



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia announces that the publishing in the media of Ambassador Dusko Lopandic's letter, which was directly addressed to Minister Ivica Dacic via the Ministry's official channels of communication and a copy of which was also transmitted to the Offices of the President, Prime Minister and Minister Joksimovic, and e-mailed to the media by the Ambassador himself, is yet another confirmation that the motion to sack him as Head of the Mission of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union was a legitimate one.

Ambassador Lopandic has been sacked in accordance with the Constitution and the law, in the same way as he was appointed three years ago. At the Minister's initiative, the Government makes a proposal for an appointment or recall, which is decided by the Presidential decree.

Not a single action of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has constituted a breach of the standard diplomatic practice and the MFA has never compromised the integrity of any of its Ambassadors, but because of the falsehoods contained in the letter, we are bound to state that it is absolutely untrue that our Mission to the EU responded promptly and accordingly regarding the shameful exhibition on Cardinal Stepinac in the European Parliament, and that Ambassador Lopandic, as he put it in his letter, did not essentially commit a serious professional error.

Citizens of Serbia must know that Ambassador Lopandic and our Mission to the EU failed to inform either the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or any other governmental authorities in Serbia about the organization of an exhibition on war criminal Stepinac, who had been sentenced to 16 years in prison for crimes committed against Serbs in the fascist Independent State of Croatia under the Ustasha regime.

We received the information on the event from the Vatican, from Ambassador Mirko Jelic, a day before the opening of the exhibition on 13 June. On that occasion, according to Ambassador Jelic, a competition, organised to select the best slogan for the exhibition and the conference to be held in the European Parliament, was run for several days. The winning slogan was "Cardinal Stepinac – Apostle of Hope and Love for God and People".

And while it is the Mission in Brussels that is supposed to be informing us, the Vatican and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed our Mission and Ambassador Lopandic about the exhibition instead. At the request of Minister Dacic, Ambassador Lopandic reported on the exhibition in writing on 14 June, the date of its opening. Ambassador Lopandic stated in writing that the Mission had been aware of the exhibition on Stepinac being prepared for a while, to quote the Ambassador "for about three weeks", and that, unfortunately, it was only today that the Mission found out that it had failed to pass the information about the exhibition onto the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was, as Ambassador Lopandic stated, an omission.

So, it was not before the very day of the exhibition and conference opening that the Mission addressed its reaction to the European institutions on the issue. Even Bojan Pajtic reacted prior to Lopandic and the Mission.

Perhaps Lopandic does not regard this as a serious professional error, but to the people of Serbia as a whole and to the Republic of Serbia the issue of Stepinac, and an attempt aimed at not only his rehabilitation, but canonization as well, is of vital importance. To resist this is incumbent upon all the state bodies and our representatives abroad. This is what President Nikolic and the prelates of the Serbian Orthodox Church discussed in the Vatican, when, at Serbia's initiative, with consent of the Pope, a joint commission was formed to look into the role and the activities of Stepinac in the Second World War, which is expected to begin its work in July.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs finds that failing to inform the Ministry about the exhibition was a serious omission, and that an opportunity was therefore missed to register a protest with European institutions while the exhibition was still in its preparatory stages. This was the main reason for initiating the sacking of Ambassador Lopandic, and none of those mentioned in the letter.

Ambassador Lopandic even claims that the Minister and the citizens could have found the information in question on the internet, as if unaware this was his duty as an Ambassador. With regard to his claim that the relations between Serbia and the EU had reached a high-point during his term of office, with all due respect to the Ambassador and to the Mission, this was a result of the policy pursued by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, and the European path of the country will most certainly not depend on particular staff members assigned to the Mission.

In line with the diplomatic practice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has never elaborated on appointment or recall decisions in public. We would not have done so on this occasion either, had it not been for Ambassador Lopandic's letter which merited a response.