That is, the very same government officials would be preparing the ground for foreign investment in Istria and Dalmatia, and acting as foreign investors in their own country.

You are surely aware of the many curious things that have been happening in this country in connection with golf development. Last year the parliament even passed a bill about golf courses, which gives investors draconian expropriation powers that have no parallel anywhere in the world. The bill is now in the Constitutional Court. Also, more than sixty golf courses have appeared in spatial or physical plans across the land, of which nearly a half are in Istria alone. There is an outcry against most of these developments throughout Croatia. Moreover, the environmental impact study of golf development in Motovun is now in the Administrative Court for many irregularities during its vetting process overseen by the Ministry of the Environment. All this indicates that highest government officials have been involved from the beginning of the golf development craze that started about a decade ago with the sale of government land. Once more, the alleged money-laundering scheme would explain their behavior perfectly well.

These are serious allegations, and they require a systematic investigation by Croatian law enforcement services. Again, you strike me as the only one in this country who can set in motion such an inquiry. As for me, I am only dutifully reporting what I have learned from well-informed sources in Zagreb and London. I am not in position to investigate the alleged criminal activity all by myself. I trust that you will take this task upon yourself.

Addendum (September 30, 2009)

By way of a reminder, today I forwarded this letter to the Croatian president. I also sent him the following letter, in which I repeated my pleas for attention and action:

An entire month has passed since I sent you the attached letter, but neither you nor anyone from your office has yet found the time to respond to it. I cannot but assume that the letter has not been passed onto the relevant law enforcement services, either. I am risking much, and possibly even my life, for my allegations are pretty serious, but you remain surprisingly silent, as though golf development in Motovun and elsewhere in Croatia is a perfectly legitimate business conducted in complete accordance with the laws of the land. I hearby plead one more time for your attention and your action.

What are the chances that I will get a response from either him or someone from his office? Zero, I would say. After six years in Croatia, I know its government inside out.

THEIR ASHEN FACES (August 30, 2009)

Having written to Croatian president Stjepan Mesić earlier today that I have learned from sources close to the highest officials of the Croatian government that a British investor in tourist development in Istria and Dalmatia is only a front for money laundering by highest government officials in this country, I can rest for the day. The second plank of my defense in court against alleged libel is now in place. Together with my proposal for a municipal inquiry into winners and losers in land development in Motovun, my proposal for a presidential inquiry into money laundering in connection with tourist development across the land, including golf development in Motovun, seals my case. Ah, I can already see their ashen faces in court...

Addendum I (October 21, 2009)

As I have not heard from president Mesić in spite of a heartfelt reminder sent a month later, I have started forwarding the letter and the

reminder to various offices of the European Union. All my letters end with a plea for a proper contact regarding the alleged fraud. Today I wrote to the Union's representative for enlargement, Olli Rehn, as well as a few of his deputies who deal with Croatia. Although I cannot expect much from them, either, I remain as hopeful as ever. Sooner or later, my letters will hit the right office. And the ashen faces will be my just reward in court.

Addendum II (October 24, 2009)

A few hours after I wrote to Olli Rehn, I also wrote to Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a leader of the European Greens in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. And a day later, on October 22, I received a letter from president Mesić's office thanking me for my letter of August 30 and promising that it will be considered with due attention. A coincidence? I very much doubt it. Although neither Rehn nor Cohn-Bendit's offices responded to my letters, they must have contacted the president's office. In short, the European Union is the way to go. In spite of all its failings, of which there are too many to mention in passing, it still has a firm hold on poor old Croatia. God bless the Union!

Addendum III (April 18, 2010)

Olli Rehn's office did respond a couple of days later, and I have been in touch with several people from the office ever since. The most important thing they advised me to do in their first missive was to send our correspondence, including the letter to president Mesić, to the highest office in Croatia dealing with corruption and organized crime. And this is what I did after a minute or two of hesitation. A few days later I went to this office, too. The rest is history, as the hackneyed expression goes. But now I am in contact with Stefan Füle, who replaced Olli Rehn as the Union's representative for enlargement. Just as his predecessor, he is most concerned with corruption and organized crime in Croatia. For better or worse, it remains one of the most important stumbling blocks for the country's entry into the Union. With some luck, we may put a dent or two into it.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE MAYOR OF MOTOVUN (October 24, 2009)

I wish you a resounding victory in Pazin next week, or whenever the final decision in your court case may be ultimately made. I wish you and your lawyers every imaginable success. And all the glory you and your confederates from the Motovun municipality certainly deserve. Let your justice prevail, for prevail it certainly must, and let my punishment be as severe as the law of this lawful land permits.

I also wish you every success in the remaining rounds of my appeal in Pula and Zagreb, or wherever else we may join legal battle, which will follow without fail. I wish you victory upon decisive victory in all the courts of this land famous for its legal prowess. I wish my punishment to grow and grow to your heart's content.

For the final victory in Strasbourg will surely be mine. And it will be so much sweeter than it could ever have been without your resounding successes leading all the way up to it. But in Strasbourg I will rout you, your lawyers, and your hapless confederates from the Motovun municipality. Your just punishment will be remembered by all and sundry in this land dedicated to law and nothing but law for many a year to come.

In memory of Jorge Luis Borges

Addendum (April 8, 2013)

A few words of explanation are due here. The idea for this letter came from Borges' poem "The Generous Enemy," which appeared in his *Dreamtigers*, but was attributed by himself to H. Gering, whose *Anbang zur Heimskringla* (1893) was supposedly translated by W.S. Merwin. "In the war of 1102," the writer explained in a brief note under the title, "Magnus Barfod undertook the general conquest of the Irish kingdoms, but it is said that on the eve of his death he received this poem as a greeting from Muirchertach, the king of Dublin." And the poem is fabulous, indeed. "May your fighting meet with good fortune, tomorrow, on the fields of my kingdom," goes one of the many upbeat lines. "May tomorrow shine the brightest of all your many days," goes another. "Because it will be your last," starts the penultimate line. "That I swear to you, Magnus Barfod." Glorious! Predictably, I was over the moon when I discovered Borges' poem among my papers today. No matter how hard I looked for it, I could not find it for years. Returning to my letter to the mayor of Motovun, I truly wish him every success. For I will blot him out in Strasbourg.

"A COMPLETE AND TOTAL COCKROACH" (October 27, 2009)

To my surprise, at today's court hearing in Pazin I learned that the mayor of Motovun had charged me with yet another crime, this time for using these insulting words in describing him last March at a conference in Zagreb ("Hopelessly Naïve," March 25, 2009). Someone had recorded the meeting with a tiny camera, which I failed to spot at the time, and posted the proceedings on the World Wide Web a few days later. Bits and pieces of this recording ended up being used against me during the municipal election campaign last May, but the mayor's third court case against me was still a big surprise earlier today ("Outright Bewitching," May 11, 2009). Anyhow, now I face two cases for libel and one for insult. Or shall we call it poetic

license? But the amount of money the mayor wants is growing at a clip. At today's exchange rates, the first two are for a bit less than three-thousand euros apiece, while the third one is for a little more than four-thousand euros. But who has ever said the mayor of Motovun is not savvy about money? Cut out his lying tongue!

In memory of Mikhail Bulgakov

MY ONLY REWARD (October 28, 2009)

After the court hearing yesterday morning, my lawyer asked me to collect everything I have ever written about my concerns for sustainable development of Motovun, make three copies of the entire collection, and bring them to the next court hearing. "Everything!" he raised his eyebrows. Apparently, he wants to show that my motivations have been honorable throughout. When I returned home, I quickly printed out everything I could find on my computer—letters, documents, and articles. This is how I organized the collection, as well. That done, I added a title page. The title itself did not require much thought: "Sustainable Development of Motovun." This morning I picked up the collection and counted the pages. I went slowly, ever so slowly. Stretching from November 2005 to the present, it boasts one-hundred and forty-one pages. And I feel really sorry for myself. How much effort, and how little reward. In fact, my only reward is the triple court case for libel and insult.

MY MATERNAL GRANDFATHER (November 2, 2009)

I just walked out of the headquarters of the top Croatian institution dealing with organized crime. Having written to them less than a week ago on advice of one of the Commissioners of the European Union, this morning I got a phone call from one of their officers. Thus I was invited for an interview on the first day of my visit to Zagreb. I talked about golf development in Motovun for more than an hour, and the officer took everything down: names, places, dates. We will keep in touch concerning further development of the case. And I must report that I feel great about all this. At long last, the ball is rolling. With a little bit of luck, we will put another dent into organized crime in this country. But the strangest thing that happened to me immediately after the interview is that I remembered my maternal grandfather. He came to me out of the blue. To my pride, he was the last chief of police in Pazin under Austro-Hungarian rule. And he lost his job as soon as Italy grabbed Istria in the wake of World War I.

Addendum (March 16, 2017)

Known as USKOK, the institution in question appeared to be on the ball when it targeted the former prime minister, Ivo Sanader, a year

after my visit. He fled the country, but was arrested and ended up in jail in Austria. He was returned to Croatia soon enough, and he went through many a trial. But none of his confederates in the government ever saw the court. More important in my case, he was never charged for the golf scam in Istria and Dalmatia, about which I informed USKOK on several visits and exchanges *via* electronic mail. All my attempts to alert key politicians in the country of this omission ended up nowhere. The newspapers also remained oblivious to my many missives on this topic.

After Croatia's accession to the European Union, USKOK started fading, as I expected it would before the event. Its main purpose was to show that the country was fighting organized crime with due resolve, and Sanader's demise was trumpeted far and wide as evidence of Croatia's change for the better. This achieved, USKOK lost its *raison d'être*. It still pops up here and there, but it offers little to justify its existence any longer. Many a criminal in the government is still free, and there is no hope that this will ever change.

In retrospect, I cannot but feel sorry for my maternal grandfather. Just like me, he must have been a fool. As a chief police officer in Pazin, he must have believed that law and order were within reach. He could not even imagine that his fellow humans were born cheats, thieves, and murderers. It is in their flesh and bones. At best, people like him can offer a semblance of law and order, which has little if anything to do with the real thing. And this is how the human race will continue indefinitely. If there is any hope for it, it is in evolution. Although it takes millions of years, it is relentless. The only question that remains is whether law and order offer any evolutionary advantage to humans. Let the biologists figure it out, though.

FAR FROM AN INSULT (November 3, 2009)

Over the years, the cockroach has appeared in my writings exactly nine times, the last of which, concerning the most recent lawsuit filed against me by the mayor of Motovun, is just a week old ("A Complete and Total Cockroach," October 27, 2009). Out of a bit less than ten-thousand pieces of writing penned over nearly thirty-four years, this is not very often. Going through the nine pieces with some care, I reassured myself that most of the references to the cockroach are rather neutral, but some are outright positive, and one of them is no less than enthusiastic.

Take "God Bless the Rugged Cockroach" (September 16, 1989), for example. It celebrates a new species of cockroach that has almost miraculously adapted to modern technology. In only about half a century, it has developed an enzyme that helps it digest the plastic coating of wires in electrical and electronic equipment. Add a little bit of heat that such equipment produces, and the clever cockroach is

more than happy with its new environment. Quite a feat, it goes without saying.

Although mildly satirical, “Evelyn” (July 20, 2007) is another piece that celebrates the rugged insect. Here I write about the memoirs written by a cockroach. The book quickly turns into a bestseller, and it is soon translated into all major languages. In a short while, the insect turns into a media star of world renown. Known under its penname, Evelyn, the cockroach eventually becomes one of the best read authors ever.

“Nostradamus” (March 12, 2005) goes as far as likening all humans to cockroaches in a neutral sort of way. Differences admittedly exist, but they are only slight. The same or similar neutrality can be found in several other pieces of writing: “On Technique” (January 22, 1981), the oldest of the pieces in which the cockroach makes an appearance, “The Ghost of Jules Renard” (May 29, 1992), and “The Favorite National Insect” (April 3, 2002).

Perhaps the first piece in which the cockroach is not presented in a favorable or even neutral light is “Scurrying about Frantically” (November 30, 2002). Here I am touching upon a childhood pastime of which I cannot be very proud so many years later. Together with a friend my age, I used to burn cockroaches with the help of crystal lens and sunshine. Half a century later, the acrid smell of their smoldering carapaces came to me out of the blue when a friend’s hair briefly caught the flame of a candle. Amazingly, the smell was identical, thus pointing to our common origin.

“The Cockroaches” (December 5, 2007) turns out to be the only piece written over so many years in which the insect is depicted disapprovingly, so to speak. “Cockroaches scurry away when the kitchen light is turned on,” I write in connection with the moribund political scene in Istria and the rest of Croatia. This was an anxious call for more freedom of the media, I suppose. At any rate, this is the only piece I have ever written in which the cockroach appears in a negative light, as it were.

All in all, the most recent lawsuit brought against me by the mayor of Motovun obviously runs counter to my own feelings about the cockroach. A brief acquaintance with my *magnum opus* is sufficient to show that this is the case. More often than not, it is clear that I am quite impressed by the resourceful insect. Therefore, calling someone a cockroach is far from an insult for me. In fact, it may be understood even as a tribute of sorts. At least in my own mind, the cockroach is someone to be.

ON MY OWN SHOULDERS (November 4, 2009)

Everyone I talk to in the Croatian capital shares much of my new-born optimism concerning organized crime in this country. Yes, it is in retreat, which seems to be picking up, too. And, yes, the retreat will last as long as the global economic downturn lasts, for it was the cheerful boom preceding it that had given rise to many among the thieves and whores around us. But, no, organized crime cannot be eradicated. It is too pervasive to stamp out once and for all. Well-connected as my friends and acquaintances happen to be, they cannot imagine all the thieves and whores behind bars. There are too many of them. And they are still to be found everywhere from the very top to the very bottom of the bulging government. Courts cannot possibly process them all. Jails cannot possibly house all of them, either. Which puts a small dent into my new-born optimism. All I really care about are the thieves and whores I personally know. The ones closer to, as it were, home. As far as I am concerned, both courts and jails are more than ample for each and every one of them. Once again, everything seems to be falling on my own shoulders.

Addendum (December 7, 2016)

I cannot but smile awkwardly as I read this piece, which now strikes me as ridiculous at best. So many years later, organized crime and corruption are of little interest to anyone in Croatia any longer. Ever since Croatia's accession to the European Union, the thieves and whores are not only free to roam once again, but they are also highly appreciated by all and sundry for their skills and their verve. By now, everything is back to, as it were, normal. Which only goes to show that my expectations were wide off the mark. Actually, they were plain silly, too. As for my own shoulders, I am still waiting to hear from Strasbourg. By the time the court makes up its mind about my trials and tribulations in Croatian courts, the vaunted decision will be nigh irrelevant to anyone concerned. My new-born optimism, my ass.

CORRUPTION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: A LETTER TO *THE ECONOMIST* (November 9, 2009)

You list four stumbling blocks in Central and Eastern Europe's catching up with the west: unpredictable legal system, cumbersome regulation, inadequate social safety net, and inefficient competition ("Down in the Dumps," November 7, 2009). It is hard to argue with any of the above. But you skip an important obstacle that mars the region: widespread corruption. The best proxy for this remnant of communist past is the poor and declining freedom of the media, which you reported only a fortnight ago ("Shut Up or Be Sued," October 24, 2009). Libel laws are systematically abused to muzzle critics. As corruption is difficult to measure, this proxy is of enormous value. The way things stand at present, it will be of increasing value in

gauging the development of the entire region as it struggles to get out of the current economic downturn.

ARCHAIC LIBEL LAWS: A LETTER TO *THE ECONOMIST* (November 17, 2009)

As you argue, it is time to reform England's archaic libel laws ("A City Named Sue," November 14, 2009). The English law is, as you put it, one of the most claimant-friendly systems in the world, for it requires the defendant to prove what he or she said is true. By contrast, the strong free-speech defense provided by America's first amendment puts the burden on the claimant. And this is where America still leads the world. It is thus time to reform many countries' archaic libel laws, not just England's. Central and Eastern Europe is a case in point. This is where a claimant-friendly libel law now serves the same function as censorship used to serve before the Iron Curtain supposedly fell. Unfortunately, only new dissidents in these countries are aware of the need for legal reform, for those in power use the archaic law to stifle all opposition. Before the general public throughout the region is sensitized to this crucial issue, defendant-friendly libel law will remain a pipedream. Just like America used to be a couple of decades ago.

AFTER MANY YEARS IN THE STATES (November 17, 2009)

There were quite a few people in the audience at my first court hearing, but there were only a couple of them at the last two. A journalist of renown in these parts, Mirjan Rimanić reports on the hearings for the most popular local newspaper. And Riko Benazić used to be an enthusiastic member of Motovun – Eco Town, an association dealing with sustainable development of the town and its surroundings, which I founded a few years back. Just like me, he returned to Croatia after many years in the States. We are about the same age, too. After this morning's hearing, we stopped by the courtroom door for a few quick words. "You know," he raised his eyebrows, "I'm a bit surprised by the speed with which your case is going through the court." As it turns out, he is involved in two court cases in Poreč, where he now lives, but both of these cases are into their fifth year already. Nothing ever happens. No hearings are ever scheduled. No pushing on anyone's part helps, either. "You know," I raised my eyebrows before we said goodbye to each other, "I'm thinking quite seriously about leaving this place." "Me, too," Riko nodded with a big grin, "me, too."

WELCOME TO CROATIA! (November 18, 2009)

I cannot sleep tonight. Exhausted by yesterday's court hearing and little sleep the previous night, when I tossed in bed for hours, I went to sleep just after ten in the evening. But I woke up just before one in the morning. It is close to four already, but sleep is beyond my ken still. As is always the case with me, and especially when I am troubled by something pretty serious, the best way out of it is through writing about it.

Slowly but surely, I am getting reconciled with my fate. I live in a country that is far from free. And Croatia has a long way to go when freedom is concerned. Having not realized that simple fact early enough, I have gotten into trouble with the law. From now on, I shall behave differently. Write differently, to put it a bit more precisely. Always keeping in mind where I actually live, I shall learn to muzzle myself. From now on, I will censor myself most carefully whenever I write about Croatia.

The cost of learning this simple truth, considerable though it is likely to be by the end of my court case, can be thought of as a write-off. It must be accepted as such without unnecessary suffering. After all, money is only money. Assuming that I have learned my lesson, and learned it for good, the write-off will be one and only. And that is all there is to it as long as I choose to stay in this country. Welcome to Croatia!

GEOGRAPHIC LABELING FOR BEGINNERS: A LETTER TO *THE ECONOMIST* (January 8, 2010)

“Eastern Europe” may be a geographic oddity, as you argue, but the label is not likely to be removed by any geographic argument, no matter how clever (“Wrongly Labeled,” January 9, 2010). After all, the term has little to do with geography. Greece is farther east than many a country usually thought of as belonging to this region, but it was never behind the Iron Curtain. It is this political, as well as military, demarcation line that separates the east from the west rather than geography as such. For a brief period in the early 1990s, many countries in the region insisted that they were in Central Europe, instead. At the time, “Eastern Europe” was reserved for countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union, a special category no doubt. The distinction has petered out over the years, but it should not be forgotten. Although you are certainly right when you claim that countries that used to be behind the Iron Curtain are quite different from each other, their political past unites them in many ways that will not quickly disappear on account of new political divisions. Communist ideology is still alive in many a bosom, and often in surprising ways—such as attitudes toward job security, health insurance, and public safety. And so is the resentment for having been

left in the Soviet clutches for such a long time. It is this resentment that still feeds all the complaints about false geographical divisions of Europe. Geographic labeling is thus best left alone.

Addendum (January 29, 2010)

This letter made it into print, as I discovered this morning. And it appears first among the letters printed this week. Seeing my name next to the name of my hilltown made me quite happy once again. Given my feelings about some people in Motovun, my sentiments surprised me a bit. But the hilltown has little, if anything, to do with its current inhabitants. Even those few whose forebears used to live in the surrounding hamlets have little, if anything, to do with the Venetian outpost of old. The only thing that I regret at this moment is that I did not use the original name for the hilltown, Montona. Sonorous as it is, it beats its muffled Croatian adaptation by a wide margin.

BEING ADMIRER FOR YOUR COURAGE (February 18, 2010)

I just returned home from a meeting with a Zagreb lawyer, who is now advising me on the best way forward with my triple lawsuit in Istria. A while ago I sent him all the court papers, but I started our meeting today by telling him about my communications with the highest Croatian authority dealing with corruption and organized crime. To the best of my knowledge, golf development in Motovun and elsewhere in Istria and Dalmatia involves money laundering by top government officials. This could not be conveyed over the phone or electronic mail, of course. When he heard my story, he gave me a long look. "I admire your courage," he said gravely, "but pay good attention wherever you go." As I was leaving, I returned to these words of his. "There is nothing worse than being admired for your courage," I chuckled. "Please pay good attention wherever you go," he repeated his words of caution with a small smile.

Addendum I (December 13, 2010)

Now that the former prime minister of Croatia is behind bars in Austria, and that his criminal organization is in the news day in and day out, I feel a bit safer wherever I go around the Croatian capital. Criminals are in retreat, no doubt. But I still worry about the surprising silence surrounding the prime minister's involvement with golf development. The ministers who helped him promote sixty-odd golf courses, most of which only served as a massive money laundering operation, are not mentioned anywhere. Neither are the governors of the regions that embraced golf with relish. Of course, the governor of Istria is uppermost in my mind, for more than twenty golf courses were entrusted to his care. Now that I am doing my best to remind all and sundry of the Croatian golf scam, I cannot but remember the good lawyer who admired my courage less than a year

ago. “Please pay good attention wherever you go,” his words come back to me every once in a while. The former prime minister’s criminal organization is still up and about, and especially when golf is concerned. At around seventy-million euros per course, more than four-billion euros were involved in the scam, and many sorely disappointed people.

Addendum II (October 20, 2015)

Times are changing, and fast. The former prime minister of Croatia has recently been released from Croatian jail, where he ended up after a short bout in Austrian jail. Interestingly, his involvement with crooked golf development has not been even mentioned either in court or in government to this day. The same goes for his ministers and everyone else down the line. Most important, his erstwhile party is on the rise again, and it may well win the next parliamentary elections soon. Although it is unlikely that golf will become the craze ever again, I am starting to wonder about my fate. Sooner or later, the resolution of my court case against Croatia in Strasbourg will bring this sorry story into focus one more time. If I win, which is hardly unlikely, the Croatian golf scam will come to the fore without fail. Will I have to pay good attention wherever I go once again? Alas, my best hope is that I am suffering from good old paranoia.

SECOND-GUESSING THE JUDGE (March 2, 2010)

“So,” many of my friends are eager to know, “what happened in court this morning?” God only knows. Once again, I have no idea what to say. Except that the hearings are now behind us, and that the judge is supposed to make up his mind in a few days. My lawyer will then let me know which way everything went, as well as suggest what to do next. He is loath of second-guessing the judge, but he is mildly optimistic about the two libel cases and somewhat pessimistic about the insult case. “Autogoal,” he mumbled as he gave me a sideways glance after the hearing. At first I just shrugged my shoulders, but then I started railing against the Croatian judicial system: “Nowhere in the free world would such a thing end up in court!” My lawyer did not even shrug his shoulders, though.

Addendum I (March 3, 2010)

My lawyer just called me with the judge’s verdict. The two libel charges have been struck down, but the insult charge has held. A wise decision, I would say, for my threat of going to the European Union is kind of lame with the charge of mere insult. But my big mouth will cost me four-thousand euros plus legal expenses. All told, this could put me behind by about eight-thousand euros. This is likely to be the most expensive cockroach ever. Quite a feat on my part, too.

Addendum II (March 4, 2010)

The situation I am now facing is rather perplexing. The mayor of Motovun stands to gain by appealing the verdict in higher court. My chances are somewhat slimmer than his, but I also stand to gain by pressing forward with an appeal. Of course, the appeals only add to the legal expenses, which fall on the loser in the higher court. If the decision on the two libel cases and the insult case remain split, so will be the legal expenses, as well. So, the winner is far from clear at this stage. Except the two lawyers, it goes without saying. And Croatian lawyers are expensive even by Western European standards. For them, it makes perfect sense to appeal and see what happens next. Given all the givens, it would perhaps be best for both the mayor and I to stop this nonsense and call it quits. However, neither of us would talk to the other. In short, this is a prisoner's dilemma sort of situation. This is fundamental problem in game theory that shows why two people might not cooperate even if it is in both their interests to do so. Alas!

MY SINCERE APOLOGIES TO THE COCKROACH (March 4, 2010)

Intrigued by the cockroach that may well cost me a good deal of money, today I searched the World Wide Web for information about this ubiquitous insect. And I quickly found plenty of interesting stuff. There are about four-thousand species of cockroach, of which thirty are associated with human habitation, but only about four are well known as pests. The earliest cockroach-like fossils are from the Carboniferous period about three-hundred million years ago. Research has shown that the insect's group-based decision-making accounts for its complex behavior, such as resource allocation. A fine balance between cooperation and competition characterizes its group decision-making behavior. Cockroaches are among the hardiest animals on the planet, too. Some species can remain active for up to a month without any food. Some can go without air for up to forty-five minutes. They have a much higher radiation resistance than vertebrates, with a lethal dose up to sixteen times that of humans. For this reason, it is often suggested that cockroaches will inherit the earth. Most species of cockroach are mainly nocturnal and will run away when exposed to light. Etc., etc. An amazing insect, indeed. Therefore, my sincere apologies to the cockroach for likening it to a human being just because it will run away when exposed to light. What an insult!

ONE MAN (July 19, 2010)

A week before my departure for Friuli, where I will be looking for a new home, my friends are puzzled. Why would I ever leave Istria? I dodge their questions as much as I can, but in the end I cannot avoid mentioning Slobodan Vugrinec, who has served as mayor of Motovun

ever since my arrival in town. Eight years and counting. Well, I am thinking of leaving because of him. There! But my friends are puzzled still. Is one man enough for you to change countries? After some finagling, I cannot but shrug my shoulders. One man is enough for me to do many a thing, indeed. He represents everything I despise about this wretched town, region, and country. Which is why he has taken me to court, as well. Still, my friends remain puzzled. As though one man cannot be behind it all. Or woman, for that matter. Hey, do you wish me to spell out a few execrable names of world renown?!

Addendum (November 24, 2010)

Perhaps one man is not enough for me to change countries, at least not for the time being, but the mayor of Motovun is surely enough for me to change places of residence. There are many reasons why I am spending more time in Zagreb now than when I moved to Motovun, but one of them is that I am not very likely to bump into him in the Croatian capital. And a single glance of him is often enough to spoil my day. As of late, when I come to Zagreb, I start breathing freely. God be praised, Slobodan Vugrinec is far away! As are his stooges, too. At last I am free! Such feelings puzzle not only my friends, but also my own self. And ever more so. Like I said, one man is enough for me to do many a thing, indeed.

ABANDON AND ABSOLVE (August 22, 2010)

Matthew Treadwell has written a fine article about golf in Motovun. Entitled “Slingshot Stones at Goliath: NGOs in Croatia Battle to Save the Landscape,” it appeared yesterday in *Conducive Chronicle* (www.cchronicle.com), where people are invited to learn about important issues around the world, as well as to join the battle if they so wish. The article relies on information from several green sources in Istria, including myself. And it does not pull any punches when it comes to all those in high places who promoted golf so as to build apartments, houses, and villas at the height of the real-estate boom.

Yesterday evening, as soon as I received the news about the publication of the article, I started sending the website address to friends far and wide. I asked them to spread the news. I also sent it to Stefan Füle, the European Union’s representative for enlargement. For good measure, I copied the highest Croatian authority concerned with corruption and organized crime. This is what I always do, just to make sure that both sides know what is going on.

As soon as I woke up this morning, I remembered a discussion about golf in Motovun with a friend yesterday afternoon. Whenever I mentioned my intentions concerning the fight, she came up with the same advice: “Abandon and absolve.” And I kept reminding her that

this was precisely what I intended to do in October 2008, when I decided to abandon the fight and absolve all those who viciously attacked me for my opposition to fake golf. Led by the mayor of Motovun, they were vicious, indeed. “But he took me to court a fortnight later,” I repeated over and over again. “Worse,” I would add each and every time, “he kept adding legal charges through the middle of 2009!” It is 2010 already, and I am still in court against my will.

Addendum (October 2, 2016)

Jadranka Drempetić is my friend’s name. As an architect of renown in these parts, she has been involved in many a building project in Motovun over several decades. As of late, though, she comes to the hilltown ever less often. Whenever we bump into each other now, we do not sit down for a talk any longer. After a few friendly words, we part our ways. The political divide that has set in with crooked golf development must be too much for her taste. Come to think of it, she has taken her advice to me rather personally. Abandon and absolve she ultimately did. Looking back, I am occasionally amazed that I am in Motovun to this day. For Jadranka’s advice comes back to my mind surprisingly often. “Abandon and absolve,” I whisper to myself as I shake my head in awe. Behold, I am still here, and against my friend’s better judgment!

STRASBOURG IS WAITING (October 28, 2010)

Nearly eight months after the court in Pazin decided that I was not guilty of libel but only of insult, I still do not have its written decision, which I intend to contest at the higher court in Pula (“Second-Guessing the Judge,” March 2, 2010). I need to go through Pula before I can go to Strasbourg, where I am certain to win all the trumped-up charges brought against me by the mayor of Motovun. Trumped-up they undoubtedly were, as any independent court would determine in a jiffy. The mayor wanted to shut me up, and that was all there was to it. But, as my lawyer has warned me, the written decision from the court in Pazin may take a year or so. When it comes to justice, Croatia is slow, slow. We have not talked about it in any great detail, but the written decision from the court in Pula might take us another couple of years. By then, Croatia’s accession to the European Union could not be far off. And my appeal to the court in Strasbourg could not possibly come at a more auspicious time. Go, Pazin, go! Pula is waiting. Much more important, Strasbourg is waiting, too.

MY DISAPPOINTMENT: THE LETTER OF RESIGNATION FROM
THE GREEN PARTY – GREEN ALTERNATIVE (November 1,
2010)

Many thanks for the invitation to the upcoming general assembly of the Green Party – Green Alternative in Pula, but I will not be coming. After many a disappointment with politics in Motovun, Istria, and Croatia, I wish to resign as the president of the Motovun branch of the party. I also wish to resign from the party itself. After eight years in this country following thirty-four years abroad, I am so thoroughly disappointed that I do not see any way forward. And I have already tried everything in my power to assure sustainable development of the town, the peninsula, and the country.

As you can gather, the coalition with the Social Democrats in Motovun is dead, and so is the joint coalition with the Independents, who are presently the main force in municipal politics. To the best of my understanding, they have become part and parcel of the hitherto ruling Istrian Democratic Assembly, which has been the main political force on the peninsula since independence. The Motovun branch of the Green Party – Green Alternative has thereby become moribund. The enthusiasm that has led to the formation of the branch prior to the elections early last year has petered out in the meanwhile. At this stage, it is meaningless to even attempt assembling all the branch members. Most of them would resign, too.

The scandals raking the peninsula and the country are many. They await resolution, but it is becoming obvious that corruption and organized crime are so deeply rooted in the government and elsewhere that any sort of resolution of the scandals is nigh impossible at this stage. From top to bottom, the government itself is facing a long period of indecision and senseless haggling. Green issues have been pushed to the side, and sustainable development has become a pipedream.

As you know, I am still facing several lawsuits for libel and insult, whose only purpose has been to repress all forms of resistance, including legitimate political opposition. Unsustainable development focusing on highly questionable golf and polo facilities around Motovun, a medieval town of breathtaking beauty, is thwarted only by the global economic crisis. The municipal, regional, and central government institutions behind this development are still pushing forward even though all the investors have disappeared from the scene. As you also know, there are indications that government officials have been behind these foreign investors, most likely for mutual gain. More than twenty proposed golf courses in Istria alone, as well as more than sixty of them across Croatia, can be understood only as a monumental land grab. I have reported everything I know about this scandal to the highest police authority in the country, but the case is still far from

resolution. Apparently, all the possible wrongdoings surrounding golf and polo are rather insignificant in view of all other scandals.

On a personal note, my disappointment with Motovun, Istria, and Croatia is so great that I have been thinking of leaving the country. This has struck me as the only way to eschew political repression, both personal and general. As this year's Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International shows, Croatia now shares the sixty-second place with Macedonia, Ghana, and Samoa. An amazing record! It has been my wish to move up the index, as it were. No matter whether or not I actually leave the country, the very fact that I have genuinely considered it as an attractive option demonstrates how fed up I actually feel.

Let me use this opportunity to wish you successful work in the years to come. My advice to the party is to make every effort to unite with other parties and non-governmental organizations with the same or similar objectives. Greens have a chance only if and when they start working together. In my opinion, the only viable model at present is offered by the German Greens, who have managed to enter the government and form coalitions with other leading parties. Croatia is no exception in this regard. Greens must either unite or face oblivion. Once again, I wish you all the very best in your further work.

Addendum (December 19, 2010)

The leadership of the Green Party – Green Alternative took my resignation very well. Although they did try to persuade me to fight on for the cause, they did not insist. They also tried to see what could be saved of the Motovun branch of the party, but they realized quickly enough that the cause was lost. Cast adrift, the hilltown is indeed beyond any hope, green or otherwise. But I have not heard a word about my advice to the party concerning unification of Croatian greens. The German Greens are much appreciated in Croatia, but few people in the country believe that the trick could be replicated in a political environment corroded by widespread corruption and organized crime. If Croatian Greens ever see the light of day, such a feat will most likely have to wait for at least a decade. The courts will have cleared the mess by then, I would hope. Be that as it may, I am out of politics for good. And I feel relieved to be on my own once again.

HIS CLEVER GOLF GAMBIT (December 29, 2010)

I just received a wonderful New Year's present. And it arrived a few days ahead of time, too. Nearly ten months after my last appearance in the Municipal Court in Pazin, the verdict has finally arrived in written form and by registered mail ("Second-Guessing the Judge," March 2, 2010). "Decision of March 2, 2010," the blue envelope smacking of bygone socialism declares for all to see without looking. The numbing

slowness of the Croatian judicial process is legendary, anyway. However, I have only eight days to appeal. The system is nothing if not perfect as a tool of suppression, oppression, and repression. As well as depression. At any rate, I just talked to my lawyer. The appeal will be lodged in time with the higher court in Pula, he assures me. But I know exactly what to do if the appeal fails (“Strasbourg is Waiting,” October 28, 2010). The mayor of Motovun will remember me till his deathbed for his clever golf gambit. And so will the governor of Istria. If everything goes according to plan, the former prime minister of Croatia will remember me till his deathbed, as well.

HOMAGE TO GOOGLE ANALYTICS (December 31, 2010)

Google Analytics provides a wonderful service, which I have used for a few years now. From day to day, I can follow my website’s performance in surprising detail. The number of visitors and visits comes first, but there are countries and cities from which they come from, too. The best feature of the service is the list of search words or phrases, though. You can see at a glance what your visitors care about. As well as why. And you can tell so much by ferreting through all these statistics at your leisure. Of course, the system is designed to help people sell good and services of all sorts, but even a ne’er-do-well such as myself can learn a lot from them.

At least in my case, the Christmas season is the pits. Few visitors chance my way these days. But there are welcome surprises even at the very bottom of the market. My announcement of the Pazin court’s decision a couple of days ago was such an occasion (“His Clever Golf Gambit,” December 29, 2010). And my piece about my friends and enemies in Motovun provides the clue to the bulging interest in the subject (“Friends, Enemies,” June 17, 2010). To wit, my erstwhile political enemies are searching my site like there is no tomorrow. The only question is whether they have learned about the court’s decision from my writings or from other, even better informed, sources.

And what are the most popular search words or phrases? “Slobodan Vugrinec,” for example. As well as “Klaudio Ivašić” and “Leila Ivašić.” Interestingly, “Emil Soldatić” is also there. He used to be the general secretary of the Istrian Democratic Assembly, the leading political organization in Istria. Nowadays, he is one of the leading lights of the municipal council in Motovun. “Ivan Jakovčić,” the top enchilada of the party, is there, as well. Everyone else among the names in my collection of search words or phrases is from the same party, it goes without saying. And this is the party behind the golf-development craze on the peninsula. Surprise, surprise. Why else would I be in court, anyhow? Thanks to Google Analytics, all this is coming out for all to see. The golf party is after me. And my site is my humble witness. Happy New Year!

ANOTHER OPEN LETTER TO THE GOVERNOR OF ISTRIA
(January 13, 2011)

Now that my appeal to the verdict of the Pazin court is with the higher court in Pula, I would like to send you a few more words. Words of warning, that is. I know that your closest associates around Istria are well acquainted with my writings, whence this open letter. As you can imagine, my main concern is the conflict of interests endemic to Istria and Croatia as a whole. My writings on the subject got me in court in the first place, but chances are that the topic will eventually be of interest to a much wider public, including the institutions of the European Union concerned with Croatia's accession to the Union.

The mayor of Motovun, who wrongly charged me with libel twice and insult once, all under the same law systematically abused in Croatia to suppress dissidents, is your man. You two are connected not only through the Istrian Democratic Assembly, of which you are the boss, but also through golf development. Motovun is just one of more than twenty municipalities in Istria, a region with the population of a small European town, which were supposed to be enriched by the vaunted sport and vast numbers of apartments, houses, and villas. The law firm from Pula representing the mayor is also close to you and golf development. Representing all regional promoters of golf and all domestic and foreign investors in the sport, including the one in Motovun, this law firm has also contributed to the golf law promoted by the former prime minister, who is now in an Austrian jail for widespread corruption and organized crime. And the judge in the Pazin court who was selected to deal with the three lawsuits by the mayor of Motovun is a well-known supporter of your party, which is in power ever since independence.

I would expect that the judge in Pula selected to deal with my appeal will also be a well-known supporter of your party, which would neatly complete my story about the conflict of interests as endemic to the region and the country. Facing your people from all sides, I will have no chance in court whatsoever, and the mayor of Motovun will eventually win one or more of his lawsuits. But I would like to warn you one more time that this story will not end in Istria or anywhere else in Croatia. It will end in Strasbourg, under the watchful eyes of the Union officials responsible for such matters, including enlargement. And that will be another nail in the coffin of your and your closest associates' systematic abuse of the conflict of interests as one of the fundamental principles of democratic government.

THE NEXT AND CRUCIAL STEP (January 21, 2011)

According to my lawyer, my appeal with the court in Pula against the decision of the lower court in Pazin concerning insult of the mayor of Motovun will take about six months at least. However, he says that he

would not be surprised if it took a whole year. Appeals of the mayor and municipality of Motovun regarding libel, which the court in Pazin decided against, will be decided at the same time. Wary of the judicial process in Croatia, where judges are famous for their close ties with leading politicians, I am already looking for a lawyer to represent me in Strasbourg. Alas, my Istrian lawyer is not good with languages. To my frustration, he could not read any of my writings. Anyhow, Zagreb is the best place in the country to find a lawyer for the next and crucial step. I am sure to win in Strasbourg, for all the charges against me amount to no more than a sustained exercise in political harassment, but a good lawyer is still crucial to the success of my appeal. Luckily, I have a lot of time to find what I am looking for. And I am relishing the search for a clever, skillful, and feisty partner in the fight for justice. Partner is the word, too.

HUMAN RIGHTS GALORE (January 25, 2011)

The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg is attracting ever more of my attention. In addition to my own legal problems in Croatia, the court itself is of real interest to me. Having been a dissident all my life, the very notion of human rights is quite central to me. The founding document underlying all activities of the court in Strasbourg is the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which started its life in 1950, but was amended many times since. The key to this document is its first section, which delineates in separate articles all the rights that concern this particular court. And here they are in full: right to life; prohibition of torture; prohibition of slavery and forced labor; right to liberty and security; right to a fair trial; no punishment without law; right to respect for private and family life; freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; freedom of expression; freedom of assembly and association; right to marry; right to an effective remedy; prohibition of discrimination; derogation in time of emergency; restrictions on political activity of aliens; prohibition of abuse of rights; and limitation on use of restrictions on rights. So, there are human rights galore. It took me a while to identify the articles of special interest in my own case, but freedoms of thought and expression are surely central to my appeal, if and when needed. At any rate, the array of all the other rights listed in the convention started me thinking. It appears that dissidents have it kind of easy nowadays. Which leaves me crestfallen.

MY VICTORY (January 27, 2011)

The plot thickens concerning my legal battle with the mayor of Motovun. According to my new legal advisors in Zagreb, I may have to go to the Constitutional Court of Croatia before I go to Strasbourg. The latter will accept applications only if all domestic legal remedies have been exhausted. This is a bit disappointing, of course. It pushes

my victory into the future. Not to worry, though. According to the latest news, Croatia's accession to the European Union is also shifting into the future. Perhaps 2013, but maybe even 2014. So, Strasbourg can wait a bit longer. As long as Croatia is striving to please the Union, I am ahead of the game. But now I have to shift my gaze toward the highest court in the land. Now that corruption and organized crime have risen to the fore, and cannot be swept under the rug any longer, I may have a chance even in Croatia. And the outlook is apparently good. My legal advisers claim that all the lawsuits brought against me by the mayor of Motovun and his stooges are flimsy. Legally speaking, they should not have been admitted to the court in the first place. My victory may be within reach. Hey, who says there is no future to Croatia?!

Addendum (August 3, 2016)

Coming across this piece a bit more than five years later, I cannot but pinch my face in utter disgust. No matter how flimsy, the Constitutional Court in Zagreb accepted the former mayor's insult case without any trouble. More important, the court dismissed my appeal and upheld the decisions of the lower courts in Pazin and Pula. It was the former mayor's victory, and my defeat. Even if the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg decides in my favor, he will go scot free, for I am taking Croatia to court this time around. He will keep the money he got from me, and I will get it back from some government office in turn. As for Croatia's future, it is bright enough. Crooks of all descriptions will thrive in it for quite a while. With some luck, it may even become one of their safe havens. And the Croatian courts will be squarely behind them, I bet.

GOLF DEVELOPMENT IN CROATIA: A LETTER TO CROATIAN PRESIDENT IVO JOSIPOVIĆ (February 15, 2011)

Golf development in Croatia is closely related to the second privatization drive since the country's independence. This time it is the land in the hands of the government that is being privatized. Many governors and mayors, and especially those from regions and municipalities along the Adriatic coast, have jumped at this opportunity in connection with tourism. Although the economic crisis has stalled the development, which very much depended on the global property boom, it may come back in earnest when the economic conditions improve. At around seventy-million euros per golf course and more than sixty courses planned across the country, at least four-billion euros are involved.

Golf development is marred by corruption and organized crime, though. As you may be aware, I wrote about this to the former president Stjepan Mesić in August 2009. From sources close to the highest officials of the Croatian government I learned that a British

investor in tourist development in Istria and Dalmatia was only a front for money laundering by highest government officials in this country. Through funds illegally taken abroad, they intended to appear as foreign investors in Croatia. I became aware of the alleged connections through my involvement in environmental protection of Motovun and its surroundings, where this particular British investor was engaged in golf development. However, money-laundering schemes of this kind must have been in place in many other golf courses in Croatia.

There are strong indications that the former prime minister of Croatia, who is now in jail in Austria, was at the helm of corruption and organized crime connected with golf development in the country. He personally promoted the golf law empowering developers with expropriation rights usually reserved for highways and ports. Also involved were the ministers closely engaged in golf development. And so were the governors and mayors of regions and municipalities that were supposed to be blessed with golf courses. Thousands upon thousands of apartments, houses, and villas were to be built on private land adjoining the government land that was to be leased to developers over the long term.

Now, president Mesić did not respond to my letter even after several reminders. Only when I contacted Olli Rehn, the former European Union's commissioner for enlargement, did I get a cursory answer. Most important, it was Rehn who suggested to me to report what I knew to the highest Croatian office dealing with corruption and organized crime, which is what I did in October 2009. I have been in touch concerning this issue with the current commissioner for enlargement, Stefan Füle, as well. To this day, though, the golf development scam is not out in the open. It appears that powerful interests are involved, which is why I am writing to you at this point.

Let me mention in this connection that I am being persecuted for my resistance to questionable golf development in Motovun. In particular, the mayor of the municipality has taken me to court for libel and insult in November 2008 and March 2009, both of which charges are only politically motivated. The governor of Istria, where more than twenty golf courses are planned, is firmly behind golf development in Motovun. He is also firmly behind the mayor of this medieval town of extraordinary beauty. As there are serious doubts about political independence of Istrian courts, where lawsuits for libel and insult are currently pending appeal, I intend to go all the way to the highest Croatian court. But, if my appeals fail there, as well, I intend to go to Strasbourg. Political repression of the sort I have experienced in Istria must be tolerated no longer. The penal law that regulates libel and insult is used all too often only to stifle political opposition.

Returning to golf development in Croatia, I would hope that you will do whatever is in your power to ensure that it is freed from the clutches

of corruption and organized crime. As such, golf development may indeed be an asset for tourist development in the country. As tourism is one of the main economic sectors of Croatia, golf could play an important rôle in the country's economic development. Corruption and organized crime threaten golf development, though. Those who stand to gain from it are few and far between. In addition, they are likely to take much of their returns to their safe havens abroad. The four-billion euros I mentioned at the outset need to reach as wide a base in the country as possible.

Addendum (February 22, 2011)

“Has the president responded?” my beloved teases me gently almost every day. “Ah,” I tease her in turn, “he will never respond!” But I still believe that the president of Croatia is a man to be trusted. “What can he possibly tell me, though?” I continue while she smiles devilishly at me. Indeed, that is the only question. But he knows that this letter has gone to a few other lofty electronic-mail addresses. And he knows that it is available on the World Wide Web. My heart thus goes to the poor president. What can he possibly tell me, us, everyone who follows my writings? That Croatia is finally shedding its inglorious past and that the future is forever bright, bright, bright?

GOLF DEVELOPMENT AND CORRUPTION (February 22, 2011)

When you search the World Wide Web for golf development and corruption, you quickly learn that the connection is not far fetched. And this is a global phenomenon, too. There is the Caribbean. There is Spain, of course. And now there is China. As is the case with many other things, China beats the rest of the world in terms of golf development. As well as corruption, it goes without saying. Your search will also bring you to Croatia, where my writings are among the most prominent. My letter to the Croatian president comes on top, but it is closely followed by my letter to the Istrian governor. Both focus on corruption by the highest government officials, as well. At any rate, it does not take long to learn that corruption is part and parcel of golf development across the globe. Government officials play a key rôle in most of the scams. Again, the web is my witness. Now, how is it possible that I am having such a hard time pointing all of this out in Croatia?

COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC: A LETTER TO CROATIAN PRESIDENT IVO JOSIPOVIĆ (March 15, 2011)

To begin with, I am hardly surprised by your silence. My letter, sent to you exactly a month ago, remains unanswered even though it broaches an important if ticklish subject (“Golf Development in Croatia: A Letter to Croatian President Ivo Josipović,” February 15, 2011). Your

predecessor was silent, too, and on the very same subject. And so were nearly all public officials I have addressed after my return to Croatia following more than thirty years in America and Britain. But silence is only an index of the undemocratic character of Croatian government. This is something you can help change. Your example could work wonders, or so I would sincerely hope.

Public office means communicating with the public and not only winning the elections. It means having an office capable of proper interaction with everyone who addresses a public official for any reason whatsoever, as well as under all circumstances, regardless of all other political exigencies. Here, there is no difference between the president of a country, a governor of a region, or a mayor of a municipality. But the president can still offer some guidance to all the others serving in the government by communicating with the public in an exemplary way.

Therefore, I would like to propose that you instruct everyone in your office, which is probably quite ample, to copy the established ways in which presidents of democratic countries communicate with the public. That is one of the duties of the president's office in civil societies for at least a century already. Letters directed to you should be answered as soon as possible, but certainly within a period of at most a month. Mind you, communicating with the public may vastly improve your own grip of the political situation you face. And the same holds for all the public officials down the line. Democracy minus communication is a travesty of the very principles that underpin the entire social order.

GOLF FOR BEGINNERS (April 18, 2011)

Thus the title of a documentary film about golf that will be shown on the leading channel of Croatian television tomorrow evening from just after eight till nine o'clock. I will appear in it together with several outspoken critics of the sport's abuses in Croatia. I have not seen it so far, but it is likely that I am not playing a minor rôle in the film. For the time being, I quite like the title. The film will indeed help people understand what golf is actually about. To wit, it is not about kicking a small rubber ball with a club so as to get it into a hole marked by a flag and surrounded by mowed grass, but about crooked real estate development mostly in Istria and Dalmatia. In spite of the peninsula's modest size, about a third of some sixty planned golf courses are in Istria alone. Thousands upon thousands of apartments, houses, and villas are golf's awful secret. Almost all the people in Motovun know this already, and by heart, but many others across Croatia have not yet been acquainted with the vaunted sport first hand. Therefore, they will benefit from the film the most. I can only hope that it will help stop the advance of fake golf in its tracks. Otherwise, an upturn in economic conditions might despoil many a beautiful spot in the

country, including Motovun's countryside, which is still blessed by ancient vineyards, olive groves, and orchards.

Addendum I (April 19, 2011)

I just received an electronic-mail message to the effect that the television program had been changed because of someone's death. I have never heard of the name, but the person in question was an actor of some renown in Croatia. According to the new television program, the documentary film about golf will be shown on April 26, instead. One never knows, though. This country is teeming with actors of some renown.

Addendum II (April 26, 2011)

This evening I watched the documentary together with a few of my closest neighbors. I was far from impressed with the film itself, which struck me as hopelessly disjointed, but I was pleased with my own performance. Surprise, surprise. At any rate, the overall message is loud and clear: golf in Croatia is about crooked real estate development rather than sport or tourism. As I put it squarely in the film, it was the corrupt Croatian politicians who were to make the biggest profit from the whole thing. And so on, and so forth. But this is definitely my last television appearance on any subject whatsoever, including golf. I do not wish to see my face on the little screen ever again.

PERSECUTION FOR BEGINNERS (April 26, 2011)

Friends and acquaintances have been telling me for a couple of weeks already that they have enjoyed the trailer of a documentary film about golf, which is supposed to be screened on television this evening ("Golf for Beginners," April 18, 2011). It has been long in coming ("The Screening," February 1, 2011). Made last August, my interview is rather vague in my recollection ("The Television Interview," August 20, 2010). "You look so good," people tell me with big smiles on their faces. "And you sound so convincing," many of them add. Of course, no-one remembers what I actually have to say in the trailer. Which worries me a bit, I must admit. "I only wonder whether another court case will come out of it..." I mumble humbly in return. More than four-billion euros are involved in golf development in Croatia, and many of my enemies will be watching the screening, too ("Being Admired for Your Courage," February 18, 2010). Although I know that I will eventually win in Strasbourg all the court cases coming my way in this corrupt country, court appearances are not my cup of tea. Having been persecuted by the mayor of Motovun since the fall of 2008, I am pretty tired of the whole thing ("Welcome to Motovun!" November 13, 2008). Predictably, this is how I will be watching the film this evening. "Hmmm," I will be weighing every word, "is this enough for another blue envelope from the court in Pazin?" ("The

Country of Blue Envelopes,” January 17, 2011). Persecution for beginners, of course.

THE RULE OF EX-COMMUNIST LEADERS (May 26, 2011)

This morning I was surprised by a major article in *Glas Istre* (*The Voice of Istria*) against abuses of the Croatian libel law. Among many crooked cases well known to the Istrian public, my three court cases lodged several years ago by the mayor of Motovun were also mentioned. I could not but respond with a supportive letter to the editor of the leading newspaper in the region. And I could not but mention that the same law is customarily abused in most ex-communist countries. As well as by the children of communist leaders of old. Especially in the provinces, like Istria, they quickly figured out how to use the law to their utmost advantage. The corrupt courts obliged, too. Of course, I could not but also mention that the mayor of Motovun would ultimately lose all the cases brought against me for political reasons having to do with crooked golf development. And in Strasbourg, of all places. Freedoms of thought and speech have been trampled often enough behind the old Iron Curtain. But enough is enough. The rule of ex-communist leaders is finally up. Or so I would sincerely hope.

Addendum (June 1, 2011)

For good measure, I forwarded my letter to the editor of *Glas Istre* to the governor of Istria, as well. I was testing the system once again. Of course, my letter has never appeared in print. God forbid. The governor has many and powerful connections throughout the peninsula. Put differently, I was wrong about the rule of ex-communist leaders. They are still in power, and they will stay in power as long as the local newspapers, like *Glas Istre*, are squarely behind them. How much longer? Hard to tell, but chances are that the whole system will stay in its present sorry shape until Istrians learn to read English. In the meanwhile, good luck to the whole lot.

CROOKED GOLF (June 29, 2011)

My lawyer was right when he guessed that my appeal with the regional court in Pula against the decision of the municipal court in Pazin concerning insult of the mayor of Motovun will take about six months at least (“The Next and Crucial Step,” January 21, 2011). The decision of the court in Pula arrived this morning. Not surprisingly, it upholds the decision of the court in Pazin. My appeal concerning insult has failed, and so has the appeal of the mayor of Motovun and the Municipality of Motovun against the decision of the court in Pazin concerning libel.

Before I appeal to the court in Strasbourg, I must appeal again, this time to the highest court in Zagreb (“My Victory,” January 27, 2011). That will exhaust my legal means in this country, which is a precondition for going abroad. The next appeal must focus on political repression in Motovun. All three lawsuits came my way just before the municipal elections in 2009. They were designed to stop me in my tracks as an opponent of the excessive number of villas, houses, and apartments in connection with golf development in Motovun. At the time, I was leading the Motovun branch of the Green Party – Green Alternative, which was opposed to the abuses of golf as a sport.

The financial crisis has intervened, of course. Golf development is hardly ever mentioned in Motovun these days. But the threat is still there. Picturesque as it is, the hilltown will keep attracting developers, and especially those bent on quick returns. It is therefore essential to continue the battle, and not only to protect myself from undemocratic ways of this municipality. I am not involved in any political organization any longer, but the battle remains political as ever. And crooked golf is squarely behind it. The way things look at the moment, the battle will take several more years. With some luck, it will be over around the time that Croatia enters the European Union. This is very much to my advantage, too.

LINGUA FRANCA (June 30, 2011)

Mirjan Rimanić, a journalist from *Glas Istre* (*The Voice of Istria*) who covers Motovun, just called me. “What’s your reaction to the decision of the court in Pula?” he asked. “I’m going to the highest court in Zagreb,” I answered, “and then to Strasbourg.” “That’s the court for human rights?” he went on. “Yup,” I replied, “for this is a case of political repression in connection with the last municipal elections.” I added that this was typical of ex-communist countries, where laws regulating libel are systematically abused for political purposes. “Thanks,” chuckled Mirjan. We will see his article in tomorrow’s issue, I suppose, but the conversation left me wondering about my website. Is it possible that no journalist in Istria ever reads it? And I wrote about the whole thing only yesterday! Damned English, the so-called *lingua franca* of our day and age. *Lingua franca*, my ass.

Addendum I (July 2, 2011)

The article appeared today. It covers half a page, too. The text is on the meager side, but the editor added to its importance by putting two large pictures of the mayor of Motovun and my humble self. However, the text does not offer any clue as to the nature of insult in question. In fact, I likened the mayor to a “complete and total cockroach” in the context of my claim that he works in the darkness and behind closed doors. And especially when golf development is concerned. The metaphor was used to put an additional punch behind

my story about the lack of democracy in the hilltown. For some strange reason, the article skips this vital bit. Entirely. I just wrote to the editor, explained the whole thing, and demanded that my letter be published as soon as possible. Judging from my past experience with this newspaper, my chances are slim.

Addendum II (July 16, 2011)

I sent the letter to the editor several more times since the article appeared. But my letter has not yet appeared in print. Chances are that it never will, either. And this is far from the first time with this newspaper that my letters in direct response to something written about me end up in the bin. To the best of my knowledge, this is something that they must do by law. God only knows why I keep trying, though. Democracy is a pipedream in this country, and it is high time for me to learn that little lesson.

CRIME SCENE (July 4, 2011)

I just bought Richard Schneider's *Mjesto zločina: Hypo Alpe Adria* (Zagreb: Jesenski & Turk, 2011). It first appeared in Austria last year, but it was quickly translated into Croatian. It appeared in bookstores only last Friday. The country figures prominently in the original. The key German word in the original title, *Tatort*, as well as its Croatian translation, stands for "crime scene" in English. On the front cover, Croatia is outlined in chalk on asphalt, and there is a big blood stain within the outline. I went for the index at once. Jörg Haider on mentioned on twenty-six pages, Ivo Sanader on twenty-one page, and Ivan Jakovčić on six pages. Although I was a bit disappointed by the last figure, I took the book to the cashier's at once. Schneider is an independent journalist concerned with economic affairs, and he has followed the development of the Austrian bank over the years. Also, he is well acquainted with Eastern Europe. At any rate, I am looking forward to my reading.

Addendum I (July 5, 2011)

Well, Stevo Zufić is mentioned on only four pages in Schneider's book, but he is someone I have neglected so far. He was Jakovčić's predecessor in the Istrian Democratic Assembly, the leading party in Istria. He was among its founders, too. Over the years, he has become one of the key real estate dealers in Poreč, but he has been involved in all sorts of projects throughout the peninsula. Most important, he was the first Istrian politician who got in touch with Jörg Haider and his bank. Hypo Alpe Adria Bank came to Istria through Zufić. Anyway, he is a man to follow a bit more closely in connection with real estate development in Istria, golf development included.

Addendum II (July 6, 2011)

I am not even half way through the book, but it is already clear that corruption and organized crime are at the very foundations of the Croatian state. These are at the cornerstones of the whole country. It all started with Franjo Tudjman and crooked arms imports that bypassed the United Nations' ban. Austria and Germany were there to help since long before Yugoslavia fell apart. On top of this, Tudjman buttressed his autocratic rule by promoting his legendary two-hundred Croatian families into wealth and influence. Austria and Germany helped once again, their banks always on the ready with hidden accounts and money laundering facilities. And Tudjman's successors have made sure that the foundations of the new state have been kept intact. Corruption and organized crime only blossomed during the real estate boom at the start of the millennium. This is where crooked golf came in, for large swaths of land in the hands of the state could be sold or leased at ever-higher prices. The control of the sale was in the hands of the state, anyhow. One more time, Austria and Germany were there to help, its banks going gaga over the luscious prospects. The real estate bust stopped all this at long last and the banks went into a spin. It is a depressing reading, to say the least. Lustration of any kind is simply impossible in Croatia. Everyone who is anyone has been involved in corruption and organized crime from the very first day. If not even earlier.

Addendum III (July 15, 2013)

I was reading at home when I heard knocks on the front door. When I opened the door, I found a tall man with a prominent nose and bushy eyebrows. "Ranko Bon?" he asked. I nodded. "Richard Schneider," he grinned and gave me his hand. I invited him in, and we sat at the dining table. I realized who he was only when he mentioned his book. "Ah," I gave him my hand this time, "congratulations!" As it turned out, he is working on a new book on Hypo Alpe Adria and its shenanigans in Croatia. Thus he came across my name. We had a wonderful talk about golf and polo development in Motovun. He is already familiar with most of the key players, and he is following them around Istria and beyond. When he got up to leave, we promised each other to stay in touch. "I'll let you know if and when I learn anything of interest," I beamed at him happily. "It's wonderful to meet you," I gave him my hand one more time, "and I wish you the best of luck with your new book!" Where would we be without independent journalists like Schneider?!

A SAVINGS PLAN (July 12, 2011)

This morning I learned from my lawyer that I must pay nearly thirty-thousand Croatian kuna to the mayor of Motovun for the cockroach insult even though we are about to lodge a complaint to the highest

court in the country against decisions of two lower courts. For some reason, the news quite stunned me. We are talking about close to four-thousand euros, which I will get back when I win the case either in Zagreb or in Strasbourg. This sort of money is not something I can pull out of my pocket at a moment's notice, though. At first I panicked a bit. I also got cross with my lawyer, who did not tell me about the payment ahead of time. More often than not, he assumes I understand the law and court practice almost as well as he does. Anyhow, I simmered down quickly enough. Perhaps I can pay the fine in several installments. Looking forward, it will be a joy getting all this money back from the mayor. The best way to think about the whole thing is that it is a savings plan of sorts. Minus interest, of course.

SNOOPING THE SNOOPS (July 16, 2011)

As I can learn from Google Analytics, several search words or phrases have become quite popular on my website as of late: “Slobodan,” “Vugrinec,” and “Slobodan Vugrinec.” There are many searches, and many pages are visited on some of them. Not a few of these searches lead to unusually long visits, too. Is that the mayor of Motovun himself? Possibly, but I would doubt it. Much more likely, it is his political associates with better English looking for things he could sue me for. Or his lawyers preparing one or more lawsuits on the quiet. After all, they are the very same lawyers who are representing, or used to represent, golf developers all over Istria and perhaps beyond. These developers have turned quiet lately, but they are still waiting for their chance, no doubt. At any rate, here I am—snooping the snoops. Judging from their activities, though, they do not give a damn about being snooped. Of course, political repression works in many guises, including persistent website searches.

Addendum I (July 27, 2011)

The snoops are active. Very active. “Slobodan Vugrinec” is one of the foremost search phrases on my website today. It appears on the very first page of the Google Analytics report. In eight visits, the snoops have inspected some forty pages. They have spent an hour and a half snooping, as well. It must be the mayor's lawyers who are after me. That is, the golf investors behind the whole lot. Judging from the bulging interest in my writings, golf development is far from dead. Once again, Motovun will be in the news any day now. And I will be nailed to the cross for my sins. Free speech, my ass.

Addendum II (February 10, 2012)

Although nothing much has changed regarding golf development in Motovun, the snoops are still active. Surprisingly so, as a matter of fact. “Vugrinec” and “Slobodan Vugrinec” still top the list of search words or phrases, but several others are there, as well. “Klaudio” and

“Klaudio Ivašić” are close to the top. “Tomica Vugrinec” is not far behind. By the way, Tomica or Tomislav is Slobodan’s brother, as well as one of his staunch political supporters. And Klaudio is among Slobodan’s closest political associates in the hilltown. Also, he is a restaurateur and a real estate agent. The two are the most likely snoops, for the searches come from Istria. Be that as it may, the snoops are very active. Chances are that the imminent accession of Croatia to the European Union is giving them hope. And real estate remains the only hope on the peninsula. In fact, real estate is Moses and the prophets in Istria, as Karl Marx would have put it.

Addendum III (November 27, 2015)

By and by, the names of my Motovun enemies are petering out from the search words or phrases of my website reported by Google Analytics. All but one of them, that is. “Klaudio Ivašić” is among the most popular search words or phrases reported to this day. The snoop, as it were. Or the snoop of snoops. Looking back, it is most likely that it was he who was behind all the snooping. He reported to all the others what could be found about them on my site. And it was most likely he who was behind the double libel case against me by Slobodan Vugrinec (“Croatia Spells Conflict of Interest,” October 3, 2008). Peekaboo! Thanks to Google Analytics, everything is clear, albeit with a time delay of seven years that I will remember till my last day.

Addendum IV (January 21, 2017)

Amazingly, “Klaudio” and “Klaudio Ivašić” are among the most prominent search words or phrases on my *Residua* website to this day. Their incidence seems to be increasing as of late, as well. Each and every time I check Google Analytics, the snoop of all snoops pops up close to the top of search results. There can hardly be any question any longer about his rôle in all my miseries just ahead of the municipal elections eight years ago. And it is obvious that his interest in my writings has perked up just ahead of this year’s municipal elections. Together with several others close to the helm of the local branch of the Istrian Democratic Assembly, he will do whatever he can to topple the present local government. Although Slobodan Vugrinec has been out of local politics ever since it was determined that he did not even reside in Motovun, he is still very active on the sidelines. And so is Emil Soldatić, who used to be the secretary general of the party. Together, they will do everything in their power to get rid of Tomica Pahović, the mayor, and the Independents, who won the municipal elections four years ago. At any rate, the best I can do at present is to keep snooping the snoops. And Klaudio is foremost among them, no doubt whatsoever.

STRASBOURG, HERE WE COME (July 28, 2011)

My appeal to the decision of the court in Pula concerning my supposed insult of the mayor of Motovun is already with the highest court in Croatia. Seated in Zagreb, it is likely to take a while to review the case and make its decision. My lawyer cannot tell me which way the final decision is likely to go, but it is clear to me that my chances are slim. All things considered, Zagreb could be expected to stand behind Pula. Not to worry, though. The court of human rights in Strasbourg is the next and crucial step, given that I will have exhausted all the legal means available in Croatia. And political repression will be my claim. The intent of the three lawsuits lodged against me just before the last municipal elections in Motovun was perfectly clear: to destroy me as the mayor's political opponent in connection with crooked golf development in the municipality. And my supposed insult is squarely about his undemocratic ways rather than an insult as such. Every politician worth his post in democratic countries should be used to all sorts of insults, anyhow. Again, it is hard to tell at this time how long the whole legal process will take, but my final appeal is likely to be in Strasbourg within two years. That is, while Croatia is still waiting for its accession to the European Union. That will be the best possible time to make sure that political repression in the country comes into the limelight. By then, crooked golf will also be exposed in the media to put the repression in its proper context. Strasbourg, here we come. Oh, I can hardly wait!

FOR POLICE (August 5, 2011)

A couple of years ago I wrote everything I knew about people who stood to gain from the golf (and polo) scam with land in government hands. I started with the highest authorities in Zagreb and ended with those in Motovun, all of whom I knew personally. Counting about four-hundred words, the text got its own file. Entitled "For Police," it is still on the desktop of one of my computers. "If anything happens to me," I concluded, "all these people should be investigated by the police, for they all stood to gain from the golf (and polo) scam." For some reason, I just opened the file and read the entire text. Curious about the date when it was written, for there was no date anywhere in the text itself, I checked the file information provided by my computer. As it turns out, it was written on July 18, 2009, and it was never modified. That must have been the date when I was most anxious about my safety in Croatia. Still curious about this particular date, I checked my *Residua* website. And I was quite pleased to discover that I had written a list of the best search words concerning the golf (and polo) scam only a day later ("The Right Words," July 19, 2009). Of course, some of the people on that list appear in my file intended for the police. To my chagrin, only one of them is in jail two years later.

SUMMING UP (August 30, 2011)

I just bumped into an acquaintance from my, as it were, political days. Whenever we met, we used to talk about all sorts of green issues surrounding corrupt golf development in Croatia. But I did not beat around the bush this time around. I admitted that I was out of politics since about a year ago. She just nodded seriously. And then I admitted that I was surprised by my own feelings about the whole thing, as well. The persecution I have experienced has affected me much more than I have expected. From time to time, I am still overcome by rage and despondency. She asked me about my lawsuits, and I told her that the legal ordeal might stretch for another two years, but that I was confident of ultimate victory in Strasbourg. Still, my political opponents had won, as witnessed by my decision to pull out of politics. Persecution paid off. Corrupt golf has vanished from the scene only because of the economic crisis, which is not likely to go away soon. I added that the only thing I was happy about was that everyone finally understood that golf development in Croatia had nothing to do with the posh sport, but only with real-estate machinations organized from the very top of the Croatian political scene. My acquaintance nodded again, and we said goodbye soon afterwards. But the summing up felt unexpectedly soothing. I can tell everything there is to tell about five years of my political struggle in five minutes flat. And I can tell it in such a way that I am not spared, either. Perhaps I will shake off all the bad memories in a couple of years.

Addendum (October 19, 2015)

A bit more than four years later, I rarely bump into acquaintances from my political days any longer. The same holds for summing up my experience. Thus I wonder whether I could tell everything there is to tell about five years of my struggle against crooked golf development in Croatia in five minutes flat ever again. If an opportunity unexpectedly arose, chances are I would only wave my hand dismissively without a single word. Given that my case is now in Strasbourg, where it is likely to be decided upon sometime next year, it will take me another couple of years to shake off all the bad memories. Assuming they can be shaken off at all, of course. At present, this is my greatest hope.

CROATIAN REPRESSION (September 17, 2011)

Political repression has been on my mind lately. Chinese repression is among my favorite subjects. And memories of Yugoslav repression came back to me a few days ago. Indeed, so-called socialism and repression go well together. Under socialism, people of the pen have always been in danger of overstepping boundaries, both known and unknown. But the fact is that I have experienced repression on my

own skin only in so-called capitalist Croatia. Like most of the countries behind the Iron Curtain of old, those on top in this country have continued using old methods under new circumstances. The libel law is at their disposal to confront all forms of “verbal crimes” that expose their wrongdoings or challenge their political power. Although I won two libel cases raised against me by the mayor of Motovun, I lost the insult case, which falls under the very same law. A vestige of Yugoslav repression, Croatian repression is quite real. Unbeknown to most, it is that much more successful. As well as debilitating. Strangely, only those who have suffered from it directly would agree with my ruminations about repression. Most of them are denizens of the World Wide Web, just as I am. The others are blissfully unaware of the repressive nature of capitalism in the making. As well as of its fading socialist undertones. Croatian repression is thus more successful than one would think. In fact, it is thriving.

MY POLITICAL CASE (September 30, 2011)

Glancing through one of the leading Croatian newspapers, this morning I come across a letter to the editor to the effect that decisions of the court in Strasbourg are binding in Croatia, as well. Namely, there was a recent article in the same newspaper in which some person of note expressed surprise at such a possibility, as though the court in The Hague is not another example of the same principle of international justice. At any rate, the letter got me thinking about my own story. My appeal to the decision of the court in Pazin is now with the highest Croatian court in Zagreb. The insult lawsuit by the mayor of Motovun is nothing but a case of blatant political repression, and the court in Strasbourg is sure to agree with me on this point. The mayor has pursued me with such untoward zeal that he has endangered his own legal case. But the next twist in my own thinking surprised even myself: what if the court in Zagreb agrees with me, too? To my horror, that would mean that I would not get my satisfaction from Strasbourg, as I have long expected, but in Zagreb, of all places. It is the Croatian oppressive legal system I wish to put into question, though, not only my own case. The systematic abuse of the libel law is at issue. Whatever the odds, I now pray that the Zagreb court upholds the decision against me. Without Strasbourg, my political case is as good as lost.

CROOKED GOLF IS DEAD (October 5, 2011)

Today I met with Dr. Velimir Šimičić, one of the key players in the story about crooked golf in Motovun (“The Motovun Golf Saga,” April 2, 2009). He joined Green Istria, an association concerned with environmental issues on the peninsula, in a lawsuit against the Ministry of the Environment on account of many irregularities in the process of vetting the spatial or physical plan of the Municipality of Motovun.

Green Istria received the court's decision only this morning, nearly three years after the lawsuit was filed with the court. The good news is that Green Istria has won the case, thus putting in question the municipal plan in its entirety. But the bad news is that the court's decision was made on July 21. God only knows why it took it almost two months to reach the aggrieved parties. The rectification of all the irregularities committed in the process of vetting of the plan is liable to take many more years, as well. One way or another, though, crooked golf is dead. At least in Motovun.

Addendum I (October 7, 2011)

The news is out by now. All kinds of media are reporting the court's decision. Friends and acquaintances are calling and sending messages with their congratulations for my part in the demise of crooked golf in Motovun. Although it is Green Istria that is to be congratulated in this case, I am certainly the one in the hilltown who has been pointing out that the golf in question has little to do with sport. It was a real-estate grab, which was a part of the real-estate bubble that burst just as the spatial or physical plan of Motovun was being shoved through the municipality. And this is why I am still in court myself. As an opponent of the scam, which would have enriched a few, I had to be stopped one way or another. In the end, the mayor of Motovun took me to court for make-believe crimes, such as libel and insult. Amazingly, his lawyers represented golf developers, as well. This is how I became a martyr of sorts. And I am accepting congratulations only as such.

Addendum II (October 8, 2011)

In line with its long-term record, *Glas Istre (The Voice of Istria)* yesterday offered the most pitiful account of the story. They do have a flair for such things, anyway. There was little worth reading in the article about the victory of Green Istria, but the article emphasized some endangered species of frog in the Mirna valley. A picture of the poor creature takes most of the space available. Apparently, golf development in Motovun was cast aside because of the silly frog. The irregularities central to the case were not even mentioned in the article. Not to worry, though. Everyone worth his or her salt on the peninsula knows perfectly well that this newspaper is in the grips of the leading local party, the Istrian Democratic Assembly, which brought golf to Istria in the first place. Although not an official member of the party, the mayor of Motovun is committed to it hook, line, and sinker. Which is why he solemnly declared in a brief interview with the newspaper that he had learned about the court decision from the newspapers only. He is awaiting further instructions from no lesser an authority than the Ministry of the Environment itself. Amen!

THE COCKROACH CASE (February 10, 2012)

Eager to know what is going on with my appeal to the Constitutional Court in Zagreb regarding the decision of the Municipal Court in Pazin about my supposed insult of the mayor of Motovun, I just called my lawyer (“Strasbourg, Here We Come,” July 28, 2011). “Could you tell me what’s going on with the cockroach case?” I asked. “No idea,” he responded calmly, “but the highest court in Croatia is taking its time.” According to him, this is a good omen, for dismissals of appeals are often quite quick. “I’m not concerned with their verdict,” I explained somewhat edgily after some seven months since the appeal, “but I’m only eager to get to Strasbourg.” He appeared to be surprised. “That means you don’t trust the Constitutional Court in Zagreb,” he chuckled. “To tell you the truth,” I said point blank, “I don’t.” I added that I trusted the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, instead. “At any rate,” he sounded somewhat annoyed, “we can’t rush the Constitutional Court!” He added that it might take many more months for me to exhaust all the legal means available to me in Croatia. “Thank you very much,” I concluded our conversation a bit abruptly. And all this because I complained in public that the mayor of Motovun customarily worked in the dark and behind closed doors, like a cockroach. Actually, I should have complained about the entire country.

THE CROATIAN GOLF SCAM, AGAIN (February 17, 2012)

Following the advice of the then commissioner for enlargement of the European Union, Olli Rehn, I reported in October 2009 what I knew about the Croatian golf scam to the highest Croatian authority dealing with corruption and organized crime. By the end of that year, I informed them of everything I knew about golf development in Motovun, Istria, Dalmatia, and the rest of the country. The golf scam went from the top of the then government all the way down to the regional and municipal levels. The prime minister himself was involved, and so were many of his ministers, including those dealing with environmental protection and preservation of cultural heritage. Since then, I have been in touch with the current commissioner for enlargement, Stefan Füle, as well. However, the highest Croatian authority concerned with corruption and organized crime has not yet moved a finger regarding the golf scam. Although they are apparently overwhelmed with the number of cases at their hands, and although golf development is in the doldrums after the onset of the global economic crisis in October 2008, they surely could have made a few decisive moves over more than two years. Had the golf scam taken hold, it would have involved more than four-billion euros invested in more than sixty golf courses, mainly in Istria and Dalmatia. Much of this investment involved money laundered by Croatian politicians. The only interpretation of the persistent neglect of the golf scam is that it is not entirely dead. In fact, it is only pushed into the background.

And many of those involved in it are still at large. What does this say about corruption and organized crime in Croatia, now that it is already at the doorsteps of the Union?

ON POLITICAL REPRESSION IN CROATIA (March 6, 2012)

According to a leading Croatian newspaper, a Croatian soccer magnate, who happens to be one of the richest people in the country, was just found guilty of insult because he had called a journalist at a crowded press conference something like “treacherous trash.” And I, a mere pensioner, was found guilty of the same verbal crime for calling the mayor of Motovun a cockroach, albeit only as a metaphor for someone who always works in the dark and behind closed doors. Undemocratically, that is. Besides, the insult was recorded by an unauthorized camera in a small gathering of green activists. Now, and this is the clincher, the soccer magnate got a fine that is about a half of the fine that I got. Is there a better index of political repression in Croatia than the difference between the two fines? Is there a clearer sign that something is seriously amiss with this country of rampant capitalism and dwindling democracy?

FUREŠT (March 8, 2012)

The more often I think of Motovun, which keeps popping up in my mind with growing signs of spring, the more often I remember that I am only a *furešt* there, to use the Istrian word for “foreigner” (“Straight from the Forest,” April 13, 2009). By the way, that is the verdict of not a few people in and around the hilltown. Egged on by those in power, they have succumbed to the insult all too gladly. Although I have long accepted my fate, the Istrian word still grates in my mind. As I wrote years ago, I could only be glad that my parents were dead when I was called a foreigner in the land of our ancestors (“Luckily for My Parents,” October 29, 2008). And by mere newcomers by any serious historical standards, too. At any rate, I keep calling myself a *furešt* in preparation for my return. Which I do so as to lessen the pain of hearing the accursed word from someone else’s mouth, of course. “*Furešt, furešt, furešt,*” I keep insulting myself as I walk around Zagreb. “*Furešt, furešt, furešt...*”

Addendum I (March 9, 2012)

Egged on by those in power, as I claim? Indeed. I was called *furešt* at the meeting concerned with the spatial or physical plan of Motovun, which took place on October 21, 2008. The mayor of Motovun led the meeting. It was the leading people of the Istrian political party in power that introduced the insulting word, too. And it took off, as witnessed by Maša Jerin’s article in *Glas Istre (The Voice of Istria)* on October 24, 2008. Entitled “*Furešts versus the Locals,*” it tells it all.

Marina Kelava's "Moral Bankruptcy of Local Community," which appeared on the H-Alter website (www.h-alter.org) on October 30, 2008, says it all in the very title. Of course, I wrote about all this to the members of Motovun - Eco Town, an association concerned with sustainable development of Motovun, a day after the meeting ("The Mayor and His Stooges: An Electronic-Mail Message to the Members of Motovun - Eco Town," October 22, 2008). A day later I resigned the presidency of the association ("My Resignation," October 23, 2008). So many years later, I am still reeling from the experience. As witnessed by this piece, the Istrian word for "foreigner" is lodged deep in my heart. And all I had in mind at the time was to protect the local community from excessive development associated with golf and polo, which were enshrined in the spatial or physical plan of the municipality discussed at the meeting. Months later I learned that excessive development was a part of a scam going all the way to the top of the Croatian political system ("Croats as Foreign Investors in Croatia: A Letter to Croatian President Stjepan Mesić," August 30, 2009). Note the word "foreign" in my letter. Enough, though. As I walk around Zagreb, I keep insulting myself in preparation for my return to Motovun: "*Furešt, furešt, furešt...*"

Addendum II (March 13, 2012)

I did think about taking the mayor of Motovun to court for insult, for he did nothing to stop his stooges from calling me a *furešt* at the fateful meeting, but I decided against it in the end. His first lawsuit came some three weeks after that meeting ("Welcome to Motovun!" November 13, 2008). Less than two months later came another lawsuit, this time from the Municipality of Motovun, but with his blessing ("Merrily into 2009!" January 2, 2009). Both were for libel, though. And both were for the same piece of writing posted on my *Residua* website ("Croatia Spells Conflict of Interests," October 3, 2008). A year later came the third and last lawsuit ("A Complete and Total Cockroach," October 27, 2009). It was the second from the mayor, this time for insult. As the misery piled up, I often thought of my decision not to file a lawsuit for insult myself, but it was too late for that. According to the Croatian law, there are only three months for legal action, and the mayor knows the law. At any rate, I remain a *furešt* forever. And in the land of my ancestors going back some five centuries at least.

Addendum III (March 5, 2013)

Once again, the growing signs of spring bring Motovun to mind ever more often. Predictably, my sorry status there is popping up in my thoughts with growing alarm. For I am only a *furešt* there. Many locals, and especially those in power, including the mayor himself, have their origins in Medjimurje on the Austrian and Hungarian borders, after all. Brought to the deserted hilltown soon after World War II, they could not care less about my Venetian origins. So be it,

though. But I still have to keep reminding myself of my status as I walk around Zagreb: “*Furešt, furešt, furešt...*”

REGULATED GREEN AREAS (July 5, 2012)

The new push for golf in Croatia is all over the media (“A Fresh Golf Campaign in Croatia,” July 4, 2012). Once again, it stinks to high heaven. This time around, Veljko Ostojić, the Croatian minister of tourism, wants to change the law regulating construction so as to help golf development. In particular, this law treats golf courses as constructed facilities. “That is unnecessary,” he argues. Unnecessary? According to him, “golf courses are actually regulated green areas, and should be treated as such.” Regulated green areas? As any cross section through a golf course will show, though, they are actually constructed facilities. Under the grass of any golf course worth its name there are layers upon layers of sand and gravel of different sizes, as well as a complex drainage system buried underneath. In short, a golf course cannot be used to grow wheat or corn. To return the land to agricultural use, all of the above has to be removed. The new push for golf is thus suspect from the very start. The regulated green areas the minister is talking about are, in fact, constructed. As is his suspiciously legalistic argument, too.

Addendum (July 6, 2012)

As usual, I sent this piece about golf in Croatia to Stefan Füle, the European Union’s commissioner for enlargement. What will he do about it, though? As heretofore, absolutely nothing. In spite of my many missives on the subject, the former prime minister of Croatia, Ivo Sanader, has not yet been charged with the golf scam hatched while he was in power. Beyond any doubt, he was the key politician behind it, too. The governor of Istria, Ivan Jakovčić, is still running scot free for his part in the massive real-estate scam that took shape during the last worldwide boom. Croatia’s president, Ivo Josipović, has not found the time to do anything about it, either. He has remained quiet after more than a year since my first letter on the nasty subject. So, why am I still informing one of the key Union officials about the shameful affair? By this time, I am poking as much fun at the Union as I have been poking at Croatia for so many years. They are criminal havens both, and especially when it comes to the rich. Thieves and whores of this world, unite! Golf is on your side.

THE LAST OPEN LETTER TO THE MAYOR OF MOTOVUN (July 17, 2012)

So far, I have written two open letters to you already. In the first, I wished you every victory in the Croatian courts, which are known far and wide for their crooked ways, for I would thus relish so much more

my final victory in Strasbourg (“An Open Letter to the Mayor of Motovun,” October 24, 2009). In the second, I reiterated my wishes in good faith and reminded you of my first open letter (“Another Open Letter to the Mayor of Motovun,” December 2, 2010).

You have remained curiously silent, though. Concerning my appeal, I have not yet heard from the highest court in Zagreb regarding your third and last lawsuit for insult, but I wish to offer you a gracious deal now that you have lost the two previous lawsuits for libel. First, withdraw your court case for insult. Second, reimburse all my legal expenses over the last five years. Third, apologize in public for all the misery that you have senselessly inflicted upon me through Croatian courts.

In return, I will not take you to Strasbourg, where your political gambit is sure to unravel, anyway. Political repression is frowned upon across most of Europe. As you know perfectly well, I likened you to a cockroach only metaphorically because you tend to work in the dark and behind closed doors. That is, undemocratically. Otherwise, I have no less than deep respect for the intrepid insect (“My Sincere Apologies to the Cockroach,” March 4, 2010). Mind you, this is my final offer. And this is thus my last open letter to you. The decision is yours and only yours.

VUGRINEC *VERSUS* BON: A LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT OF CROATIA JASNA OMEJEC (July 18, 2012)

I am writing to you in connection with my appeal to the decision of the Municipal Court in Pazin, which the Regional Court in Pula subsequently upheld, in the lawsuit for insult lodged against me by Slobodan Vugrinec, the mayor of Motovun. My appeal has been with you for about a year now. Although my lawyer tells me that there are no legal means to speed up your decision, I would like to appeal to you personally. I hope that you will carefully consider my situation, and that you will find my appeal reasonable.

The main reason why I am appealing with the Constitutional Court in Zagreb is the requirement of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg that all legal means be previously exhausted in the country of origin. I intend to appeal to the court in Strasbourg because I believe that the mayor of Motovun has trampled my basic human rights. He lodged one lawsuit against me in 2008, and two more in 2009, the first of which ostensibly came from the municipality itself. The first two were for libel, and the third for insult. The lawsuits preceded the municipal elections in 2009, and their main objective was to remove me from the political scene.

The reason for this is straightforward. I was opposed to the mayor's plans for golf and polo development in Motovun since late 2005, when it transpired through the local press that a large number of apartments, houses, and villas were planned along with the sport facilities. Together with a number of associates from Motovun, Istria, and Croatia, I was convinced that these plans were ecologically unsustainable. Carefully planned golf and polo courses as such were not at issue, however. Excessive development was at our focus from the very beginning.

I should add at this point that the law firm representing the mayor of Motovun in all three cases simultaneously represented the municipality of Motovun and the then investor in golf development in the municipality. At the same time, they represented the majority of golf investors in Istria, as well as several regional organizations promoting golf on the peninsula. On top of everything, golf was considered one of the top priorities by the regional government, which the law firm in question also represented. I could not imagine a person accused ever facing such a situation in any democratic country. Throughout the court proceedings, I felt that I had no reasonable chance of winning any of the lawsuits.

Now, the mayor and the municipality of Motovun eventually lost the two libel cases in the Pazin court, and the court in Pula upheld this decision upon their appeal. However, the mayor won the insult case, and my appeal with the court in Pula was unsuccessful. He claimed that I called him a cockroach, but he did not explain the context in which the remark was made. My attempts to do so in court were unsuccessful. As a matter of fact, the comment was made at a gathering of people concerned with ecological issues, where I was talking about Motovun and the mayor's undemocratic ways. I said that he does everything behind closed doors and in the dark, like a cockroach. The metaphor would not elicit a lawsuit in any democratic country. To the best of my knowledge, a court in such a country would never consider it, either.

I would like to stress that the mayor of Motovun has not suffered in any way from my comment, which was recorded without my permission. He won the elections, too. In short, my likening him to a cockroach has done him no harm whatsoever. On the other hand, I have suffered from his persecution for years. I have long abandoned all activities concerning sustainable development. In addition, I have started thinking about leaving Motovun, Istria, and Croatia. Having spent most of my life in the United States and the United Kingdom, I have found the political repression in Croatia rather unbearable. Although both of my parents hail from Istria, the mayor of Motovun has promoted a campaign in which I have been treated as a foreigner, or *furešt* in the Istrian dialect.

As you can imagine, I am eager to bring the mayor's persecution to a close. The court in Strasbourg strikes me as the right institution to consider the political repression I have encountered in Croatia. For this reason, I am appealing to you to resolve my appeal to the decision of the court in Pazin as soon as possible. If you do not acquit me, so be it. I am not concerned with your decision as such, but with its speediness. Having been forced into this legal quagmire in 2008, I hope to resolve it once and for all by 2013 or 2014 at the latest. This is why I am appealing for your personal help. Believe me, I feel utterly exhausted by everything that has come my way after my return to Croatia in 2002. In all likelihood, I will leave the country for good once my court case is resolved.

WATER RESTRICTIONS IN ISTRIA (August 1, 2012)

According to the Croatian media, Istria is suffering from such a severe drought that water restrictions are imminent. This will seriously affect tourism, practically the only economic activity still viable on the destitute peninsula. Surprise, surprise. It has long been known that climate change will dry up Istria among many other regions around the Mediterranean. And yet, the leading Istrian politicians have continued clamoring for golf development. Ivan Jakovčić, the governor, has promoted more than twenty golf courses in the region in spite of the fact that they are known to require huge quantities of water. Only the global economic crisis has stopped him in his foolishness. This is how Motovun has been saved from no less than two golf courses, as well. Just like the governor, Slobodan Vugrinec, the mayor of Motovun, has been oblivious to expected water shortages. One can only hope that the water restrictions now pending will change their minds. Hope is always the last to die, anyway. And especially from thirst.

MY BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS: A LETTER TO THE EUROPEAN UNION VICE PRESIDENT AND COMMISSIONER VIVIANE REDING (September 17, 2012)

I am writing to you in connection with a legal conundrum I am now facing in Croatia. I am both a Croatian and British citizen. Having retired to Croatia a decade ago after many years in the United States and the United Kingdom, where I taught at several universities, at some point I found myself opposed to the policies of the mayor of Motovun, a small Istrian town of medieval origin in which I now reside. In particular, he was promoting golf and polo development in the municipality, which I found unsustainable. Golf and polo as such were not at issue; rather it was excessive real estate development that I found questionable. I confronted him in several different ways, including political action. I formed a branch of an Istrian green party in Motovun so as to defend the municipality from pernicious development.

The mayor responded by taking me to court with two libel cases and one insult case ahead of the last municipal elections, which took place in 2009. The first lawsuit came along in 2008, and the other two in 2009, all of them just before the elections. This was political harassment *par excellence*. Trumped up without exception, the lawsuits were meant to stop me as a political opponent with some credibility on professional grounds, for my specialties include spatial or physical planning and real estate development.

I should add at this point that the law firm representing the mayor of Motovun in all three cases simultaneously represented the municipality of Motovun and the then investor in golf development in the municipality. At the same time, they represented the majority of golf investors in Istria, as well as several regional organizations promoting golf on the peninsula. Also, golf was considered one of the top development priorities by the regional government, which the law firm in question also represented. On top of everything, the law firm was directly involved in writing a law expropriating all those who did not wish to sell their land for golf development. I could not imagine a person accused ever facing such a formidable opposition in any democratic country. Throughout the court proceedings, I felt that I had no reasonable chance of winning any of the lawsuits.

The municipal and regional courts eventually struck down the two libel cases, however, but they upheld the insult case. The insult is of interest in its own right. At a gathering of green activists in the Croatian capital I likened the mayor to a cockroach because he usually worked in the dark and behind close doors. That is, undemocratically. I was not aware that my comment was recorded. This was done without my permission, as well. Anyhow, the metaphor harmed the mayor in no way. Thus I appealed to the Constitutional Court of Croatia before taking the insult case to the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, as required by that international court. However, the Constitutional Court has remained quiet for more than a year now. I should mention that procrastination of this sort is often used at all court levels in Croatia as a deliberate strategy to defeat political opposition.

I would like to stress once again that the mayor of Motovun has suffered in no way from my metaphor. He has won the elections and he is now serving as mayor for the third time in a row. In short, my likening him to a cockroach has done him no harm whatsoever. On the other hand, I have suffered from his harassment for years. I have long abandoned all activities concerning sustainable development. In addition, I have started thinking about leaving Motovun, Istria, and Croatia. Having spent most of my life abroad, I have found the political repression in Croatia rather unbearable. Although both of my parents hail from Istria, the mayor of Motovun has promoted a campaign in which I have been treated as a foreigner, or *furešt* in the Istrian dialect. This I find unbearable, indeed.

Two months ago I sent a personal appeal about this matter to Jasna Omejec, the President of the Constitutional Court of Croatia, but without any success. As is typical of this country, few people in high places ever respond to letters of concerned citizens. It is not in the culture, as it were. Mind you, all I was asking for is a speedy decision, no matter which, so that I could go to Strasbourg for the final verdict. This is all I wish at this point. My goal is to bring the insult case to a close within a year or two at most. In addition, I wish to point out the political nature of the judiciary process in Croatia, where libel and insult cases are systematically used to thwart political opposition.

I sincerely hope that you can help me with this matter. Again, all I want is a timely decision by the Constitutional Court of Croatia so that I can proceed to Strasbourg, where I expect to win the insult case in due time. This I consider to be among my basic human rights. The decision of the highest court in Croatia itself is otherwise of no concern to me. I have nowhere else to turn but the European Union, which Croatia will join in less than a year. If you cannot help me, I will have to leave Croatia as soon as I can. The persecution I am facing at the moment is turning out to be too difficult for me to bear any longer.

MY ARCHENEMY (September 17, 2012)

It is amazing how much I have suffered over the last four or five years from Slobodan Vugrinec's harassment. Back in 2008, when his first lawsuit hit me, I could not even imagine the pain I would eventually undergo. The next two lawsuits in 2009 also looked rather manageable back then. But the trial that stretched from 2009 to 2010 really hurt. My boiling emotions gradually turned from him to Motovun to Istria to Croatia as a whole. I started hating the whole lot from the bottom of my heart. Feeling like a powerless victim, I turned against everything in sight. A good psychoanalyst would readily pick up my growing wretchedness from my writings over the period. Everything is there in plain sight. My suffering is palpable. And it all starts from one man deeply entrenched in a political system bent on capitalizing on the last boom, which ended in a spectacular bust precisely when I got the first lawsuit in the mail. As always, I will be my own psychoanalyst, though. Once Vugrinec's lawsuits are finally behind me, which may well take another couple of years, I will submit all my writings about him to a thorough content analysis. Everything will be laid bare. And my archenemy will shine in all his glory for everyone to see. In plain English, too.

Addendum (October 26, 2016)

As it happened, I could not wait with my promise, and I submitted all my writings about my archenemy to a thorough content analysis a bit

more than a year ago (“Content Analysis: Slobodan Vugrinec,” September 22, 2015). But I will go through it once again as soon as I get the final decision from the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. And I will go through it for the third time several years after the faithful decision, as well. Only then will my suffering be laid bare at long last. Political repression that comes naturally to the former mayor of Motovun, for he was a cadre of the communist regime of former Yugoslavia, will surely have left an indelible mark on my psyche. Including the fear and loathing of everything having to do with the state of Croatia.

USKOK (October 3, 2012)

I walked into the building of the highest Croatian authority dealing with corruption and organized crime nearly three years ago. This I did on advice of the then commissioner for enlargement of the European Union, Olli Rehn. I sent them everything I knew about crooked golf development in Motovun, Istria, and Croatia as a whole a few days earlier. We have been in touch several times afterwards, but the last time this happened was more than two years ago. In the meanwhile, I have been in touch with the current commissioner for enlargement, Stefan Füle, who replaced Rehn a couple of years ago. This I consider to be the most “direct” contact concerning the case.

Although crooked golf has never come up in a plethora of lawsuits now facing Croatian politicians and government officials, I still hope that it will not be entirely forgotten. Widespread speculation with land in the hands of the state is squarely behind it. Why have I abandoned all hope with the highest Croatian authority dealing with corruption and organized crime, though? Their ineffectiveness comes first to mind. Over the years, many implicated politicians and officials are running free. Recent news of “deep throats” in the authority’s midst comes second. Apparently, many implicated politicians and officials have been informed about planned lawsuits well in advance.

But there is something else that goes much deeper with me. The third reason for my discomfort is the very name of the authority in question: USKOK. This is an acronym for something or other in Croatian, but the acronym itself was carefully chosen. It refers to brigands and bandits on the Adriatic coast who molested all and sundry especially in the Sixteenth and Seventieth Century. Venice and Austria went to war because of them, too. *Uskok* comes from the Croatian verb “to jump in.” Most *uskoks* were pirates, that is. And most of the ships they jumped in were Venetian. As witnessed by the authority’s name, brigands and bandits remain heroes in Croatian minds. But not in mine. Whence my reliance on the European Union when it comes to crooked golf development.

YET ANOTHER EMBARRASSMENT FOR CROATIA (October 16, 2012)

The verdict of the highest court in Croatia concerning the made-up insult lawsuit lodged against me by the mayor of Motovun is still pending. My letter to the president of that court remains unanswered after three months (“Vugrinec *versus* Bon: A Letter to the President of the Constitutional Court of Croatia Jasna Omejec,” July 18, 2012). I have received a speedy reply to my letter to the European Union’s commissioner for justice, but it has apparently missed its mark (“My Basic Human Rights: A Letter to The European Union Vice President and Commissioner Viviane Reding,” September 17, 2012). In particular, I was told point blank by her cabinet that Croatia is not yet a full member of the Union, and that it is therefore not under their jurisdiction. But I am ever more sure that I know why I am still waiting for the decision of the highest court in Croatia. As I have been very clear about my intention to go to Strasbourg with my final appeal, I will have to wait for the verdict until after the country joins the Union as a full member. Before the accession, Strasbourg would be yet another embarrassment for Croatia, for the international court would have to address my claim of rampant political repression in this country. The systematic abuse of the law concerning libel and insult is an issue that goes to the heart of the political system in this country. To wit, my appeal would be a personal affair only after the accession. It would lose its political bite. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

TEN YEARS ONLY (November 20, 2012)

Ivo Sanader, the former Croatian prime minister, just got ten years for his many crimes. Ten years only, that is. As I am writing, the judge is still delivering his verdict. But crooked golf was not even mentioned among Sanader’s crimes. He got saved by the real estate bust. Had it come just a year later, many golf courses would have sprung all around Croatia, but mainly in Istria and Dalmatia. One of them would be in Motovun, too. And all the golf courses would be linked to fraudulent sale of land in the hands of the government made possible by physical or spatial planning tricks orchestrated from the very top of the government hierarchy. In short, neither he nor his many helpers at all levels of government will suffer any pain for the scam they have planned for years. Scot free, they can only laugh as the verdict is being delivered. Ten years only, once again.

IVO SANADER AND I (November 23, 2012)

According to the Croatian media today, Čedo Prodanović, the lawyer of Ivo Sanader, is busy preparing an appeal to the court decision of a few days ago, whereby the former prime minister is to serve ten years in jail for corruption and organized crime. Predictable enough. What

has caught my attention, though, is that the lawyer is threatening to go all the way to Strasbourg with his appeal. So, we are talking about Sanader's human rights, no less. Thus we may end up in the same court if the highest court in Croatia does not accept my appeal to decisions of lower courts in Istria concerning my insult of the mayor of Motovun, in which I likened him to a cockroach for his predilection to work in the dark and behind closed doors. Undemocratically, in short. And the mayor was only following instructions of the governor of Istria, who was following instructions of the then prime minister concerning golf development bent on the abuse of land in the government's hands. To wit, our two appeals will have a common base even though Sanader has never been charged with corruption and organized crime in connection with golf development in Istria, Dalmatia, and Croatia as a whole. As paradoxes go, this promises to be a cute one. Human rights, anyone?

Addendum I (November 26, 2012)

As soon as I posted this piece on the World Wide Web, I copied it and sent it to Stefan Füle, the European Union's commissioner for enlargement. I sent him the piece about the former prime minister's verdict a few days earlier ("Ten Years Only," November 20, 2012). After searching my website for a minute or two, I also sent him one of my letters to Sanader while he was still in power ("Continuing Concerns with Croatia's Democratic Record: A Letter to Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader," May 27, 2009). Nothing was done about human rights in Croatia on account of the last letter, it goes without saying. In fact, the law pertaining to libel and insult has gotten only tougher in the meanwhile. Will anything be done about it on account of my letter to Füle, though? Of course not. I am not writing to any of these potentates to achieve anything in particular. I am only keeping the record straight, and the record is abominable so far. Democracy is for the birds, as every fool knows by now. The only difference between us is that I can also prove it.

Addendum II (December 5, 2012)

As Stefan Füle hails from Slovakia, I could not but remember him when I went through this year's Corruption Perception Index compiled by Transparency International. Of all countries, Croatia and Slovakia share the sixty-second place in the ranking. Bingo! Which is why he must be among the best politicians of the European Union to appreciate corruption. As well as organized crime, it goes without saying. How lucky Croatia has been to have him as the commissioner for enlargement! Olli Rehn, his predecessor, hails from Finland, which tops the ranking together with Denmark and New Zealand. He could not but have despaired of Croatia's abysmal ranking. Lucky Croatia, indeed.

VUGRINEC *VERSUS* BON: JUSTICE IN WAITING (March 1, 2013)

My letter to Jasna Omejec crosses my mind at least once a week, if not more often (“Vugrinec *versus* Bon: A Letter to the President of the Constitutional Court of Croatia Jasna Omejec,” July 18, 2012). And so does my related letter to Viviane Reding a couple of months afterwards (“My Basic Human Rights: A Letter to the European Union Vice President and Commissioner Viviane Reding,” September 17, 2012). Predictably enough, the former has never responded, while the latter responded at once that Croatia was not yet in the European Union. Therefore, she argued, the Union had no jurisdiction over it yet. Apparently, the candidate status is irrelevant in this case. It has been sufficient for the inflow of capital, as well as goods and services, but not for justice, let alone basic human rights.

Writing to Omejec again would be a waste of my time, but I am sure to write to Reding the very day Croatia joins the Union, presumably in July of this year. As I have long suspected, Omejec must be waiting for the accession so as to eschew embarrassment in Strasbourg (“Yet Another Embarrassment for Croatia,” October 16, 2012). If it ever comes my way, Reding’s help will come a bit too late, at least politically. One way or another, it is amazing that my appeal with the highest court in Croatia is pending since July 2011. And so is my appeal to Strasbourg, where I am pretty certain to win on account of the political motivation of the insult case. Justice in waiting is nothing but justice in waiting, though.

My suffering is none of Omejec’s business, to be sure, but waiting for her response is still no less than continual suffering for me. That blue envelope that will eventually appear in my mailbox is on my mind every single day. Paradoxically, it is the mayor of Motovun who is supposed to be suffering for being likened to a cockroach for his undemocratic ways. In fact, the metaphor has not hurt him at all, politically or otherwise, as I have pointed out in my letters to both Omejec and Reding. Chances are that it rarely, if ever, crosses his mind as he keeps doing everything in the dark and behind closed doors. But the cockroach is with me all this time. Night and day, I can see it, hear it, feel it, smell it wherever I go. As metaphors go, it is surely a powerful one, at least in my own case.

ON THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH (March 19, 2013)

Jason Pontin, the editor in chief of *The MIT Technology Review*, has an interesting article in the last issue of his magazine (Vol. 116, No. 2, March-April 2013). Entitled “Free Speech in the Era of Its Technological Amplification,” it is conceived as a letter to John Stuart Mill, no less. An Oxford graduate, Pontin has a special way with words. And he is for free speech all the way. That is, as long as it

eschews physical harm, which is Mill's own principle. As Pontin argues, "the Internet itself has a bias toward free speech." And then he adds that the communication medium is "cloaking speakers in pseudonymity and anonymity." Which only reminds me of my own recent ruminations about Venice of old ("*La bocha de leon*," January 27, 2013). But neither Pontin nor I have said a word about this important qualification of freedom, which survives to this day in spite of all the pronouncements about this linchpin of democracy across the globe. As it turns out, the freedom of speech that the Internet provides is strictly conditional upon pseudonymity and anonymity. Otherwise, those who dare to practice it are sure to suffer physical harm. Courts, jails, and even execution chambers are still awaiting those foolish enough to speak freely under their own names. In the best of cases, hefty fines for libel or insult will be imposed and extracted even in the Twenty-First Century. And even in America, the land of the free. Long live the technologically-amplified freedom of speech!

Addendum (March 20, 2013)

For his information only, I sent this piece to Jason Pontin. He responded at once, just like he did the last time I sent him a letter to the editor ("Dear Mrs. Smith: A Letter to *The MIT Technology Review*," February 22, 2013). He promised to post my piece in the online edition of the magazine, and added that it might appear in the printed edition, as well. But then he mentioned that he had just visited my *Residua* website for the first time. It struck him as less of a blog, as it predates the World Wide Web, than an electronic commonplace book, or perhaps a work of art. "Very cool," he concluded. I was delighted, of course. In my quick response, I mentioned that I, too, had been suffering from the lack of free speech in Croatia. "For my sins," I added, "I ended up in court for libel and insult." And I concluded somewhat wistfully: "I was too slow to pick up on pseudonyms and anonymity." Anyhow, it has been a joy to exchange a few words with Jason. One never knows when and where one may come across a new friend.

THOSE TWO FAMILIES (March 29, 2013)

On our way to the store on Gradiziol and back home on Borgo, my beloved and I met between a fifth and a quarter of permanent residents of Motovun proper. The old town, that is. We talked with them all. Well, one of them would not even exchange greetings with us, as she belongs to one of the two families that would rather see me never again. But it was a joy for me to catch up with so many people I have not seen for three whole months. My beloved kept pulling at my sleeve all the while. She kept making sour faces, as well. But I was unstoppable. I kept asking about everyone's family and friends. And in much detail. As my beloved told me when we finally made it home,

I was unusually loud, as well. In short, there is definitely a soft spot for Motovun in my heart. A pity for those two families, though.

Addendum I (April 10, 2013)

Not to beat around the bush, these are families Vugrinec and Ivašić. That is, the families of the mayor and the former president of the leading Istrian party in the Municipality of Motovun. The same party has hogged much of the peninsula ever since independence. I was quite friendly with both families before I started fighting against crooked golf and polo close to the hilltown some six years ago. The rift took its present shape four years ago, just before the last municipal elections. No prize for guessing which side of the fight they were on, as well as their party. One way or another, most members of those two families will not greet me in the street ever again. As I already said, a pity for them, too.

Addendum II (November 27, 2015)

Pray, who was that woman who would not exchange greetings with my beloved and me a bit more than a couple of years ago? It was Tatjana Sutera, Klaudio Ivašić's sister and Djurdja Ivašić's daughter. For the record, none of them would greet me in the street any longer, but Djurdja is on most friendly terms with my beloved. She appears quite happy whenever they happen to meet. That is one of the little mysteries of the hilltown. We cannot figure it out no matter how hard we try, for neither Leila Ivašić, Klaudio's wife, nor Giacomo Sutera, Tatjana's husband, would greet either of us any longer. Djurdja's attitude to my beloved is thus rather special. At any rate, we can only hope that this mystery will persist forever.

CLEANING HOUSE (April 30, 2013)

Gabriel Kuris, a Senior Research Specialist from Innovations for Successful Societies, a research center at Princeton, has just published a paper about corruption in Croatia.[1] I learned about it from the website of my Internet service provider, and wrote to Kuris at once. I mentioned my own travails with crooked golf in Istria, my subsequent troubles with Croatian courts, and my intention to go to Strasbourg for justice. I did my best to curb my enthusiasm, though. There are few people I can talk to about the subject of corruption in Croatia. If I push too hard, not even Kuris would be eager to respond.

Only then I discovered his paper on the World Wide Web and started reading it in earnest. Also, I visited his research center's website, which shows quite a number of papers dealing with anti-corruption policies in Brazil, Ghana, Indonesia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, and the United States. The center's activities concern the building of effective

institutions, and escaping development traps. Among its focus areas are elections, civil service, decentralization, and the like.

Returning to Kuris' recent paper, it focuses on the former prime minister, Ivo Sanader, whose incarceration in 2010 changed the game in Croatia. It also focuses on the highest institution dealing with corruption and organized crime in Croatia, which is behind Sanader's demise. I have not finished reading the paper yet, but I am already ever-so-slightly annoyed by its optimistic tone. For cleaning house in Croatia has barely started. Even though it is wonderful that the former prime minister is behind bars, I know many more people who are still running free. And all I know about with any certainty is crooked golf in Istria. As far as I can tell, the struggle against corruption and organized crime in this country has barely started. The capture of Sanader has actually brought it to an early close.

Footnote

1. *Cleaning House: Croatia Mops Up High-Level Corruption, 2005-2012*, Innovations for Successful Societies, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 2013.

A REVOLUTION IN MOTOVUN (May 19, 2013)

There is a revolution in Motovun. Today's municipal elections will change things for many years to come. To begin with, Tomislav Pahović known to all as Tomica is the new mayor. A medical doctor in his thirties, he promises to make everyone heard. In addition, the Istrian Democratic Assembly, the dominant party on the peninsula since independence, has ended up in the opposition in the municipal council for the second time in a row. They got five posts, the same number as the Independents, the new mayor's party, who will form a coalition with the Social Democrats with only one post. A similar coalition was formed after the previous elections, but the departing mayor, Slobodan Vugrinec, had managed to steer it pretty close to the desires of his own party, the Istrian Democratic Assembly. The new mayor will push them into opposition proper for the very first time. In short, petty politics is history in the hilltown. A political scientist in his fifties, the old mayor will return to an administrative post in Vrsar, a municipality on the Istrian coast, where he actually lives with his family. Good riddance, Slobodan! And the warmest of welcomes, Tomica!

Addendum (May 21, 2013)

Now that the dust has settled, it is time for a few more words. First, I did not take part in the municipal elections. As I explained to all those who were surprised by my behavior, I could not break my solemn promise to the president of Croatia ("My Best Wishes: A Letter to

Croatian President Ivo Josipović,” April 15, 2011). No matter what, I will vote never again in this godforsaken country. Second, I was pretty sure that Tomica Pahović could not win the elections for mayor. However, he and the Independents, who went from door to door in the municipality, managed to persuade many people who had given up hope to vote one more time. It was these people who made the difference I was not counting with. Anyhow, I was wrong in my assessment, for Tomica won by a wide margin rather than a couple of votes. In fact, he trounced Slobodan Vugrinec. Turning to the future, I cannot but have high hopes for Tomica and the Independents in coalition with the Social Democrats. If they have won the municipal elections so splendidly, they can also make a difference in Motovun’s future. My best wishes, once again.

MANIA (June 9, 2013)

It is amazing to behold my Google Analytics reports. For many years now, they are dominated by only a few search words or phrases (“Snooping the Snoops,” June 16, 2011). They are “Klaudio,” “Klaudio Ivašić,” “Vugrinec,” and “Slobodan Vugrinec.” The names of my Motovun enemies are often repeated many times over in every report. Clearly, one or both of them are searching my *Residua* website with a zeal bordering on obsession. Nay, mania. To my surprise, this continues even after the recent municipal elections, in which my enemies lost their political footing. When will it stop, though? Unfortunately, manias seldom go away all by themselves. After all, they are a serious form of mental illness. My Google Analytics reports will most likely be marred by these Motovun names for many years to come.

Addendum (March 31, 2016)

Nearly three years later, not much has changed in terms of the search words or phrases reported by Google Analytics. “Klaudio Ivašić” still dominates the reports, whereas “Slobodan Vugrinec” appears a bit less often than before. But chances are that both of them will soon start appearing ever more often until about a year from now, for this is when Motovun will have the next municipal elections. The mania of my enemies cannot but gather momentum before this momentous event, for they must hope to regain power in the municipality. According to local gossip, they are meeting increasingly often in this connection. And my Google Analytics reports offer a perfect gauge of their political hopes.

MY QUEST FOR JUSTICE (May 29, 2013)

My legal battle with the former mayor of Motovun ricochets through my mind every once in a while. Say, once every few days. On rare

occasion, I find myself hoping that the highest court in Croatia, which is located in Zagreb, will uphold my appeal against the verdicts of the municipal court in Pazin and the regional court in Pula, according to which I am guilty of insult. That would end the ugly story, minus the collection of legal expenses from the former mayor and the Municipality of Motovun, which promptly joined him in his libel case against me, but which failed to convince the courts in Pazin and Pula. Their appeal against the verdict had failed just the same as my own. But I find myself hoping much more often that the court in Zagreb will reject my appeal, as well. In fact, the main, if not the only, reason for my appeal with that court is that the court in Strasbourg, which I will appeal to next, requires that I exhaust all the legal means available to me in Croatia before I can go farther. My two hopes are contradictory, of course. But the second hope is far stronger than the first one. In fact, I find myself hoping to win not only in my legal battle with the former mayor and the Municipality of Motovun, but also with all the Croatian courts involved, and especially those in Pazin and Pula. And the second hope frightens me from time to time, for I find myself dying to go all the way to the bitter end in my quest for justice. All the way to death, to put it squarely. Can justice ever be worth such a headlong quest, though?

THIS SPECIAL DAY: ANOTHER LETTER TO THE EUROPEAN UNION VICE PRESIDENT AND COMMISSIONER VIVIANE REDING (July 1, 2013)

I wrote to you on September 17, 2012, in connection with a trumped-up charge brought against me by Slobodan Vugrinec, the former mayor of Motovun, a hilltown in picturesque Istria in which I reside since my retirement from professorship in the United Kingdom. The enclosed letter explains it all (“My Basic Human Rights: A Letter to the European Union Vice President and Commissioner Viviane Reding,” September 17, 2012). I should only add that we have a new mayor since a couple of months ago. My main point is that I have been a victim of political repression perpetrated by the then mayor and his political affiliates. You responded within a week that you could not do anything about my case because Croatia was not yet a full member of the European Union.

As of today, Croatia is in the Union, though. Thus I am writing to you again, and on this special day. As you will see from my letter to Jasna Omejec, the president of the highest court in Croatia, all I want is for that court to make its decision without any further delay (“Vugrinec *versus* Bon: A Letter to the President of the Constitutional Court of Croatia Jasna Omejec,” July 18, 2012). I am not concerned with the decision itself, but with its speedy delivery. It has been two years already, and it is high time for my appeal to be addressed. In the case my appeal is not upheld, I intend to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, which requires that I first appeal to the

highest court in my own country. By the way, president Omejec has never responded to my letter. This is typical of Croatia, where those in high places see no reason to communicate with their citizens. In this respect, as well as in many others, good luck with the new member!

In short, I would appreciate your prompt help with this matter, which I cannot but see as part of political repression typical of not only Motovun and Istria, but also of Croatia as a whole, where libel and insult charges are systematically used against political opponents through corrupt courts. Please do whatever you can do to break the deadlock I find myself in. I can only hope that this is within your power now that Croatia is a full member of the Union. To repeat, all I want is speedy access to Strasbourg.

Addendum (August 8, 2013)

The first time I wrote to Viviane Reding, the answer came in about a week. The second time, it took more than a month. But the answer, which arrived today, is equally disappointing. To begin with, the European Commission can intervene only if an issue of European Union law is involved. In addition, the European Court of Human Rights, whose seat is in Strasbourg, is not an institution of the Union. In short, political repression and bungling courts in Croatia are none of the Union's business. It is a pity I was not told about all this the first time I wrote to Reding, when the prompt answer was that the Commission could not intervene in my case because Croatia was not yet in the Union. Not to worry, though. At least I know that human rights are for the birds. Long live political repression!

CROOKED GOLF FOREVER: A LETTER TO THE EUROPEAN UNION COMMISSIONER FOR ENLARGEMENT STEFAN FÜLE
(July 1, 2013)

Congratulations! Croatia is in the European Union at last. Your job is done, and rather well. This is likely to be the only enlargement on your guard, for the remaining Balkan countries, not to mention Turkey, will take many years, if not decades, to join the Union. But there will be much to do in the meanwhile, no doubt. The region is special in many ways, and this is why I am writing to you at this time. It is enough to remember that this is where Venetian, Turkish, and Austro-Hungarian empires met for many centuries, and often violently. The Slavs in the region learned many a trick in dealing with the three empires.

Now, I informed your predecessor, Olli Rehn, of many strange things that accompanied golf development in Motovun, Istria, and Croatia as a whole. And there were many golf courses planned across the country. At around seventy-million euros per golf course and more than sixty courses, at least four-billion euros were involved. Rehn

suggested that I go to the highest Croatian authority dealing with corruption and organized crime, which I did. And I kept informing him about my progress. Once you replaced him as the commissioner for enlargement, I kept informing you, too. Your administration must have about a hundred of my missives.

Alas, many of the people responsible for crooked golf in Croatia are still running free! Only the man then on top of the government and the criminal endeavor surrounding golf development, Ivo Sanader, is now in jail, but he is not yet accused of any crimes concerning golf development. To my surprise, this has been swept under the rug by the prosecution. All those working under his command at all levels of government are not even investigated for corruption and organized crime in spite of the billions of euros involved. I have written to many people in the Croatian government about this matter, but without any success.

Now that Croatia is already in the Union, it makes no sense to write to you about all this any longer. But I am writing to you about golf development in the remaining Balkan countries, for you can be sure that golf goes well with corruption and organized crime in these parts. Shady foreign investors can easily strike funny deals with equally shady local politicians who are entrusted with land in government's hands. The match is perfect, and golf requires lots of land that can be used for the building of apartments and villas galore. Shady politicians up the hierarchy quickly pick up the trick and provide the backing in planning and laws required for crooked deals. Once the top of the political hierarchy becomes involved, money laundering becomes attractive, for ill-begotten moneys can easily be shifted to safe havens abroad and then invested under the guise of the foreign company interested in golf. The loop is closed.

Mind you, the governments of Balkan countries not yet in the Union are equally as crafty at such deals as was Sanader's government. Thus it is easy to predict that golf development will be attractive across the region as soon as the global economic crisis is over. If this is not kept in mind, we will have crooked golf forever. Thus this letter to you, my very last. I wish you all the best with one of the most corrupt regions on the planet. After so many centuries of shady deals between embattled empires spanning the Balkan peninsula, organized crime is in people's bones. Good luck!

SLOBODAN VUGRINEC FOREVER (July 21, 2013)

When Slobodan Vugrinec lost the recent elections for mayor of Motovun, I was happy about it for at least two reasons. Most important, his abominable misrule would be over at last. In addition, I would see him only on a rare occasion, when he would come to his former fief to visit his two siblings, Tomica and Jasmina. Say, twice

or thrice a year. It was not to be, though. As it happens, he is in the hilltown more often than ever before. To my horror, I see him almost every day. His elder daughter now runs a café owned by his brother, who acquired it with some brotherly help. His younger daughter and two daughters of his sister are helping with the glorious chore. As far as I can tell, the place is hoping every single night till the wee hours in spite of all the laws ensuring peace and quiet. The way things look at this juncture, I will be seeing the former mayor for years. To my chagrin, I fear that I will be seeing him in hell, as well. Over there, he will be running one of the biggest of fires, I am quite sure. And I will be seeing him day after day without fail. Slobodan Vugrinec forever.

JASNA OMEJEC AND I (October 17, 2013)

As I was walking past a bookstore in Zagreb, a hefty book attracted my attention. I stopped and looked a bit more closely. The book was about the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, as well as its application at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. “Hey,” I mumbled under my breath, “this is something for me!” And then I checked the author. To my amazement, it was Jasna Omejec, the President of the Constitutional Court of Croatia. I wrote to her last year about my misery with the Croatian courts, but she had never replied (“Vugrinec *versus* Bon: A Letter to the President of the Constitutional Court of Croatia Jasna Omejec,” July 18, 2012). I asked her for help with my appeal to decisions of courts in Pazin and Pula, but I stressed that I was concerned with a speedy decision of the highest court in Zagreb only because I was eager to go to Strasbourg as soon as possible. Of course, I had no idea she was an, as it were, expert on human rights herself. Whence my surprise when I saw her name on the front cover of that hefty book. I was about to enter the bookstore and check the publisher and year of publication, but I decided against it quickly enough. My only hope is in Strasbourg, anyhow. “Jasna Omejec and I have nothing else in common than the damned country of birth,” I sighed and kept walking. So much for human rights.

DYING TO GO TO STRASBOURG (October 25, 2013)

As is abundantly clear from occasional searches through the Croatian press, the country is regularly losing court cases that end up in Strasbourg. One of the common features of these legal debacles is the inadequacy of the Croatian judiciary system. It is not only inept, but also corrupt. Therefore, I am gearing my appeal against the decisions of courts in Pazin and Pula, and eventually Zagreb, toward the judiciary system as a whole. It is anyone’s guess how much longer I will have to wait for the decision of the highest court in Zagreb, but I expect to go to Strasbourg in the end.

To recapitulate my story, the former mayor of Motovun engineered three court cases against me just ahead of the municipal elections in 2009. All the cases were politically motivated in the context of questionable golf development in Motovun, which I opposed as unsustainable. He lost two libel cases, but won the insult case. Although I explained in court that I had likened him to a cockroach because of his tendency to work in the dark and behind closed doors, that is to say undemocratically, the judge remained oblivious to my defense. Apparently, metaphors are not allowed in Croatia.

Now, the judge was an ardent member of the Istrian Democratic Assembly, just like the former mayor of Motovun and his political allies in the municipality. Also, the party's president and the governor of Istria at the time was an ardent supporter of golf development on the peninsula. And now comes the clincher: in addition to the municipality, the law office representing the former mayor in all three cases against me also represented the investor in golf in Motovun, as well as many other investors in golf across the peninsula. On top of that, the same law office drafted the golf law that was pushed through the Croatian parliament by the former prime minister of the country, who was an ardent supporter of golf in Istria, Dalmatia, and elsewhere in Croatia.

All my attempts to speed up the decision of the highest court in Zagreb have been in vain. Characteristically, the highest court is dragging its feet for years, just as Croatian courts at all levels customarily do. But this will only help my case in Strasbourg. I am a victim of political repression perpetrated with the help of the judiciary. The highest court in Zagreb is part and parcel of the system. Indeed, it is at its very helm. I am dying to go to Strasbourg not only to win my court case, but also to show the Croatian judiciary in its true colors. It cannot be separated from political repression as such.

To Jasna Omejec

THE PERSONIFICATION (October 28, 2013)

I cannot shake Jasna Omejec, the president of the Croatian Constitutional Court, out of my mind as of late. Today I printed out the seven pieces of writing in my *Residua* that bear her name, stapled them together, appended my business card, and mailed the lot to her office. "Personal," I wrote on the envelope. The first piece is my only letter to her ("Vugrinec *versus* Bon: A Letter to the President of the Constitutional Court of Croatia Jasna Omejec," July 18, 2012); the last is only a few days old, but it was dedicated to her ("Dying to Go to Strasbourg," October 25, 2013). At any rate, my appeal to her court more than two years ago is still pending. It is the only barrier to my ultimate appeal to the court in Strasbourg. Today's mail is not likely to help my chances, either. I may end up in court for harassment, too.

But I simply cannot stop myself thinking about this woman any longer. In my mind, she has become the personification of the Croatian judiciary system. The system now has a name, which is loud and clear. It also has a face, the sharp features of which I would recognize in any crowd.

Addendum (October 28, 2016)

To the best of my understanding, Jasna Omejec is no longer the president of the Croatian Constitutional Court. Her successor is to be announced soon. And yet, her court's decision on December 11, 2014 will stay with me for the rest of my life ("The Decision," March 8, 2015). In particular, it went along with the decisions of the Municipal Court in Pazin and the Regional Court in Pula, according to which I was guilty of insult of the former mayor of Motovun. The cockroach, for short. Soon after I learned about the decision, which I was praying for year after year, I took Croatia to the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg ("Bon *versus* Croatia," April 13, 2015). In my mind, though, I took Omejec to court. As far as I am concerned, she remains the personification of the Croatian judiciary system for all times. And it is enough for me to search for her name on the World Wide Web to see her face. The face of judicial travesty for ever and ever. Amen.

FOR GOLF READY! (November 22, 2013)

Several days ago, Croatia qualified for the soccer world cup in Brazil next year by defeating Island in Zagreb. After the match, one of the Croatian players grabbed the microphone and started yelling the Ustasha salute: "For home ready!" Tens of thousands of fans responded with unbridled enthusiasm. Trained in Mussolini's Italy, Ustasas were eager Hitler's puppets during World War II. Famed for their nationalism, they were especially ferocious toward the Serbs, a large minority in Croatia, but they were also most helpful with the extermination of Jews. A century earlier, when Croatian nationalism was in its cradle, the salute expressed readiness to die for homeland. Anyhow, I just learned that the soccer player in question was fined by a judge in Zagreb about three-thousand and three-hundred euros for his verbal offence. I could not but notice that the fine was rather like the one I got for my verbal offence of likening the former mayor of Motovun to a cockroach on account of his habit of doing everything in the dark and behind closed doors—that is, undemocratically—at a gathering of at most a hundred green activists opposed to unsustainable golf development in Croatia. In fact, my fine was about two-hundred euros higher than the soccer player's. As fines are determined in terms of both the severity of the offence and the financial means of the offender, my offence must have been perceived as much more severe than the Ustasha salute in front of tens of thousands, as well as many television crews. Close to the leading party in Istria, to which the former mayor of Motovun also belongs to this day, the judge in Pazin

was obviously ready to do a lot for golf development promoted by the party and its leadership. For golf ready, as it were.

Addendum I (November 25, 2013)

The hapless soccer player already has the wholehearted support of many tens of thousands of fans on Facebook. That number is likely to grow at a clip. His boisterous salute is also spreading across Croatia. At a soccer match in Split yesterday night, soccer fans yelled the Ustasha salute all the time, but they also chanted repeatedly in enthusiastic support of the fascist past: “Ustashes, let’s go!” Simply put, the country is ready for a new “political” movement. As well as a new party. Now that the European Union can do little if anything about it, the road to extreme forms of nationalism is wide open. And I cannot but remember my father’s boisterous salute wherever he went on a brief visit to Zagreb in mid-Nineties (“*Heil Hitler!*” September 7, 1996). He was right on the money so many years back.

Addendum II (September 7, 2015)

About a month ago, a Croatian political coalition proposed a referendum on the Ustasha salute. They wanted it to become the official salute of the Croatian army. The prime minister and the president were against the referendum, but their arguments were garbled at best, for there could be little doubt that the majority of Croats would be in favor of the idea. So, why irk the electorate? In a few short years, the soccer player who used the Ustasha salute will be remembered as a hero. In retrospect, it stands to reason that his fine was less than mine. Cockroaches are loathed by all Croats, while Ustashes are still close to many a Croat heart brimming with nationalism. Sorry, patriotism. After all, Croatia is a democratic country. The majority rules, period.

A POLITICAL SPORT (February 14, 2014)

Golf is in the news once again. As of late, a growing number of articles about the posh sport can be found in the Croatian newspapers. Many of them concern Istria, where the golf lobby seems to be ready for its return. I have long decided to retire from the golf scene, but I can expect many a question about it from friends concerned with sustainable development of the peninsula and the country as a whole. The first thing that comes to my mind by way of an answer is to shrug my shoulders, pucker my lips, and lift my eyebrows. None of my business, in short. But I am aware that many of my friends will not be satisfied with such an answer. Thus I am prepared to make one observation only: all the articles I have read so far suggest that the future of golf in Istria and Croatia is still in the hands of politicians. Put differently, none of them have been punished so far for their shady deals with foreign and domestic golf investors, and so they will most

likely press on as though everything has been hunky-dory. After all, golf is a political sport in this country. So much land needed for golf development is in the hands of the state that it cannot be otherwise, at any rate. But this is where I will stop and shrug my shoulders one more time. None of this is any of my business, indeed. My friends will just shake their heads at this point, I can already tell.

Addendum (December 3, 2014)

Everything that holds for golf also holds for polo, to be sure. Even more posh than golf, polo revolves around huge tracts of land. And land is the politicians' domain. In this respect, Croatia is not different than many other countries. What is different is that much land remains in the hands of the state, which has inherited it from socialist Yugoslavia of yesteryear. For this reason, land has attracted many a politician eager for money. Returning to polo, it has been bantered about in only a few places in Croatia during the real estate boom leading to the global financial crisis. One of these places was Motovun. Georg List, the German investor in polo development, is now accusing Ivan Jakovčić, the governor of Istria until recently, of corruption in connection with the Motovun project. As List claims, Jakovčić asked him for half a million euros to inaugurate his polo project to the east of the Motovun hill. Jakovčić is now in the European Parliament, where he is protected by immunity. Stripping him of immunity is currently under discussion, but the outcome is not yet clear. If and when he falls, some details of political shenanigans surrounding posh sports in Motovun, Istria, and Croatia as a whole will finally come to light. Quite a number of local politicians were involved in the profitable game, it goes without saying. Many in Motovun are thus looking forward to the end of the polo saga, for several money-grabbing people they know very well would most likely end up behind bars.

LOVE, HATE (February 18, 2014)

My beloved had to go to her office very early this morning, but I could not go back to sleep after she left. I tossed and turned for quite a while, and ultimately I got up. Try as I might, I could not stop thinking about all the bureaucratic horrors I am facing in Croatia. The tax authorities were uppermost in my mind. I have been corresponding with them for an entire year, but my case is still up in the air. And all this on account of countless forms that must be filled and submitted to one office or another. The law regulating taxes in this country is simply frightening. The threat of punishment for the smallest of errors is hanging over one's head all the time. Pure hell, and I am not exaggerating. On top of the tax quagmire, I remembered the misery I am facing with the Croatian courts. Ever since the former mayor of Motovun has taken me to court for libel and insult, both of which charges were politically motivated, I have been from one court to

another. And my appeal to the constitutional court is pending for the third year already. Strasbourg is my last hope, but I cannot go there without the highest court's decision. To my horror, the ordeal with Croatian courts started no less than six years ago. Pure hell for true. I have lived in quite a number of countries, but I have never experienced so much trouble with vicious bureaucracy. By comparison, even former Yugoslavia was a wonderful place. All in all, I am dying to leave Croatia for good, but my love for my beloved stops me. The greatest love of my life stands in the way of the greatest hate of my life. And I do hate Croatia with a passion. Stuck between the two, the best I can do is to write about it. Some consolation, too!

“JUSTICE DELAYED IS JUSTICE DENIED” (March 18, 2014)

Thus one of the leading newspapers in Croatia today quoting Viviane Reding, the European Commission's top enchilada in jurisprudence, in connection with a report just issued by the European Union about jurisprudence in its member countries. Reportedly, Croatia ended up at the bottom of the list. Among many other problems with jurisprudence in this country, including widespread corruption, long delays in court proceedings are a standard feature. The quote is actually a legal maxim rather than Reding's wisdom. It goes a long way back, too. At any rate, the article in question immediately reminded me of my misery with Slobodan Vugrinec, the former mayor of Motovun, who took me to court for fabricated libel and insult in 2008 and 2009. My appeal is with the Constitutional Court of Croatia ever since 2011. More important in this connection, commissioner Reding is very well aware of it. I wrote to her in 2012 and 2013 about my misery with Croatian courts (“My Basic Human Rights: A Letter to the European Union Vice President and Commissioner Viviane Reding,” September 17, 2012, and “This Special Day: Another Letter to The European Union Vice President and Commissioner Viviane Reding,” July 1, 2013). What has she done about it, though? Absolutely nothing. Not under her competence, she explained. Justice delayed is justice denied, and the maxim applies not only to Croatia, but also to the vaunted Union.

THOSE TWO FAMILIES, AGAIN (March 28, 2014)

Just like last year, as well as several years before last, I relish my return to Motovun. I talk to everyone I meet on Gradiziol and Borgo except those two families that would rather see me never again (“Those Two Families,” March 29, 2013). But there is one small difference this year among years: more and more people in the hilltown tell me point blank that the same two families cannot stand them, either. People like to say that there is something wrong with Motovun, which is forever pulled apart by all sorts of rivalries, but it seems that everything boils down to those two families and their

closest friends. In the last analysis, it is only a handful of people who are driving the whole community apart. But when will everyone figure it out at last? The way things are shaping, I reckon it is a matter of months at most.

Addendum (February 17, 2017)

Now that the winter seems to be ebbing, I am starting to think about my return to Motovun once again. Quite a few friends pop up in my mind, and I am happy that I will be with them early this spring. Against my will, I cannot but think of those two families, as well (“Those Two Families,” March 29, 2013; and “Those Two Families, Again,” March 28, 2014). These are families Vugrinec and Ivašić, it goes without saying. And I must admit that I am far from happy to see some of them ever again. Alas, Motovun is so medieval that I cannot but see a few of them every single day! In my predicament, I find myself searching the World Wide Web for paranoid schizophrenia one more time. Although the mental illness seems to be quite widespread in Istria, I cannot find much more about it. How to diagnose it? More important, how to deal with it? To my chagrin, it appears that psychiatrists are not doing their job in these parts. What are we to do with families such as these two? Are we to suffer from their shenanigans for ever and ever?

SLINGING STONES AT GOLIATH (May 25, 2014)

Matthew Treadwell wrote a wonderful account of my struggles with the golf lobby in Motovun, Istria, and Croatia some four years ago (“Abandon and Absolve,” August 22, 2010). A copy of his article, which can be found on the World Wide Web under the title of “Slinging Stones at Goliath,” can be found on the desktop of my laptop ever since. I see its icon SLINGING STONES AT GOLIATH every day without fail. Over the years, the title has become etched into my mind. But my appeal of nearly three years ago with the Constitutional Court of Croatia against the decisions of municipal and regional courts in Istria is still awaiting the highest court’s decision.

But all I wish is to go to the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, where I am sure to defeat the former mayor of Motovun, who had filed no less than three court cases against me just before the municipal elections five years ago, which took place shortly after the onset of the global financial crisis. I have written to the president of the Constitutional Court, Jasna Omejec, over and over again, but without any success. And this is where my sling now strikes me as pretty powerless. In the case of Croatia, the Goliath is ultimately its court system. This is where the slinging of stones is for the birds.

Prime ministers enamored with golf fall, as witnessed by Ivo Sanader. Although he has been in jail for several years now, he has never been

charged with the golf scam involving much of Croatia, but especially Istria and Dalmatia. Regional governors fall, as well, as witnessed by Ivan Jakovčić, Sanader's closest Istrian ally in the multi-billion-euro golf game. And so do golf-loving municipal mayors, as witnessed by Slobodan Vugrinec, who lost the municipal elections only a year ago. He was the very last in the chain of power, too. Unperturbed, the Goliath still stands, though. The wretched country's court system is beyond the reach of my sling. Or any other sling, for that matter.

COLLECTIVE HARM (June 9, 2014)

Most Motovun potentates in the last couple of decades have their roots in the communist regime of former Yugoslavia. This is where their parents had built the foundations of their current wealth entirely by stealth. One question that pops up every now and then is how much they have managed to put into their own pockets since Croatian independence. As one of the former potentates has just been accused by the Istrian media of putting away a bit more than thirteen-thousand euros, I cannot but laugh. Every one of them is sure to boast at least ten times this much in swindled wealth, and especially in the form of real estate. This is the only sort of capital Croats recognize, anyway. But what is their collective harm to Motovun, Istria, and Croatia as a whole? Having engaged in every kind of corruption and organized crime for more than two decades, they must have reduced the wealth of everyone around them by about a third, I reckon. And this is the sort of calculation that we need at this stage. The cost of malefactors cannot be reduced to their own gain. Without the communist crooks, Croatia could have been around a third wealthier. But where are the economists when one needs them?

THOSE TWO FAMILIES, AGAIN AND AGAIN (June 11, 2014)

Having witnessed one assault too many from a member of one of those two families that seem to be behind most of the strife in Motovun, I cannot but wonder about mental illness as the underlying cause. What else could explain so much misery in the hilltown? In the case of one of the families, the connection is unmistakable, which started me thinking in the first place. The medical diagnosis of an important member of this family is beyond me, but paranoid schizophrenia strikes me as the right verdict. The Istrian peninsula is rife with it, too. I do not know the other family well enough, but the same diagnosis seems plausible at first glance. To learn a bit more about this condition, I just checked it on the World Wide Web. Losing touch with reality is mentioned over and over again. This is accompanied by delusions and hallucinations having to do with a belief that everyone is out to cause you harm. Among the symptoms are disorganized speech and behavior, as well as inappropriate affect. All this is quite plausible in the case of those two families. But what can be done about the

underlying mental illness? This is where I am baffled in spite of my considerable effort. As far as I can tell, the first step forward is the recognition of the problem. But who in the world could even suggest such a thing to those two families?

POLO, GOLF (July 25, 2014)

Motovun is abuzz about a scandal involving the former mayor of Motovun and his closest associates from the municipal administration. It is about polo development. The scandal goes all the way to the former governor of Istria and his closest associates from the regional administration. It entails untold machinations with land ownership and outright bribery. The German investor in polo, whose many attempts have been frustrated by corruption and organized crime, has come out into the open after many years of trying in vain. The scandal makes me laugh, though. Polo is next to nothing by comparison with golf development, which preceded it by several years. That is where corruption and organized crime go from one of the former prime ministers of Croatia to the former mayor of Motovun *via* the former governor of Istria. I cannot wait for that scandal to come out in the open. By comparison with polo development, which entailed some seventy-million euros all told, golf development entailed more than four-billion euros across Croatia, where more than sixty golf courses were to be built during the real estate boom. Golf and polo courses would cost about the same amount of money. But about a third of golf development involved Istria. The only reason why the golf scandal is still out of sight is that it involves at least sixty times as many people as the polo scandal. And at all levels of the Croatian government.

ON CROATIAN CROOKED COURTS (August 1, 2014)

The court system in Croatia is notorious for its crooked ways. Eminently practical people, judges have been on the take ever since independence. One of their tactics has been political. By aligning themselves with one of the leading parties, they have been ahead of the game for more than two decades now. Not surprisingly, the same holds for Istria. The Istrian Democratic Assembly, the leading party on the peninsula since the breakup of Yugoslavia, has formed its own web of sympathetic judges. And one of them is Denis Hek from the municipal court in Pazin, who was “my” judge several years back (“Something to Write About,” January 8, 2009). As many have warned me when the former mayor of Motovun took me to court six years ago, the cards were stacked against me. Although Hek overturned two out of three fraudulent court cases lodged against me, one of them stuck. And the regional court in Pula upheld his decision a couple of years later. This surprised no-one, as the higher court was also notorious for its intimate ties with the Istrian Democratic

Assembly. But there is some reason for me to rejoice at present, for Hek has been in the Croatian news as of late. There are ever-louder claims from a number of concerned parties that he has been way too close to the leading political party in Istria. Apparently, many court cases have thus been twisted in their favor. This cannot but be good news for me, too, for the court in Strasbourg will be quite interested in my story. To wit, my trial was decided before it even started. Assuming, of course, that the highest court in Zagreb will be incompetent enough to let me go to Strasbourg. Perhaps the best they can do is to keep my appeal forever. So far, it has been with them for more than three years.

VUGRINEC *VERSUS* BON FOREVER (August 5, 2014)

Two women are on my mind almost every day. The first is Jasna Omejec, the president of the Constitutional Court of Croatia. The second is Viviane Reding, the European Union vice president and commissioner for justice, fundamental rights, and citizenship. I have written to them both in connection with the three fabricated court cases lodged against me by Slobodan Vugrinec, the former mayor of Motovun. The municipal court in Pazin struck down two of the cases, but upheld one of them. I was found guilty of insult rather than libel. Of course, this was a political move meant to make me quiet about crooked golf in Istria. The higher regional court in Pula upheld the municipal court's decision. Before going to Strasbourg with my appeal, I had to appeal to the Constitutional Court in Zagreb. That was in July 2011, a bit more than three years ago.

I wrote to Omejec a year later with a plea for a quick resolution of my case ("Vugrinec *versus* Bon: A Letter to the President of the Constitutional Court of Croatia Jasna Omejec," July 18, 2012). As I got no response, I wrote to Reding ("My Basic Human Rights: A Letter to the European Union Vice President and Commissioner Viviane Reding," September 17, 2012). The response was quick but dismissive. Croatia was not yet in the Union, I was told. Thus I wrote to her again on Croatia's accession date ("This Special Day: Another Letter to the European Union Vice President and Commissioner Viviane Reding," July 1, 2013). This time the response was less quick but equally disappointing. Namely, I was told that the Union could react only in the case one of its laws was in jeopardy.

Earlier this year I read a couple of articles in Croatian newspapers about the dismal record of the Croatian judiciary and Reding's reaction to it ("Justice Delayed is Justice Denied," March 18, 2014). Delighted by the legal maxim invoked by her, I have been thinking about another letter to her ever since. Would the Union not be expected to act in such a case? And is not my case a good example of justice denied? For some reason, though, I keep delaying this letter. Deep down, I feel that it would be to no avail. Neither Omejec nor Reding are likely to

be of any help in my quagmire, or so I feel after so many attempts to get help from on high. No matter how often I think of the two women, I am as good as lost. The way things look at present, we have a historic legal case in the making: Vugrinec *versus* Bon forever.

Addendum I (August 8, 2014)

I just printed out this piece of writing, as well as all the pieces mentioned in it, arranged them in reverse chronological order, stapled them together, and mailed them to Viviane Reding in Brussels. For good measure, I printed all the pieces from my *Residua* website, so it is clear that everything is on the World Wide Web. What do I expect from Reding? Well, nothing. At best, she will contact Omejec in a personal sort of way. For Vugrinec *versus* Bon is likely to turn into an embarrassment for all concerned minus myself. Even Reding and her cabinet will understand that much. As far as Omejec is concerned, it is anyone's guess. She sits on top of a stinky tomb that is the Croatian court system, anyway. At any rate, today's missive gives me an enormous joy. I was laughing all the way to the post office and back home.

Addendum II (September 18, 2014)

Not surprisingly, there has been no reply from Viviane Reding after more than a month. Her page on the European Union's website indicates that she has moved on to the European Parliament. It is not clear who will replace her as commissioner concerned with justice, if such a commissioner will exist in the new European Commission under Jean-Claude Juncker. In short, I had better forget about my ploy. My last missive is in the garbage bin, that is. And so is the European Union as far as I am concerned. Much hoopla about nothing. Good luck, Juncker! You may well be in power when the stinky tomb under you crumbles to pieces.

Addendum III (September 19, 2014)

As luck would have it, this morning I received a reply from Viviane Reding's office. One of her people explains that the European Commission has no general powers in intervene with the member states. It can do so only in the case a European Union law is involved. However, the Commission has recently proposed and the Union has subsequently adopted a country-specific recommendation for Croatia in the area of justice. The recommendation states that Croatia should "improve the quality and efficiency of the judicial system, in particular by providing incentives to resolve proceedings in litigious civil and commercial cases and in administrative cases in a timely manner, and to resort to out-of-court settlement especially for smaller claims." The Commission follows the implementation of this recommendation, or so the letter claims. Phew! The Croatian courts are now sure to speed up

their proceedings. They simply must. My own case will be resolved in no time!

THE FALSE ADDRESS (September 4, 2014)

Slobodan Vugrinec, the former mayor of Motovun, has been kicked out of the municipal council, where he has been in the opposition ever since he lost the last elections to Tomislav Pahović, the current mayor. Why? Vugrinec has lived in Vrsar, a small town on the western coast of Istria, for many years, but he has kept his address in Motovun, where he grew up. According to the Croatian law, he has no place in the administration of Motovun as an inhabitant of Vrsar. How is it possible that he has served three four-year terms as mayor of the hilltown, as well as more than a year in the council? To the best of my understanding, it took quite some effort to prove that his Motovun address was false. The police had to look for him several times in a row in both places to establish that he was actually lying about his address. Every single inhabitant of Motovun knows that Vugrinec lives in Vrsar, but it has still taken close to fourteen years to establish this simple fact. As well as to connect it to his political machinations. Well, this is Istria. Someone from the leadership of the leading political party on the peninsula, the Istrian Democratic Assembly, wanted Vugrinec in Motovun, and that someone was high enough in the party hierarchy to make the impossible happen. The false address was all it took, too. Would that this were the end of the story, though. It will take a few more years to learn about all the former mayor's shenanigans. As for the shenanigans of the leadership of the Istrian Democratic Assembly, it will take a few more decades. My guess would be that most of what we are yet to learn will have to do with two posh sports of vital interest to the leading party: golf and polo. Live and learn.

YET ANOTHER CHALLENGE FOR VUGRINEC AND HIS STOOGES (September 7, 2014)

I just heard from some friends that one of the leading newspapers in Croatia has published an interview with the German investor who wanted to build a polo course under the Motovun hill. He has been in the news as of late with many a story about corruption in Motovun and Istria as a whole ("Polo, Golf," July 25, 2014). After some search, I found a copy of the newspaper. All I wanted to see was how many people from Motovun were mentioned by name. To my disappointment, the only two people who appear in the article are the former governor of Istria, Ivan Jakovčić, who is now a member of the European Parliament, and one of his closest business associates, Branko Curić, who used to lead both a public and a private company promoting golf on the peninsula ("Conflict of Interests Defined," January 10, 2009). The German investor accuses them both of

attempted bribery. He has even undergone a polygraph test about his claims. And in Germany, of all places. But the former mayor of Motovun, Slobodan Vugrinec, is nowhere to be found in the interview. The same holds for his closest associates from the municipality, whose names are best not mentioned at this stage. All the German investor had to say was that the leading people from the municipality and their closest friends were involved in a land scam surrounding polo development. That is almost verbatim what I had written about golf development many years ago (“Croatia Spells Conflict of Interests,” October 3, 2008). Golf and polo are the same in this regard, it goes without saying. Back then, Vugrinec and the entire municipal council took me to court for libel. I wonder whether they will take the German investor to court, as well. Since we are making exactly the same accusations against the very same people, they simply must. This is yet another challenge for Vugrinec and his stooges, no doubt.

HOMO HOMINI HOMO (November 15, 2014)

Slobodan Vugrinec rarely comes to Motovun as of late. I have not seen him for quite some time. It must have been months already. First he lost the municipal elections, when he was running for mayor for the fourth time, and then he was ousted from the municipal council because he did not reside in the hilltown, as he pretended for many a year. On top of all this, he is now facing serious accusations in connection with polo development to the east of the Motovun hill. Together with several of his closest associates from the Istrian Democratic Assembly, he is being accused of machinations with land. What is more, the former leader of the peninsular party is being accused for corruption in connection with polo development in Motovun. Ivan Jakovčić is in the European Parliament right now, but he is threatened even there. Anyhow, I just learned that Vugrinec is quite active in local politics to this day. Yesterday evening was a meeting of the municipal council, and several people have seen him with all council members from his party both before and after the meeting. He is active, and chances are that he is preparing yet another strike against the current mayor and the Independents behind him. Interestingly, both meetings took place away from the hilltown itself. There was a clandestine ring to them, no doubt. What could Vugrinec and the Istrian Democratic Assembly be scheming? We will learn soon enough, but it is amazing to observe local politics from some distance. Humble wolves could never come up with so much bile. Indeed, humans are unbeatable at it. *Homo homini homo*, as I love to remind myself and everyone around me. *Et nihil est peior quam homo.* *Pace* Vugrinec, but you are only human.

WORTH FIGHTING FOR (November 23, 2014)

I rallied against fake golf in Motovun in 2005, when I realized it had nothing to do with the posh sport. Rather, it was a part of the real estate boom that started around the turn of the millennium and collapsed with the financial crash in 2008. Golf never came to the hilltown, but it was the crash that ultimately stopped it. However, the crash took some time to take hold in Croatia. The very same year, I ended up in court for everything I had done against fake golf. The golf lobby was still hopeful at the time that everything would go smoothly after a few jitters in America, where the real estate boom had started and whence it subsequently spread across the globe.

The then mayor of Motovun piled up three cases against me, two for libel and one for insult. As a local champion of the golf lobby that that was very strong in Istria and that reached all the way to Zagreb, he wanted to crush me ahead of the municipal elections in 2009. Although he lost the libel cases, he won the insult one. And I am still appealing against decisions of the municipal and regional courts in Istria. Due to the incompetence of the Croatian judicial system, I am still in court six years later. Before going to Strasbourg with my final appeal, I had to appeal to the highest court in the country, but I have been waiting for its decision for more than three years already. The misery may take many more years still.

Now, would I rally against fake golf in Motovun had I known what was in store? If asked this straightforward question three or four years ago, I would have no difficulty answering it. Had I known what was in store, I would keep my mouth shut. Things are changing, though. If asked the same question today, I would not rush with an answer. Upon some reflection, it is quite likely that I would still rally against anything that might harm the hilltown and its surroundings in spite of everything that has happened to me in the meanwhile. And the reason for this change in my attitude has to do with the fact that I am much closer to the local community at this juncture than I was three or four years ago. The new mayor of Motovun and his affiliates make a big difference in my mind. The hilltown is worth fighting for once again.

ON CROATIA, CORRUPTION, AND THE COURTS (November 24, 2014)

According to an article on the website of my Internet service provider, which appears to be carefully researched, the fight against corruption in Croatia is only a myth. Out of untold spectacular arrests the last few years, very few cases involving politicians and officials have been brought to completion so far. Most of these cases are dragging on and on. Many of them will ultimately get nowhere, albeit at a snail's pace, and the arrested politicians and officials will eventually be released. In the last analysis, the court system is in their favor. Although thousands

upon thousands of corrupt politicians and officials should be behind bars by now, and for hefty terms, most of them are not even facing prosecution. As I like to put it, it is the Croatian court system that shelters the corrupt politicians and officials (“Slinging Stones at Goliath,” May 25, 2014). It is their impregnable shield. On top of that, nothing can be done against the court system. It is beyond reach. Thus, today’s article about the fight against corruption in Croatia being only a myth will get nowhere. If any of those who control the court system chance upon it, it will entice only a smile.

WHY DO CROATIANS PUT THEIR LAST HOPES IN STRASBOURG? (December 2, 2014)

While I was having my morning coffee at the hotel, I browsed through today’s issue of the leading local newspaper, *Glas Istre (The Voice of Istria)*. An article dealing with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg attracted most of my attention. Although I skimmed most of it, I read some parts of it with due care. Apparently, the number of cases that come to the court is disproportional to the size of the country. One of the Croatian judges currently in Strasbourg, Ksenija Turković, says that more than twelve-thousand cases from Croatia have come to the court thus far. Out of these, more than eight-thousand were rejected by the court because they had nothing to do with human rights.

Pedja Grbin, who leads one of the bodies concerned with constitutional issues in the Croatian parliament, is quoted as saying that “Strasbourg” has become a common word in Croatia. He has nothing to say about the reason for this linguistic peculiarity, though. Jasna Omejec, the head of the Croatian Constitutional Court is also quoted about the propensity of Croatian citizens to put their last hope in Strasbourg, but I could not figure out what she was getting at. In the end, none of the people interviewed suggested that the importance of Strasbourg in Croatia only shows how poorly the judicial system in the country actually works. People thus put all their hopes in a court out of the reach of Croatian judges, many of whom are seen as pawns of their political masters.

I could not but think of my own litigation, which is also liable to end up in Strasbourg. It has to do with political persecution in Croatia, where political opponents are taken to court if everything else fails to stop them. One way or another, my complaint against the three court cases lodged against me by Slobodan Vugrinec, the former mayor of Motovun, will surely fit Strasbourg’s remit. And all three cases came my way just ahead of municipal elections in 2009. If this is not about human rights, I have no idea what is. Once again, my hope in Strasbourg only shows how little I trust the Croatian judiciary, which is squarely in the hands of the political establishment ever since Croatia’s independence. As for *Glas Istre*, it is nothing but a political

newspaper, as well. The Istrian Democratic Assembly, the party that has the Istrian peninsula in its tight embrace since independence, is undoubtedly behind it.

MY FOUR POINTS FOR STRASBOURG (December 3, 2014)

My appeal to Strasbourg pops up in my mind at least once and maybe even twice a week. By now, it has become no less than an obsession of mine. Each and every time this happens, I go through four points that explain why I am going to Strasbourg in the first place. My human rights are in question, to be sure. I was a victim of political repression in Croatia, where repression survives to this day after many decades of communist party rule, and my four points show that beyond any doubt. Here goes:

First, all three court cases against me appeared just before the municipal elections in 2009. Two were for libel and one for insult. One of the libel cases was lodged by Slobodan Vugrinec, the mayor of Motovun at the time, and another by the Municipality of Motovun. The second libel case was pushed through the Municipal Council by EfreM Močibob, one of the closest associates of the mayor. The insult case was lodged by the former mayor once again. As I was a staunch opponent of crooked golf at the time, the three cases are a clear sign of political repression.

Second, the two libel cases fell at the Municipal Court in Pazin, but the insult case stuck. I appealed to the regional court in Pula, but the case stuck once again, and I thus made my final appeal to the Constitutional Court in Zagreb, which is a precondition of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. However, likening the mayor to a cockroach at a public gathering was meant as a metaphor for his undemocratic behavior. At the gathering in question I actually said that the mayor did everything in the dark and behind closed doors, just like a cockroach. But the court refused to acknowledge this obvious metaphor. The insult case thus hangs on the word itself without any explanation of its origin.

Third, the mayor's lawyer came from the office of Goran Veljović in Pula. At the time, the same office represented the mayor, the municipality, the investor in Motovun golf called Jupiter Adria, and many other investors in golf in Istria at the time. In addition, the same office drafted the golf law that was pushed through the Croatian parliament by Ivo Sanader, the prime minister at the time. Effectively a law of eminent domain, it treated golf as an activity of national interest. Land on any planned golf course could be expropriated without any legal difficulty.

Fourth, the judge who got my case at the Municipal Court in Pazin, Denis Hek, is known to be very close to the Istrian Democratic

Assembly, the leading party in Istria since Croatian independence. The head of the party, Ivan Jakovčić, was also the governor of Istria at the time, and he was known to be an enthusiastic supporter of golf development across the Istrian peninsula. At the time, there were more than twenty golf courses planned in Istria alone out of more than sixty across Croatia. In short, the Istrian Democratic Assembly was doing its best to silence opponents to golf development, and the judge helped along as best he could.

These four points I can recite even in my dream. Having felt political repression on my own skin, I know precisely how it feels. Being persecuted for likening someone to a cockroach smacks of Asia or Africa rather than Europe. Even though Slobodan Vugrinec stands behind the three cases lodged against me, massive political machinery stood behind him all the while. It went from Motovun to Pula to Zagreb, and it is quite possible that it went to Austria from there. For both Sanader and Jakovčić were close to Jörg Haider, a politician at the head of the Hypo Alpe Adria Bank in Austria, which was behind many a crooked deal involving land grabs across Croatia and other countries that came into being after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Not surprisingly, some of the land involved in the Motovun golf course was in the crafty bank's hands.

THE COCKROACH COUNTRY (February 23, 2015)

My appeal with the highest court in Croatia crosses my mind almost daily. When will I get the final verdict in this travesty of a country? When will I finally get a chance to appeal to the court in Strasbourg? For crying out loud, I appealed against the insult verdict of the lower courts in Pazin and Pula in 2011. And the insult case was lodged against me by the then mayor of Motovun, Slobodan Vugrinec, in 2009. His first two cases for libel, which were lodged in 2008 and 2009, failed even in Istria, where he had all the political backing he could ever dream of in a so-called democratic country. In retrospect, Vugrinec knew what he was doing to me. Unable to stop me in any other way in my opposition to fraudulent golf development in Motovun, where real estate prices were skyrocketing at the time, he went for the courts. He knew it would take years, and maybe even decades, for me to extricate myself from the clutches of the legal system. After all, he got a degree in political science in communist Yugoslavia, where every trick in the book was invented to thwart a wide spectrum of political enemies. And it is precisely ex-communist cadres like him who took the power in Croatia after independence. Cockroaches one and all, they knew tricks galore. Used to doing everything behind closed doors and in the dark, they created the cockroach country in their own image. The courts are part and parcel of the cozy arrangement. As for my appeal, it is lingering behind the same closed doors and in the dark. Perhaps forever.

THE DECISION (March 8, 2015)

I will be going back to Motovun in a bit more than two weeks, and so I searched the World Wide Web with a simple phrase: “Ranko Bon Motovun.” Anything that could connect me to the hilltown within the last couple of months would pop up among the findings. And so I came upon the decision of the Constitutional Court of Croatia regarding my appeal to the insult case lodged against me by Slobodan Vugrinec six years ago (“Vugrinec *versus* Bon: A Letter to the President of the Constitutional Court of Croatia Jasna Omejec,” July 18, 2012). I could not believe my eyes. The highest court in the country decided against my appeal on December 11, 2014, but I have not been informed about the decision. In fact, I discovered the verdict purely by chance. I immediately forwarded the document to my lawyer *via* electronic mail, and then I sent him a mobile-phone text-message about the whole thing. I am still waiting to hear from him, but my head is reeling. What is going on? I have been waiting for years to go to Strasbourg with my final appeal, but I have missed three whole months because of the fact that I have not been informed about the fate of my appeal with the Constitutional Court of Croatia (“My Four Points for Strasbourg,” December 3, 2014). At any rate, I must hear from my lawyer soon. This miserable country is well beyond me...

Addendum (March 25, 2015)

So many days later, I am still baffled by my unexpected discovery of the Constitutional Court’s decision about my appeal. I cannot figure out how long it has been on the World Wide Web, but I would assume that it was posted there not more than a month after the decision was made. But why have I not heard about it from the vaunted court or any other court involved in my litigation? The same holds for my lawyer. How much time will have to pass for the decision to officially reach me? The only guess I can make is that the courts in Istria are waiting until my chance to appeal to Strasbourg expires. And that is six months after the Constitutional Court’s decision. If that is the case, I will be notified of the decision soon after June 11, 2015, the deadline. Luckily, I discovered the decision all by myself, which gives me all the time in the world to prepare my appeal to Strasbourg. What does this tell you about the Croatian judicial system, though?

LIKE A NAIL IN THE COFFIN (March 9, 2015)

Now that I finally have the decision of the highest court in Croatia, which rejected my appeal against the decisions of lower courts in Istria, I am focusing on Strasbourg (“The Decision,” March 8, 2015). After the initial confusion, my mind is sharp again. To begin with, I need a good lawyer. The lawyer who has taken care of me so far may

not be up to the new legal challenge. He knows Istrian courts well, but that is about it. Even Zagreb is a bit too far for him, let alone Strasbourg. Anyhow, I am still waiting to hear from him, for he appears to be quite busy at this time.

In the meanwhile, I am thinking through my letter to the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. That is the only bit of my appeal that is actually in my own hands rather than in the hands of lawyers. In a thousand words or so, I must explain everything that has happened to me in Motovun ever since I started my fight against crooked golf, which came to Istria together with the real estate boom originating in America in the early years of the new millennium. The then mayor of the municipality was part and parcel of the real estate scam orchestrated on the peninsula by the then leader of the Istrian Democratic Assembly, the political party that did its best to capitalize on the real estate boom for its top brass.

The legal onslaught against me is nothing but political repression, which includes the court system. My appeal in Strasbourg is not only against the former mayor of Motovun, but also against his political masters who go all the way up the political hierarchy in Croatia. The then prime minister was squarely behind the golf scam across the country. My victory in Strasbourg will thus be much bigger than is suggested by the legal case itself. And that is the only pleasure I can get from the encroaching misery at this point in time. At any rate, my letter to Strasbourg will take much of my time in the next month or so. Like a nail in the coffin, every word will have to be just right. Nay, perfect.

THE STRASBOURG BOOK (March 16, 2015)

After so many years, my troubles with Slobodan Vugrinec, the former mayor of Motovun, are difficult to piece together without some effort. What happened and when? How did I react to it? What happened next? The misery started in 2008, and much has happened over the seven years in between. Thus I decided to write a lengthy piece outlining the whole story. I thought of it as my introduction to the court in Strasbourg, which should present my troubles in a coherent way. A thousand words would do the job, I thought. But then I realized that it would be useful to append to that piece of writing all the relevant pieces, starting with the one that led to the libel case in the first place (“Croatia Spells Conflict of Interests,” October 3, 2008). When I started collaging all the pieces, it became obvious that I was facing yet another book. The Strasbourg book, as I started calling it immediately. Whether or not it will find a publisher is irrelevant at this stage, for I can always offer it for free on the Ca’ Bon Gallery website. Who knows, the Strasbourg judges may find it an interesting read, as well. Only the front piece will be crucial for them to read. The rest is up to their literary tastes, but I should certainly put it

together. Besides, I will have a load of readers in Motovun, of all places. Hooray!

Addendum I (March 17, 2015)

Only a day later, the book is already in my hands. About forty-thousand words in length, it has a memorable title, as well. As usual, it comes from one of the pieces in the selection (“Dying to Go to Strasbourg,” October 25, 2013). A picture of Motovun is on the front page, it goes without saying. I will add a few more pieces to the selection in the days to come, but my main job is to write the introduction. The letter to the judges of Strasbourg, that is. Given its importance, it will surely take me a while to put together. At any rate, the book started me thinking about Croatian publishers once again. I bet that not a single one among them would even think of publishing a book in English, no matter the subject. It would be a wonderful tease to send a book proposal to the very best among them...

Addendum II (March 18, 2015)

No more than two days later, the book is on the World Wide Web already. About five-thousand words longer than yesterday, it is available on the Ca’ Bon Gallery website for free (www.cabongallery.org). Peekaboo! Given that nearly all the pieces that make up the newest selection were penned more than three months ago, the Croatian libel law is not a threat any longer. But the most recent pieces have been written with utmost care, it goes without saying. As for the Strasbourg judges, I wish them all the fun with my appeal. I can only hope their verdict will be as much fun for me.

Addendum III (March 20, 2015)

For better or worse, I keep adding to the Strasbourg book, which now counts some fifty-thousand words. Every once in a while, I think of yet another piece of writing that should be added to the selection. And I rush to put it in its rightful chronological place. But it is high time to abandon all hope that the book intended for the judges of the Court of Human Rights could ever contain everything that is relevant to the story of my plight in Croatia. In a way, every single word I have written ever since I was surprised by the first court case lodged against me by the former mayor of Motovun could be added to the book. The three court cases have changed my life in many different ways. And how. At any rate, fifty-thousand words should be enough for my present purposes. Phew!

POSTSCRIPTUM XVI (March 17, 2015)

This book about my legal struggle in Croatia is a big surprise for me. It crossed my mind only yesterday morning, but it is already finished

and ready to go the following afternoon. Amazingly, it took a bit more than twenty-four hours to hammer down. It will come useful with my appeal to the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, but I hope it will attract a wider readership along the way. Human rights are far from Croatia's forte. In many ways, it is still behind the proverbial Iron Curtain. Although it is hard to believe that Strasbourg could help it out of the quagmire, hope is all I have at present. Undying hope, no less.

Sundry Afterthoughts

THE CROOKED FACES (March 18, 2015)

Now that my last book about corruption and organized crime in Croatia is in print, as it were, I have hard time looking at passers by in the streets and squares of the Croatian capital. I see crooks and robbers and murderers everywhere around me. Golf development offered yet another opportunity for wrongdoing to them all. And they would grab any such opportunity whenever it presented itself. Corruption and organized crime is in their bones for more than a millennium of servitude to many a master in the bloody Balkans. Disgusted, I do my best not to look into the crooked faces. It will take me a few days to shake off my last book. The best I can do under the circumstances is to remind myself of yoga. And enlightenment, the only goal worth pursuing on this godforsaken planet. If only I could master the first two limbs of yoga any time soon...

A SMALL GIFT TO A SMALL NEWSPAPER (March 18, 2015)

I just sent my last book in a Portable Document Format file to Ranko Borovečki, the editor of *Glas Istre (The Voice of Istria)*, the leading newspaper on the peninsula that is mentioned often enough in the book's pages. More often than not, though, it is mentioned in derogatory terms. "A small gift..." runs the subject of my electronic-mail message, "... to a small newspaper!" The message is plain enough, as well as right on the money in terms of size. Still, there is much for him to learn from the book about his political bosses, I reckon. I can only hope the good editor can read English. Perhaps I am overly optimistic on this score, as usual.

Addendum (July 15, 2016)

I did not expect any reaction from Borovečki, it goes without saying. And I did not get any. Zilch. The same holds for the editors of other newspapers in Croatia, all of whom I regaled with a copy of the book about my struggle with Croatian courts. Not a peep from any of them,

let alone an article or two about my predicament. Still, I wanted them to get a sniff of what lied ahead. Of course, I was expecting a victory at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. In that case, they will all get the same book one more time, but with a happy end of sorts. And Borovečki's newspaper will be uppermost on my mind both because it is geared toward Istria, where both a municipal and the regional court clobbered me in turn, and because it is in the hands of the Istrian Democratic Assembly, the leading political party on the peninsula since Croatian independence. I am thus dying to see Borovečki's reaction to the book in its final edition. Will he dare shove it aside one more time? Or will he do his best to limit the damages to the party bosses hovering above him?

BELGRADE, ZAGREB (March 23, 2015)

Nenad Popović, one of the Croatian publishers of renown, told me years ago that publishing a book in English in Zagreb, let alone anywhere else in Croatia, would be nigh impossible. He would only wave his hand at my protestations. When I would remind him of my books published in Belgrade, he would just laugh. In spite of his advice, I have been trying to find a publisher for my last book about the legal troubles foisted upon me by the former mayor of Motovun. So far, there has been no sign of interest from any of them. When I mentioned Popović's advice to one of them, all I got was laughter. And plenty of it. Although my book is about corruption and organized crime surrounding golf development in Croatia, it apparently has no chance in any language other than Croatian. I do not dare even mention my books in English published in Belgrade, and by different publishers. God forbid. From the perspective of publishers in Zagreb, the two cities are not on the same planet, nor in the same galaxy. So, why ever mention them in the same breath?

DYING TO GO TO STRASBOURG, AGAIN (March 24, 2015)

I am leaving Zagreb soon, and so I am completing all sorts of chores at a clip. One of them was printing out three copies of my new book for the Strasbourg judges. It took me about a quarter of an hour to have them printed and bound in one of the best copying services in the Croatian capital. Nothing of this sort is available in Motovun, it goes without saying. Embellished with a photograph of the hilltown bathing in sunshine, the three copies now rest in front of me. I pick one of them up every now and then, open it at random, and read a few lines. And I am over the moon with my own writing. "Lucky judges," I grin to myself after a while, "they will have loads of fun at long last!" Indeed, I cannot but see them grinning in turn at my relentless tirade against corruption and organized crime in Croatia. The government, the political parties, and the court system behind the whole lot are in

my focus much of the time. By comparison, the former mayor of Motovun is the size of, well, a common household bug.

MY MOST SINCERE THANKS (April 2, 2015)

Ever since I accidentally discovered on the World Wide Web the decision of the Constitutional Court in Zagreb concerning my litigation with the former mayor of Motovun, I have been trying to get in touch with my lawyer (“The Decision,” March 8, 2015). I sent him a load of electronic-mail messages, and I called him many times by phone. The only response I got from someone in his office was that the notice about the fee I must pay for the cockroach insult would come to me by mail from the Municipal Court in Pazin. In the meanwhile, there was nothing I ought to do. All my questions about the appeal to Strasbourg have remained unanswered, though.

Thus I let my lawyer go and engaged another one, who has considerable experience with Strasbourg. After much thought, the decision was made yesterday evening. Amazingly, my former lawyer responded at once to my electronic-mail message about his release. The transfer of all the documents from the former to the new lawyer will apparently take some time, but this morning I sent an advance payment to the new lawyer. I also sent him a copy of my new book for the judges of the European Court of Human Rights (“The Strasbourg Book,” March 16, 2015). I hope he will have all the ammunition he needs well ahead of the six-month deadline, which falls on June 11, 2015. The magical date.

Having done all this, there is nothing else for me to do. Now everything rests with my new lawyer. I can prod him from time to time, but that is about it. Once the appeal goes to Strasbourg, there will be a long wait. Assuming that it is not rejected out of hand, the appeal will take at least a year, if not longer. And the best I can do in the meanwhile is to stay cool, as the expression goes. Yoga time, in short. Regular yoga practice is my best bet, no doubt. With the help of the former mayor of Motovun, I may well reach enlightenment by the time I get the final verdict from Strasbourg. My most sincere thanks thus go to him well ahead of time. One way or another, he will end up being my greatest benefactor ever.

“THERE’LL BE NO WITHDRAWAL” (April 12, 2015)

Thus a persistent inner voice the last few days. The phrase comes to me over and over again, and when I least expect it, but I have no idea what it refers to. I am not contemplating any withdrawal, anyhow. What is going on? *The Bhagavad Gita* comes to mind at long last, but the connection still puzzles me. Is Krishna talking into my ear? Am I in Arjuna’ shoes out of the blue? One way or another, the phrase

reminds me of the barren Strasbourg battlefield. There, the Croatian judges are already lined for battle against me. “There’ll be no withdrawal,” I raise my head with renewed determination. “And victory will bring no rejoicing, either.”

BON *VERSUS* CROATIA (April 13, 2015)

My appeal to the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg is in the making. My new lawyer now has everything he needs to put it together by the deadline a bit less than three months from now. But I am actually not appealing this time around. The Croatian Constitutional Court has decided in favor of Slobodan Vugrinec, the former mayor of Motovun, and that is that. The case of Vugrinec *versus* Bon is finished. He has won and I have lost the battle in Croatian courts. In fact, now I am suing Croatia for all the abuses I have gone through in its crooked courts, where my human rights have been trampled from start to finish. If I win, it is Croatia that will lose rather than Vugrinec. I will pay him for supposed insult, but Croatia will pay me for all the abuses of my human rights. Whatever ultimately happens in Strasbourg, though, it is a special pleasure to be suing Croatia. Ever since my move from England, I have gone through so much trouble in this country that it is indeed an enormous pleasure to be suing it at long last. And I can already see my name on a Strasbourg file: Bon *versus* Croatia. The bliss!

Addendum (July 2, 2015)

I just learned from my lawyer that the court in Strasbourg has officially accepted my case. This is the first piece of good news, for it means that it is in perfect order, legally speaking. Now my case has an official number and title, too: 26933/15 Bon *versus* Croatia. Ah, the number makes me so happy! A lucky number if there ever has been one. And the official title is nothing if not perfect. Nay, sublime. Hooray!

NOTHING BUT JUSTICE (April 14, 2015)

Ranko Bon’s latest selection from his *Residua*, entitled rather pathetically *Dying to Go to Strasbourg*, is a perplexing read. Having lost a court case for insult to the former mayor of Motovun, whom he called a cockroach on account of his undemocratic ways, he is going to Strasbourg in hope of justice. His new book, which can be found on the Ca’ Bon Gallery website (www.cabongallery.org), purports to demonstrate that corruption and organized crime rule not only golf development in Croatia, but its judicial system, as well. The European Court of Human Rights is thus raised by the author to the pedestal of justice at its purest and most sublime. One cannot but wonder where will the poor author go if and when he fails to find justice in

Strasbourg, either. Mars? Or perhaps Alpha Centauri? But the author seems adamant about justice in spite of his understanding that corruption and organized crime can hardly be limited to Croatia, let alone Europe. Just like cockroaches, they can be found everywhere on this planet. In spite of this, he wants nothing but justice, and at any cost. For all its pathos, the new book shows that the author is only human. Many years in Croatian courts was all it took.

From Dario Dandolo's "*Fiat iustitia et pereat mundus*,"
De natura verbalis, Vol. XXXIII, No. 1, Spring 2015,
p. 88 (in Italian).

SEE YOU IN COURT, CROATIA! (May 11, 2015)

The European Court of Human Rights was established in 1950 in Strasbourg on the basis of the European Convention of Human Rights, which was drafted the same year by the Council of Europe that was founded a year earlier. Croatia signed the convention in 1997. Ever since, eleven-thousand four-hundred and ten cases from Croatia reached the Strasbourg court. Only two-hundred and eighty-six of these cases were accepted by the court, and the Croatian government had to pay a bit more than three-million euros in damages for all the cases in which the court had decided against Croatia. All told, more than ninety-seven percent of cases from Croatia were rejected. Given all the givens, what are the chances of my upcoming case in Strasbourg? Well, a bit less than three percent. Depressing, no doubt. And yet, I feel quite optimistic about the final outcome of my case against Croatia. Why? Because most Croatians mistake their many miseries in this country with the violation of their human rights. In my case, there can hardly be any doubt about the connection. To begin with, it has to do with the freedom of expression, and then with the right to a fair trial. See you in court, Croatia! As for my chances of eventually winning, I would put them around ninety-seven percent.

MY STRASBOURG GAMBIT (May 16, 2015)

My Strasbourg case is on my mind much of the time. Each time my lawyer asks anything from me, I do whatever he wishes as quickly as I possibly can. And then I wait to hear from him again while doing my best not to bug him with too many silly questions. But the case is more or less complete by now. It would take my lawyer a week or at most two to complete it and send it to the court of my dreams. Only then will I be able to forget about my case. Once it will be out of my hands, it will be out of my mind, as well. Whatever the court ultimately decides is fine with me. If it throws the case out for any reason, fine. If it decides against me, also fine. Bereft of courts even higher anyplace on the planet, I will have nowhere to appeal to, anyhow. And if it decides in my favor, fine again. Although I will

surely relish my final victory, no matter how briefly, it will not get into my head. For the war will be far from over. Come what may, Croatia will still be crawling with cockroaches for many years to come, if not forever. But I am pretty convinced at this stage that I am indeed indifferent as to the outcome of my Strasbourg gambit. Once the case is out of my hands, it is as good as done away and finished with. At least this is how I feel today. And how I hope I will also feel tomorrow.

CONTENT ANALYSIS: STRASBOURG (May 27, 2015)

Lately, Strasbourg is on my mind ever more often. As my case against Croatia is taking its final shape, it is on my mind day after day. Thus I realized it was high time for another exercise in content analysis, as I often do when I am preoccupied with pestering thoughts of any kind. The first time Strasbourg appears in my *magnum opus* is in 2007, but it actually appears only in an *addendum* from 2015. It appears twice in 2009, thrice in 2010, seventeen times in 2011, eight times in 2012, nine times in 2013 and 2014 each, and nineteen times in 2015. This adds up to sixty-eight pieces of writing. Goodness gracious! The first peak in 2011 had to do with my appeal to the Constitutional Court of Croatia against the decisions of the Municipal Court in Pazin and the Regional Court in Pula regarding the three trumped-up cases lodged in 2008 and 2009 against me by the former mayor of Motovun, Slobodan Vugrinec, which was the last step before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. And this year's peak has to do with my case against Croatia and its corrupt courts, which will go to Strasbourg any day now, and perhaps even today. I can hardly wait, too. Whatever eventually happens with the case, I sincerely hope Strasbourg will quickly fade away in my writings. With some luck, it will disappear altogether in just a few years. Hooray!

THE SOLEMN DATE (June 2, 2015)

I just received a copy of my court case against Croatia, which is already on its way to Strasbourg. My lawyer mailed it on May 30, 2015, the solemn date. As I write, a copy of the form of the European Court of Human Rights is staring at me. The fourth item on the form catches my attention: nationality. Croatian and British, the form says. And it crosses my mind that my British nationality may well be a good omen in this particular case. All the nationalities are equal before the law, no doubt, but some are more equal than others. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) is roughly my age, at any rate. Indeed, my date of birth is the third item on the form. The form says April 17, 1946. Fingers crossed.

CONTENT ANALYSIS: SLOBODAN VUGRINEC (September 22, 2015)

Having been reading my *Residua* on a daily basis lately, I cannot but notice that Slobodan Vugrinec, the former mayor of Motovun, appears in my writings all too often. And over quite a number of years. His name first appears in 1980, albeit in an *addendum* written in 2013. It appears twice in 2004, a year after my move to the hilltown, and once each in 2006 and 2007. Starting in 2008, when he took me to court for the first time, there is an avalanche of pieces and *addenda* in which his name appears. So, Vugrinec comes up eight times in 2008, four times in 2009, eight times in 2010, seven times in 2011, six times in 2012, nine times in 2013, twelve times in 2014, and eight times in 2015, not including this piece. And this year is far from finished. All together, his name can be found sixty-seven times over eleven years. And I am including here only the pieces in which his name is spelled out in full rather than alluded to in some more or less subtle way. In short, I am quite obsessed with this man. The current peak in 2014 is quite interesting in this context. What makes it even worse, I will continue being obsessed with him until I get the final decision from the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, where my case concerning political repression in Croatia is currently being considered. If everything goes smoothly, this will be sometime in 2016, eight years after the legal conundrum was initiated by Vugrinec himself in dodgy Croatian courts. And all these years will have been wasted on account of one man, whom I challenged on account of crooked golf development in Motovun. At this stage, I can only hope that Vugrinec will vanish from my writings after next year, and literally so. But what if the emotional trauma he has put me through can never go away? And what if my longing for revenge cannot be accommodated by any legal means available to me?

SATAN'S FEE (October 22, 2015)

The blue envelope with registered mail from the Municipal Court in Pazin that I have long expected has finally arrived in this morning's mail. Amazingly, the final decision of the Constitutional Court in Zagreb concerning this case was made more than ten months ago, but the court in Pazin is not famous for its speed. Actually, all Croatian courts are famous for their slowness. At any rate, I must pay 26,666 kuna in fifteen days for my insult of the former mayor of Motovun, Slobodan Vugrinec. Currently, the average monthly salary in Croatia is 5,268 kuna, which means that the penalty amounts to a bit more than five average salaries in this godforsaken country. As I like to joke, this is the most expensive cockroach in history. I likened Vugrinec to a cockroach on account of his undemocratic behavior, for he did everything in the dark and behind closed doors, but the metaphor was not accepted by the Croatian courts. A cockroach is a cockroach. Period. Anyhow, this morning I paid 13,500 kuna to the court in

Pazin. In a few days, I will pay additional 6,500 kuna, but I will reserve the last payment of 6,666 kuna for the last day allowed by the court. Satan's fee, to be sure.

Addendum I (October 30, 2015)

It took me a while to remember that the penalty I must pay for my insult of the former mayor of Motovun is only a part of the total expenses involved in this case. In addition, there were fees charged by my two lawyers, as well as various court charges. All told, my expenses amount to 39,724 kuna so far. And this is equal to seven and a half average monthly salaries in Croatia. The most expensive cockroach in history, indeed. Still, I can only hope that my legal battle is now over and that there will be no more expenses to cover. Fingers crossed.

Addendum II (November 3, 2015)

Having already paid the total of 20,000 kuna last month, this morning I paid the last installment of the insult fee. As I expected, it was an enormous joy to make it 6,666 kuna exactly. Which is why I could hardly wait for this day to make this felicitous payment to the court in Pazin. As the fateful day approached, I got ever more jittery about it, too. Now that my legal quagmire of seven full years is squarely behind me at long last, I feel pretty calm. Actually, I feel blissfully peaceful. All that remains for me to do is wait for the decision of the court in Strasbourg. As far as I am concerned, though, that is an entirely different bag of beans. Now I am the plaintiff, and the defendant is this godforsaken country I begrudgingly call my own. Although the eventual penalty fee is of little concern to me at this juncture, it will be far from negligible one fine day. In fact, it will be deliciously ample. Satan's fee, my ass.

ALL THE CRAP FOISTED UPON MY SHOULDERS (January 7, 2016)

As of late, my case in Strasbourg crosses my mind increasingly often. My lawyer mailed it to the court at the end of May last year ("The Solemn Date," June 2, 2015). And I learned from my lawyer a month later that the case was officially accepted by the Strasbourg court ("Bon *versus* Croatia," April 13, 2015). Given that it usually takes no more than a year for the court to reach its decision, I am expecting it within a few months, at which point I will complete my book about the whole ordeal ("The Strasbourg Book," March 16, 2015; "By Way of Introduction: My Plea to the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg," March 17, 2015). My wish for the ordeal to finally end notwithstanding, I now feel that the court's decision is likely to cause a major disruption in my life. Out of the blue, I will have to return to this world, as it were. As well as to deal with all the crap foisted upon

my shoulders by the former mayor of Motovun, Slobodan Vugrinec. Now that my liberation is my one and only concern, the Strasbourg case is the only major disruption on my way. I shudder. Even death strikes me as a minor jolt by comparison.

THE REGISTER OF TRAITORS (January 25, 2016)

One of the ministers of the new Croatian government, which is as right wing as they come, has recently declared that he will set up a register of traitors containing the names of all those who have done anything against Croatia's interests. Responsible for the homeland war veterans and a retired military officer, the minister appeared not to be kidding with his threat. Given my case against Croatia in the European Court of Human Rights alone, I am pretty likely to end up on the register ("Bon *versus* Croatia," April 13, 2015). Thus I was surprised by the appearance of a website under the same name that came alive only hours after the minister's announcement. Put together by an art collective from Zagreb, the site invites all the traitors to register themselves as soon as possible. Within hours, thousands of people dutifully registered. Even though some fake names appear on it, which spoils the fun, the bulk of them appear to be genuine. And the reasons given are a joy to read. "I do not stand up when the national anthem is played," admits one. "I missed today's mass," confesses another. Most of the self-proclaimed traitors report that they are either not Croatian or Catholic enough. Delighted, I was tempted to register myself, but reason eventually prevailed. Chances are that my name will appear on the real register sooner or later, and especially if the court in Strasbourg decides in my favor. But the spoof made me happy. Really happy. Who knows, the intrepid art collective may even manage to dislodge the minister's scary plan. At long last, I have a perfectly good reason not to be a traitor of my homeland.

STRASBOURG ON MY MIND (April 24, 2016)

My case against Croatia and its crooked courts went to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg at the end of May last year. The court officially accepted the case in early June. According to my lawyer, the court's decision usually takes about a year. As May is just behind the corner, and June is not very far off, Strasbourg is on my mind ever more often. Even though I am far from anxious about my case, for it matters little to me which way the court's decision will ultimately go, I am still eager to see the end of the misery foisted upon me in 2008. Nearly eight years and counting! "Strasbourg," my mind reminds me every now and then. Which is what just happened one more time. Without any rhyme or reason, my mind gave me yet another jolt: "Strasbourg." But all I can do is sit and wait. And I can only hope that the ordeal will be over within a few months—say, by the end of this summer at the latest. If I lose the case, there will be

nothing left for me to do. The end. If I win, I will have to make the court's decision resonate through the Croatian media, crooked as they are, as well. With my lawyer's help, I will also have to press the Croatian state for all the money it owes me for damages. Who knows, perhaps it would suit me better if the court eventually decided against me?!

STRASBOURG ON MY MIND, AGAIN (May 9, 2016)

As I wrote a few weeks ago, Strasbourg is on my mind as of late ("Strasbourg on My Mind," April 24, 2016). If I lose, no problem. What if I win, though? Thus I find myself preparing for the latter possibility, which also strikes me as much more likely than the former one. The crooked Croatian courts are the pits, no doubt whatsoever. Getting the money for damages will be squarely in my lawyer's hands. Dealing with the officious Croatian state is not my cup of tea, anyhow. But neither is dealing with the spooky Croatian media. Perish the thought. I want nothing to do with any newspapers, let alone radio and television stations in this country. Interviews are out for good ("No More Interviews, Again and Again," December 15, 2015). This I will leave in my lawyer's able hands, as well. Besides, it cannot but be good advertising for him and his office in Zagreb. Which is why I am now working on everything he will need to do once the court in Strasbourg announces its decision. Assuming it is in my favor, of course. I am collecting the electronic-mail addresses of all the editors of leading newspapers, sketching my lawyer's letter to them, and thinking through all the attachments to the fateful missive. The court's decision is uppermost among them. Luckily, it will be in plain Croatian. My book about the fraudulent legal war against me launched by the former mayor of Motovun and the Municipality of Motovun comes next to my mind ("The Strasbourg Book," March 16, 2015). Even though it is in English, a few Croatian journalists will still be able to figure out its key parts. And so on, and so forth. As soon as I hear from Strasbourg, I will strike. Watch out, Croatia! Another bombshell is in the making!

CALLING SOMEONE A HUMAN (May 29, 2016)

Slobodan Vugrinec visited Motovun yesterday. I saw him and a few members of his family twice within an hour or so, but it has taken me an entire day to collect my thoughts about the unexpected encounter. So, how did I feel? To begin with, I felt nothing more than a slight discomfort at the sight of his face. And how do I feel a day later? I am happy to report that I feel nothing akin to anger or hatred. I do not feel anything like disgust, either. Even though he has put me through years of suffering, which was quite intense at times, I am free from any strong emotions. More important, I would liken him to a cockroach never again. By now, the metaphor for doing everything in the dark

and behind closed doors strikes me as threadbare. Besides, the cockroach is an innocent creature, as well as a creature that deserves nothing but praise for its clever ways. If I would ever insult the former mayor of Motovun one more time, I would call him a human instead. As insults go, this is the most horrendous one I could ever imagine, but no court would accept his plea in this case. Amazingly, calling someone a human cannot possibly qualify as an insult anywhere on this planet in spite of all the evidence accumulated over the last five-thousand years or so. Miraculously, the most abominable creature of all is still not recognized as such. And Vugrinec is a human through and through.

STRASBOURG ON MY MIND, AGAIN AND AGAIN (July 9, 2016)

“Strasbourg,” my mind surprises me every once in a while for months now (“Strasbourg on My Mind,” April 24, 2016; and “Strasbourg on My Mind, Again,” May 9, 2016). As I wrote to my lawyer earlier today, I had hoped that the European Court of Human Rights would come up with its decision regarding my case against Croatia before the summer vacations this year, but the vacations are nigh already. The court accepted the case a bit more than thirteen months ago, and my lawyer told me that most cases take about a year. Whence my hope. Even if the case is decided upon soon after the summer vacations, I cannot expect the decision before the fall. But I have had enough of waiting. Enough is the word, too. After eight years, I am dying for the resolution of my misery. And misery it definitely is, I must admit. In spite of all my prowess with abandoning thought at will and for as long as I wish, my mind surprises me every now and then with the name of the capital city of the Alsace region in northeastern France: “Strasbourg.” I can only hope that this will end when my case is resolved in the fullness of time. After so many years, though, even hope starts wearing thin.

STOP THINKING ABOUT STRASBOURG (July 15, 2016)

Ever more anxious to see the end of the legal struggle through which I was forced by the former mayor of Motovun, I am spending ever more of my time on the website of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg (www.echr.coe.int). I am following the statistics, and especially those that pertain to Croatia, scheduled hearings, and recent cases resolved. From time to time, I search for my own case by entering all the relevant information: 26933/15 *Bon versus* Croatia. Somewhat belatedly, I am learning a great deal about the court and its ways. But the most important thing I have learned lately is that many of the recently resolved cases go quite a few years back in time. In other words, expecting the court’s decision roughly a year after it has accepted a case is unreasonable, to say the least. The court’s record

shows that only a small portion of the recently resolved cases were accepted in 2015, like my own. In short, it is time for me to leave the court's website alone. Its decision will reach me in due time, and I must find other ways to deal with anxiety that has built up over the years. Eight years, to be a bit more precise. Simply put, I must stop thinking about Strasbourg. Period. As far as the former mayor of Motovun is concerned, he can go fly a kite.

Addendum (December 18, 2016)

As of late, I check the vaunted court's website but rarely. It is clear to me by now that my case may well take several more years to be resolved. In the meanwhile, it makes no sense for me to fret about the whole thing. Although I would hope that my ultimate victory would make a splash in Croatia, I would actually be quite surprised by such an outcome. Chances are that most newspapers would give it only a brief mention far from the front page. The same holds for all the other media. If at all, they would mention it only in passing. Given that I would leave the whole thing to my lawyer, anyhow, it would be entirely up to him to advertise his legal victory. One way or another, I would keep out of the limelight. So, who the hell cares about Strasbourg?

TRUE ISTRIONS, AGAIN (August 31, 2016)

Although the next municipal elections will take place in early May next year, which is more than eight months away, Istria is already in the political mood. Istrian chauvinism and local patriotism are on the rise, as well. Those who come from other parts of Croatia are not exactly welcome. Neither are foreigners of any description. But it does not take much effort to figure out what is hiding behind the explosion of such feelings. True Istrians, as well as true inhabitants of so many towns and villages on the peninsula, stand to gain from their roots, and especially if they are members of true Istrian parties, such as the Istrian Democratic Assembly. As one can learn from the local media, people of this ilk are better off in their dealings with regional and local administrations. For instance, they pay less in rent of public properties they use, they have untold tax benefits, and they have easier access to precious programs sanctioned by the local government. To wit, Istrian chauvinism and local patriotism pay off quite handsomely. At long last, I understand what motivates true Istrians. Alas, it is only money!

ON THE POLITICS OF MANIPULATION AND DECEPTION
(September 11, 2016)

Last year, George Akerlof and Robert Shiller came up with a book showing that markets are subject to widespread manipulation and

deception (“On the Economics of Manipulation and Deception,” November 10, 2015). Markets are far from free, that is. As they argue, there is something fundamentally wrong with the alleged optimality of a free-market equilibrium, which goes way back in economic literature. This year, I would recommend that they come up with a sequel of their delightful book concerning the politics of manipulation and deception. If economists systematically neglect such phenomena, so do political scientists, as well. Besides, markets and democracy go well together, as is evident from the rich interaction between businessmen and politicians, and especially during elections. Just like markets, democracy is subject to widespread manipulation and deception, and America offers plenty of evidence supporting this claim. Thus, there is something fundamentally wrong with the alleged optimality of the political equilibrium established through so-called free elections. And it is high time to debunk democracy once and for all by using the very same tools that helped debunk markets. Good luck, Akerlof and Shiller!

Addendum (September 20, 2016)

Today I spent a few hours ferretting through Akerlof and Shiller’s last book.[1] This time around, I was looking for parallels between economics and politics. To the credit of the two Nobel laureates, their Chapter Five deals with politics.[2] It is entitled “Phishing in Politics,” and phishing is used throughout the books as a metaphor for getting people to do things that are not in their own interest, but only in the interest of the phisherman.[3] As they argue, “the effects of phishing in politics parallel the effects of phishing in economics.”[4] Predictably, “basic political science says that competitive democratic elections generate good outcomes.”[5] The equilibrium purportedly occurs for the same reason as in markets. And so on, and so forth. Akerlof and Shiller are on a good trail, to be sure, but the subject undoubtedly requires more than a single chapter. Once again, good luck!

Footnotes

1. *Phishing for Phools: The Economics of Manipulation and Deception*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015.

2. *Op. cit.*, pp. 72-83.

3. *Op. cit.*, p. xi.

4. *Op. cit.*, p. 74.

5. *Loc. cit.*

MY PUBLIC LIFE (December 10, 2016)

With the exception of my two websites of quite some vintage, *Residua* (www.residua.org) and Ca' Bon Gallery (www.cabongallery.org), I am out of the public life. For years now, I have not taken an active part in any public event, given a lecture, or given an interview on any subject whatsoever. Will this ever change, though? Are there any conditions under which I would consider another public appearance of any kind? As of my liberation earlier this year, my public life is over for good. Never again will I appear in front of a camera or speak into a microphone. Also, never again will I talk at any gathering, no matter how small or even intimate. My two websites remain the only windows between my world and the world out there. And this will not change until my last breath, I solemnly promise. Amen.

THE ASTRONOMER (March 22, 2017)

An Astronomer used to go out at night to observe the stars. One evening, as he wandered through the suburbs with his whole attention fixed on the sky, he fell accidentally into a deep well. While he lamented and bewailed his sores and bruises, and cried loudly for help, a neighbor ran to the well, and learning what had happened said: "Hark ye, old fellow, why, in striving to pry what is in heaven, do you not manage to see what is on earth?"

From *Aesop's Fables*, translated by George Fyler Townsend, Collins Classics, London: Harper Press, 2011, p. 64.

THE HORRORS OF YESTERYEAR (April 2, 2017)

How does Motovun feel after three whole months? Yuck. The municipal elections a bit less than two months from now are bringing up all the horrors of yesteryear.

BON VERSUS CROATIA, AGAIN (May 16, 2017)

I just received an electronic-mail message from my lawyer in Zagreb to the effect that the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg is currently working on my case ("Bon versus Croatia," April 13, 2015). His message includes a document from the court itself. Most important, my case is considered to be legally sound. In my lawyer's words, this holds for no more than two percent of cases from Croatia, most of which have little if anything to do with human rights ("Why Do Croatians Put their Last Hopes in Strasbourg?" December 2, 2014). Given my dual nationality, the case is now going to the governments of both Croatia and the United Kingdom. The court apparently hopes for

a settlement of some kind before its final ruling. One way or another, this is excellent news. Croatian crooked courts are under review at long last. In particular, the Istrian courts in Pazin and Pula have long been under the thumb of the Istrian Democratic Assembly, the ruling party on the peninsula since Croatia's independence. They stood behind Slobodan Vugrinec, who was the mayor of Motovun at the time. And they all stood behind crooked golf that vanished without a trace with the global financial crisis of 2008. As I argued well before the crisis, golf was about real estate and nothing but real estate. The posh sport was only a shield of a few investors and politicians hoping for quick enrichment. At the time, such an argument was a blasphemy, whence all the court cases lodged by Vugrinec against me. Peekaboo!

BEHIND US (May 21, 2017)

The municipal elections are behind us at long last. Phew! The Istrian Democratic Assembly has done everything in its power to topple Tomica Pahović as mayor of Motovun and his Independents in coalition with Social Democrats as the majority in the municipal council, but it has failed one more time ("A Revolution in Motovun," May 19, 2013). The political game got pretty dirty along the way, and dirty is the word, but the leading Istrian party will remain in opposition for four more years at least. It is my hope that it will gain power in Motovun never again, though. In power across much of the Istrian peninsula ever since Croatia's independence, it has taken roots that are too deep by half. Not surprisingly, charges of corruption and organized crime are piling up as years go by.

I am delighted by the news even though I did not vote, which would break my solemn promise to the former Croatian president ("My Best Wishes: A Letter to Croatian President Ivo Josipović," April 15, 2011). I will vote in Croatia never again. Or anyplace else, for that matter, as I have promised myself in the meanwhile ("A Recipe for Foolproof Subversion," May 14, 2013). Voting is for the birds, at any rate.

Returning to the mayor and his team, there is much to do in the next four years. The second term will be far from easy. Motovun is becoming a tourist attraction to reckon with, and this comes at a cost. Much of the existing infrastructure needs rethinking and revamping because of the growing number of visitors. In addition, the existing facilities are gradually becoming stretched to their limits ("Motovun's Capacity Limitations," May 20, 2015). Soon enough, the inflow of tourists will have to be checked well before they reach their destination. There are only so many cafés, restaurants, shops, galleries, and sleeping quarters on the top of the Motovun hill. Aimless tourist throngs cannot but spoil the experience for those who have managed to find a temporary foothold. But I leave all this to the mayor and the municipal council. And I trust that they will be up to the task in years to come.

BACK HOME? (June 15, 2017)

After a fortnight in the Croatian capital, where I went to take care of my teeth, I am back in Motovun. And I am over the moon, I must confess. Once again, I feel that I am back home. The only problem is that “home” has become a fraught notion ever since my collision with the Istrian Democratic Assembly nearly a decade ago. The leading lights of the dominant Istrian party in the hilltown and farther afield made me feel like a foreigner in the land of my ancestors. Me, a foreigner? Many of them hailing from far, far away, they did everything they could to chase me away only because I was opposed to the golf and polo scams in Motovun, Istria, and Croatia as a whole. For that reason, I am weary of mentioning “home” ever again, but my return to Motovun is a delight nonetheless. Back home? Will I ever dare mention “home” without all the anxiety accumulated over the years, though? I doubt it, but my doubts are still worth mentioning whenever they surface. And in writing.

To the Istrian Democratic Assembly

BON *VERSUS* CROATIA, AGAIN AND AGAIN (October 1, 2017)

I was informed by my lawyer five months ago that the court in Strasbourg was hoping for a settlement with the government of Croatia in my case against its repression (“Bon *versus* Croatia, Again,” May 16, 2017). And I received from him the government’s response to the offer a few days ago. In short, lawyers representing Croatia are asking the Court of Human Rights to dismiss my case, which they consider to be legally wanting. I beg to differ, it goes without saying. Although I cannot go into the legal argument of the government’s response, my own response is more than clear. Simply put, I cannot but hope that I will eventually win in Strasbourg.

My supposed insult of the then mayor of Motovun at a gathering of green activists in Zagreb was that he was behaving like a cockroach. That is, that he was doing everything in the dark and behind closed doors. The court in Pazin, where the former mayor lodged his case against me, did not accept my argument that I was referring to his undemocratic behavior. In fact, it was his habit of working in the dark and behind closed doors that was at issue rather than the insect in question. Indeed, I have nothing against cockroaches as such. The poignant metaphor was readily dismissed, though, which is why I ended up in Strasbourg.

The decision of the court in Pazin was later upheld by the higher one in Pula and the highest court in Zagreb. And the latest response of the Croatian government upholds it once again. My book about political repression in Croatia and the rôle of the Croatian courts in systematic repression of the government’s opponents is shoved under the rug.

Indeed, *Dying to Go to Strasbourg* (2015) was meant to help the judges at the Court of Human Rights to better understand Croatia as it has come to pass after its independence in the early Nineties. It was my hope that my book would shed new light on Croatia today.

After more than half of my life in America and England, I could not believe that cadres from socialist Yugoslavia were still in power in “new” Croatia. And so was their way of thinking about their foes, including green activists such as myself. More to the point, the same government was an accomplice in the scam surrounding golf development, which focused on Istria and Dalmatia, where more than sixty golf courses were to be built during the real estate boom that started in the early years of the new millennium and that came to a halt with the financial crisis in 2008. As it happened, one of the golf courses was in the foothills of Motovun, where I moved after my retirement in England. The then mayor and his closest associates still reeked of former Yugoslavia, where leading party cadres were leading in corruption and organized crime, as well.

The Croatian government’s latest response to my case in Strasbourg is emblematic of political repression resembling socialism of old. It sticks to the petty legal detail without ever considering the broader picture I paint in my book about the golf scam in Motovun and my fight against it. The court case lodged against me by the former mayor of Motovun is the proof of that ongoing repression. Taking me to court on account of the cockroach metaphor is reminiscent not only of former Yugoslavia, but also of Turkey and other countries at the eastern edges of Europe. Nowhere else on the subcontinent would such a case fly in court. To this day, the cockroach case smacks of political repression and nothing else. And so does the government’s latest response.

THE NEW NEW CLASS (October 2, 2017)

In retrospect, Milovan Djilas was right when he claimed that Yugoslavia after World War II was ruled by a new class.[1] The new class was headed by the country’s communist party with Tito and his closest associates at the helm. Djilas was one of them at the outset, but he ended up serving many years in jail for his bold claims. What he could not even imagine, though, was that ends and means of the communist party would survive even after the breakdown of Yugoslavia and the return of capitalism to the newly formed countries in the Balkans. The party officials and their children switched their allegiance in a jiffy and continued operating as the new class even after the dissolution of the old regime. And this is what many of them do to this day. By now, their grandchildren are also in the play. Although they have shed the old ideology with amazing ease, its subterranean methods remain intact to this day. Behold, the new new class.

Addendum (October 4, 2017)

As I like to tell time and again, the first book I checked out at the Widener Library immediately upon enrolment at Harvard University in the fall of 1970 was none other than the one by Djilas. And I read it in a day or two, too. The library was crammed with similar books from former Yugoslavia, and I checked them out one by one during my master's studies. All the secrets of Tito's regime were of greatest interest to me at the time. Which is why I assumed my *magnum opus* contained at least a few pieces about my eager searches through the Widener's bookshelves. As it turns out, there is not a single piece of this ilk. Zilch. In fact, the magnificent library gracing the Harvard Yard is not mentioned even once in more than three-million words. The only conclusion I can draw from this discovery, and it is a discovery worth bragging about, is that I must have been weary of the Yugoslav secret police. It was a formidable organization, no doubt. Mentioning Djilas' book any time before the breakup of Yugoslavia would have been no less than foolish. The new class was hardly a joke back then. The same holds for the new new class, I hasten to add. Hardly a joke, to be sure.

Footnote

1. Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System*, New York: Praeger, 1957.

SHORT BIO

Ranko Bon writes and paints. He has published several collections from his *Residua*, the Mother of All Blogs (www.Residua.org): *Residua I-XX: Selections* (London: The Hereford Salon, 1996), *Belgrade Postcards* (Belgrade: Vračarski Breg, 2002), *Istrian Postcards* (Belgrade: Vračarski Breg, 2003), *Toward a Short History of Motovun* (Munich: Elisabeth Sandmann Verlag, 2010), and *What is to Be Done? Climate Change for Beginners* (Belgrade: HESPERIAedu, 2014). In addition, he has published in several art and literary journals: *Inventory* (1996-1997), *Flash Art* (1998-1999), *Butterfly* (1999), *Statement Art* (1999), *Tank* (2000), *Another Magazine* (2001), *The Jackdaw* (2001-2010), and *Gazet* (2002-2003).

He has exhibited at the Hereford Salon in London (1994-1999), Norwich Gallery in Norwich, England (1998), Made to Measure Gallery in London (2000-2001), Abbot's Walk Gallery in Reading, England (2001-2003), Ca' Bon Gallery in Motovun, Croatia (2003-present), Five Towers Gallery in Motovun (2004-2005), Open Space, *Zentrum für Kunstprojekte* in Vienna (2010), and Calvert 22 Gallery in London (2011).

He holds a Diplomate Engineer in Architecture degree from Belgrade University (1969), a Master's in City Planning from Harvard (1972), and a Ph.D. in Urban Studies and Planning from MIT (1975). He has worked in the Urban Planning Institute of Slovenia in Ljubljana (1975-1979) before teaching at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1979), the University of Massachusetts in Boston (1979-1980), Northeastern University (1980-1983), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1983-1990), and the University of Reading (1990-2003), where he is professor emeritus. He lives in Motovun since leaving teaching and research in 2003.