**OPENING STATEMENT by DRITA IVANAJ on SEPTEMBER 25th, 2018**

A good morning to all present here today: honorable guests and speakers, Board Members, Staff and Volunteers of the Ivanaj Foundation Institute, friends, and organizers of this event.

It is with great regret that I cannot be with you today since I am detained for a while in NYC due to a variety of reasons, but I am with you in spirit, and to all present here is MY WELCOME at the Ivanaj Foundations’ premises on the blissful occasion of the event “In the memory of….Culture” represented by three past Albanian patriotic personalities that played quite a role in their respective fields of culture, education, and law.

This event is organized in cooperation with Jozef Radi and his publishing partner “Jozef” publishing house and it includes the presentation of a new book about my uncle, Prof. Mirash Ivanaj, which will be available for sale after you hear our distinguished guest speakers, as indicated in the agenda presented to you at our reception table.

Three anniversaries are involved in this event because they represent milestones that we want to remember: Next month of October is the 130th birthday of my Father, Dr. Martin Ivanaj, as well as the month in which the Ivanaj Foundation Institute in Albania was created way back in 1995, and the 1st year of the Official Opening in 2017 of its new premises – these - that took 22 years to accomplish – a real long stretch….but not the subject of today’s gathering…. ☺ !

The 2 other anniversaries fall in this month of September, and both are related to the demises of Prof. Mirash Ivanaj – 65 years ago on Sept. 22nd, and of Dr. Lazer Radi - 20 years ago on Sept. 23rd. They were both fellow prisoners during the dark days of Albania.

My first connection with Dr. Radi’s son, Jozef, goes all the way to 1991, and was initiated thanks to Dr. Elez Biberaj of the VoA. In October 1988, while I never thought that one day I could return to the country of my origin, I was interviewed in NYC by the VoA and some people (I learned years later) remembered me and what I said then. When the opportunity arose years later, they contacted me and became long-term, loyal friends. Two of these people are also here today, Dr.Luan Leka, and his wife, Pertefe, who is also the VP of this Institute. They hosted me since 1993 during the difficult years when I returned to Tirana after a 54 year absence, and supported me in my re-acquaintance of the country of my origin and the intricate and, I must add, also chaotic, but always warm Albanian way of life…. ☺ !

Jozef actually was able to call me in July 1991, after his Father was released from decades in prison, and had received a letter from me, after the VoA contact was established. The emotions of that call are still with me today, as well as the one when, subsequently I met Dr. Radi’s entire family in Tirana, and he delivered to me 2 precious mementos that were left by my uncle at the prison and were preserved after his death.

Lots is going to be heard today about my beloved uncle Mirash and is also included in the book that Jozef has collected from his Father’s memoirs, to which great credit is due for his labor of love.

But, I want to add a few words about my Father, who also had a distinct career of his own that has not been documented publicly so far.

He was the senior brother that Mirash adored. The 2 brothers (as inscribed also on their plot at Tirana cemetery, where they now rest in peace) were always together since childhood, and their early studies abroad, when they had to sustain themselves having lost both parents while still in their teens. They both wrote extensively and were published in literary newspapers and magazines since they were teen-agers in Belgrade; they both produced in script format even a mythological drama “Il fuoco di Sant’Elmo”, and they both organized patriotic Albanian students associations in Belgrade and in Rome where they completed their studies in jurisprudence and letters/philosophy.

My Father who worked as a lawyer, as a judge, and as a member of the Council of State, was a prolific writer that did his work clearly behind closed doors due to the field he was involved in, and especially as Head of the highest court (Cassation Court). He died young at age 52, lovingly assisted by my uncle Mirash in a hospital in Istanbul for 14 months, but, during his short lifetime, he also had put together 20 manuscripts on legal matters and laws that he was planning to publish at retirement. Unfortunately, these and all the 16,600 books the 2 brothers collected in their private library, were pilfered and got lost during and after WWII.

Thanks to a family friend that is also present here today, renowned historian, Sherif Delvina, I have in my possession about 500 documents pertinent to my Father’s work. They are his official judgments during his tenures that Sherif has chosen and collected by researching the National Archives, and the ones of the High Court. They have not seen the light of day yet, but, I firmly believe that they could be valuable as references to law students, whom I hear do not have much material available from past cases for their research and study.

Years ago I was also lucky to find a copy of my Father’s Thesis in the basement of the School of Law at La Sapienza in Rome, the subject of which (contained and written in Italian in about 300 pages) is about the ancient original laws of the tribes of Northern Albania. These archival documents should be published, hopefully, one day. As one can image, though, this would also be a labor of love that requires lots of time and expertise in translation and selection of meaningful arguments worth documenting.

I hope that you will enjoy today’s presentations and also buy Radi’s book. Should you be also interested in a couple of other publications of ours (Albanian Revival & Ivanajs’ Poems) any of our staff members will be able to furnish them to you.

By the way, our premises are open every work day, and thus our facilities are available for the intended purposes of our Foundation Institute, whose mission and goals regarding culture and education are set and progressing well, also in cooperation with other organizations and individuals. We have plans for further development of what are still some embryonic ideas, while we have ongoing other projects, therefore, do keep in touch with us via our social media, by subscribing to our website (where we post news in our blog), and following us in Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram pages.

Enjoy the rest of this program, have a drink on us, and feel free to view also our memorabilia in the display units along the corridors… and, don’t forget, you can come back and visit us anytime!

**Drita Ivanaj**

President



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