

Restitution of stolen property to US citizens in Montenegro, the US Authority can fix the turning point for resolution

The time has come to resolve restitution of stolen property to US citizens in Montenegro.

In this particular time when the United States and Montenegro have the closest ties, Montenegro being a faithful US partner and NATO member some positive results is expected in the area of fundamental rights such as the right of property, an inviolable concept among Americans. The United States have poured generous financial aids from US taxpayers for the democratization and reforms in Montenegro since it became an independent country in 2006. However, in the area of property rights protection the outcome has been quite disappointing, as Montenegro has not been loyal towards US citizens but rather deceitful.

In fact, there are at least twelve American citizens' neglected restitution claims shelved by the Montenegrin authority despite a specific law ordering the return or the compensation of property seized during the Communist regime (2004, 2007 Restitution Act)

The restitution process is being delayed year after year by the conflict of interest of the Montenegrin government who is not oriented towards the fulfilment of its obligations but is much more committed to selling properties-to-be-returned to third parties. The privatization profits of the US citizens' stolen properties worth millions of Euro have not been shared with the original owners. Moreover, privatization has made impossible the physical return of assets.

It is important to notice that the Ministry of finance together with its acting bodies, represents one of the two parties in cause who, at the same time, is also the decision maker. A fair process is impossible in lack of arbitration, so that any groundless motivation is accepted by *the strong side* in order to sabotage the procedure and to deny compensation despite any legal proof of the US claimants, *the weak side* in the picture.

US citizens are offended twice, first by the insolvency of obligation and secondly by the villainy of wild privatization touching their former assets. In such situation there is no hope for property restoration unless the US Authority takes a firm action against a system that is not accountable for the lack of rule of law and for the intrinsic conflict of interest.

So far the strong leverage of the United States on Montenegro has not produced the resolution of restitution.

Will the new Ambassador to Montenegro H.E. Judy Rising Reinke representing the US Authority restore what was stolen by the Communists to US citizens? We like to remember here what US Monuments Men and Women successfully did in favour of the Jewish people deprived of their property by the Nazi in Europe. Their work has been extraordinary, so why restitution should not be possible to US citizens in Montenegro?

It only takes good will to achieve this goal, so we welcome the timely work and dedication of all the competent Authorities on this matter.

Ambra Declich Grandi