

**Miljenko
Dereta**
(1950–2014)



In Memoriam

It was with great sadness that we learned of Miljenko Dereta's death on November 3, 2014 just one month after his participation in IDEE's seminar, "25 Years After 1989."

Miljenko Dereta was among Serbia's most recognized civic leaders, first as a determined opponent of the Serbian dictator Slobodan Milošević and the murderous wars he carried out and then as a founder and long-time director of Civic Initiatives, based in Belgrade. He played a key role in mobilizing citizens to overthrow Milošević, in building civic institutions that could last, in mentoring youth and civic leaders, and in fostering civic education as a means of instilling democratic values in the next generations. Civic Initiatives continues as one of Serbia's most important and effective civil society organizations.

Miljenko Dereta was also a founder and leading member of the Social Democratic Union, a member of parliament as part of a liberal coalition (in 2012–13), and he made his distinct political voice heard through regular columns in independent newspapers and appearances on independent media.

Miljenko Dereta was among the region's most effective and respected proponents of civil society and democracy. For him, supporting democracy never stopped at the border's edge. He was engaged in many European institutions with the aim of cutting through bureaucratic mindsets and getting assistance to flow to civic forces throughout the region that could do the most effective work (sometimes successfully, but not often, as he reported).

He was an essential member of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe's Centers for Pluralism, a network of civic and political leaders and activists committed to principles of liberal democracy. In this network he participated in numerous human rights and democracy campaigns and was always a welcome adviser to activists and movements in other countries.

Miljenko Dereta was an unusual person on the Serbian political and civic scene, indeed in all of the post-communist countries. At a time when Serbia was in the firm grip of chauvinist nationalism and cultural atavism, he championed cosmopolitanism, Western democracy, and political liberalism. At a time when political liberalism was equated with economic liberalism and free market capitalism, he identified with the European tradition of social democracy. But mostly, in a period when his country was in the grip of a repressive state and paramilitary thugs, at a time when ethnic massacres and street kidnappings were daily news stories, when the economy had spiraled downward to put most people in physical and emotional despair, and when even the political and civic opponents of Milošević had adopted a hard, cynical cast of spirit in which betrayal was common and loyalty was rare, Miljenko insisted on creating a world based on humanity. His belief in democracy was not simply a preferred philosophy but also a personal and moral creed that governed both his political and personal relationships. The simple human values of dignity, honor, respect for others, and personal trust were paramount in his worldview. Opposition tactics, political strategy, the smallest civic action, and even internal organizational culture had to be based on them.

Miljenko was also our very close friend whom all the participants in IDEE's Seminar "25 Years After 1989" will miss dearly. His death at the too-early age of 65, has left a void. It cannot be filled. But his work, we hope, will live on through the lasting influence he had on civic and political life in Serbia and beyond. He inspired us and many others with his words and his actions.

ERIC CHENOWETH AND IRENA LASOTA