pojacalo

GECIĆ | LAW

Bogdan Gecić

Founding Partner

Ivan Minić: Welcome!

Bogdan Gecić: Glad to be here.

Ivan Minić: We haven't had many lawyers on the show lately.

Bogdan Gecić: Probably for a good reason.
Ivan Minić: There's a famous Shakespeare quote that people love to cite when they want to sound smart: "First, let's kill all the lawyers." Over time, I realized that we've been using it in a completely distorted context. We say it as if it means eliminating the worst, but the essence of the whole idea—if I'm not mistaken—is that Shakespeare actually wrote it as a way to show how to destroy a society. That if you eliminate those who are meant to protect it first, everything falls apart.

Bogdan Gecić: You're jumping straight into a serious topic! But yes, that's exactly right. If you look at Western countries—take the U.S. for example—every small American town revolves around three core institutions: the town hall, the church, and the courthouse. That institutional framework has defined their society since its foundation, and the British have been functioning under a similar model since at least the 13th century. Their system is based on rules that, at least in theory, should apply equally to everyone. You know what to expect, and from there, it's all about fair competition. That's a radically different concept compared to what we have here. Unfortunately, what prevails in our region is that old saying, "two lawyers, three opinions." It has become a cliché.

That kind of relativization largely stems from communism. It started with the Soviets and continued in our own socialist system, because in order to consolidate power in the hands of the party, you had to discredit the very idea of legal consistency. If there's no equality before the law, if the rule of law doesn't exist, but instead a supreme ruling party makes all the decisions—which was the core idea of communism—then things are much simpler, at least for those in power. That's why they systematically worked on undermining the legal profession and legal education. This happened before, in earlier totalitarian regimes—Kafka is a great example—but it reached its peak under Soviet rule and, generally, in communist systems. The same thing happened here. The Faculty of Law in Belgrade, which was once an impressive institution before World War II—so much so that its leading scholars were invited to advise the League of Nations, the predecessor of the United Nations—was dismantled after 1945. Many professors were expelled, and over time, academic freedom was systematically eroded. They even have an exhibition in the basement of the faculty today—I believe it's still there—where they showcase all the people who were dismissed, imprisoned, or even executed after World War II for being "ideological enemies." Let me add one more thing before I hand the conversation back to you—I know you love to talk. I once came across an official document that I even shared with my colleagues. It was from the period right after the war, when OZNA was still active (before it became UDBA).

WHEN I GROW UP, I WANT TO BE...

They compiled a list of "socially acceptable" lawyers because the Bar Association had a "problem"—there were too many "bourgeois-oriented" lawyers. And what did that mean? It meant that they had completed their undergraduate studies, pursued master's and doctoral degrees abroad, and spoke foreign languages. That made them unacceptable. So, a plan was put in place to transform the Bar Association into a "socially acceptable" organization while gradually eliminating these lawyers. The numbers are fascinating—if I remember correctly, when I did some research, about one in four or five lawyers in the Bar Association at that time had been educated abroad. Translating that into today's figures, that would mean that around 20-25% of the Bar—roughly 3,000 lawyers in Serbia—should have an international education. I believe that number is now around 3%. So yes, communism had a massive impact on our profession and its role in society.

Ivan Minić: We'll talk more about this in the second part of our conversation when we go through your personal and professional journey. But one fact remains—I know quite a few people who studied law abroad, but almost none of them came back. So, we do have high-quality legal minds, but they are scattered around the world, and there are far fewer of them than before. But let me ask you the question I ask every guest at the beginning of Pojačalo—what did you want to be when you grew up?

When I Grow Up, I Want To Be...

Bogdan Gecić: You know, that depends on the period. The earliest memory I have, from when I was about three, was being obsessed with James Bond. To the general shock of my family, I was that self-aware at such a young age—but honestly, it was mainly because of the women. I was Bond, and the Bond girls were fantastic to me, so James Bond was it. Then, a few years later, Top Gun came out, and for kids of our generation, that was the movie. At that point, it wasn't just about the women anymore—I loved everything about it. He flies a plane, wears a leather jacket, takes risks, rides a motorcycle—it was a dream. Like many kids from that era, that movie defined the 80s for us, so at that time, I wanted to be a fighter pilot. Then, as I got older and entered school, things started shifting. I think I was in 4th, 5th, or 6th grade when I started realizing how much I loved chemistry. I was convinced I was going to be a genetic engineer. That was my passion for years—until the second year of high school. I was in a science-focused track, loved it, competed in chemistry competitions—I was really into it. And then, at some point, something changed. My mom still tells this story as if it were a joke, but I assure you, it was not a joke. When I was in my junior or senior year of high school, I first expressed my thoughts about studying law. And she, without missing a beat, said: "If you want to make your mother miserable for the rest of her life, then go ahead and study law."

STUDYING LAW.

Today, she claims she was joking, but there was zero humor in that moment. Now, of course, context is everything. My mom was part of the first generation of students in Statistics and Cybernetics—she was born in 1947—a mathematician. She worked on mainframe computers—you know, those giant machines with punch cards? Their entire hard drive took up an entire floor of a building. And back then, that was cutting-edge technology. Naturally, for her, mathematics was royalty, and lawyers belonged to "that yellow house." She and one of her mathematician friends even called my mom to intervene when I started talking about law. They had discussions about how it would be a shame for someone so talented in math to study law. If I insisted on such a mistake, they suggested I at least study a "real" subject as well, to make up for it. So yeah, it was a complicated period—I spent over a year debating with myself before finally making my decision. Let's just say my idea wasn't met with much enthusiasm.

Ivan Minić: Where did the idea to study law even come from? I know how much you love technology and science. Typically, people with those interests don't end up in law school. On the other hand, from what I know, those exact types of people do end up in law school abroad.

Bogdan Gecić: Exactly. But at the time, I had no idea about that. I grew up in a Yugoslav middle-class environment, where if you were meritocratic, you naturally gravitated toward the sciences.

That was the standard in Yugoslavia, and in the entire Eastern Bloc, because they competed with the West in technical fields, while social sciences were systematically destroyed. If you look at what was happening at the Faculty of Philosophy, or at any other social science faculty in Yugoslavia... well, that's a whole other story. So, I never even considered what kind of lawyers existed abroad. My path to law school was purely organic. It was around the time of the October 5th changes in Serbia, a period of massive political upheaval. A vacuum had formed. We were transitioning away from communism—ten years later than the rest of Eastern Europe—but the system had collapsed, and no one really knew who was in charge. That chaos intrigued me. I wanted to understand how to fix it. And that's how I stumbled into law.

STUDYING LAW.

When I was a kid—because, you know, that was just the time we lived in—there were tons of NGOs around, and I got involved in all sorts of social work at a young age. That's when I realized that the core of everything comes down to a single fundamental question: do you have the same rules for everyone?

It's like in sports, right? I used to explain it like this—back when Djokovic was first making a name for himself, he was what Americans call an underdog. He was from the "wrong" country, at the "wrong" time, with the "wrong" talents, shaking up a system that was set up for the so-called "right" people from the "right" nations—the ones who were supposed to be there. Now imagine if there was a line judge who always ruled against him—some actually did, back in the day—but imagine if every single call was against him. And at the end of the match, when Djokovic was clearly playing better, the other side just pulled out a gun and shot him.

That's the difference between having fair, consistent rules and not having them. At the end of the day, no matter where you're from, you should have a shot at winning in a fair game. And once you see how important that is, especially for a society just stepping into democracy and a free market, you understand why it matters so much for entrepreneurship, creativity, innovation—everything, really.

That's when I truly grasped the role of legal systems: you're essentially a guardian, making sure everything is based on logic. Because the moment something stops making logical sense, it loses credibility.

That's actually why people in this region have had such a strong aversion to lawyers and the legal system, especially during socialism. When you read some of those legal rulings—and unfortunately, we still see a lot of this today—half of it makes no sense. It's just gibberish. You're reading something completely irrational, disconnected from reality.

But when things follow a clear logical sequence—step by step, point by point—people start to respect the system.

And that brings me to something else... I had no idea that in many places, people with backgrounds in science—biology, physics, math—often end up studying law. I only figured this out when I went to the U.S. and saw that most law students there had studied natural sciences before law school. Since law school there is a postgraduate program, it's not filled with traditional social science students like it is here.

That's when I realized that law is pure logic. And the moment it stops being logical, you end up with the kind of legal system people in our region struggle with on a daily basis.

EDUCATION QUALITY.

Quality of Education

Ivan Minić: We'll make a connection to America in a bit, but the prerequisite for that was that your decision to become a lawyer led you to enroll in law school.
I've often mentioned this here... My uncle, besides other things, studied law at one point. And I remember these insanely thick books that, back when I was 13 or 14, seemed endlessly boring to me. And to him, too—just a little more.
At the same time, even though I find law interesting and really engaging, and I love listening to legal discussions, I love watching legal content, the idea of actually studying law always seemed like a terribly exhausting, tedious, and useless thing.
In the sense that you're learning a mountain of things that you'll never actually need, because only a tiny portion of it will ever come in handy in some situation.
So, tell me, from your own experience—what was it actually like back when you were studying? How difficult was it to get in, and how difficult was it to be among the top students?
And secondly, how much was it actually valuable to you, and how much was just jumping through hoops?

Bogdan Gecić: Wait, you just asked me a ton of questions, let me structure it a bit...
Look, let's start with the easiest part.
I don't like it when people criticize things they haven't actually gone through themselves—I'm not talking about constructive criticism, but rather this tendency, which is really common here, to badmouth something without having any real experience with it.
So, even though what I'm about to say isn't very popular among my colleagues, I think I've earned the credibility to speak on this subject, as someone who had an exceptionally high GPA and was among the top students in my class.
That said—everything you just mentioned is, unfortunately, largely true.
The system of studying law didn't make much sense even back then. And I don't think it does today either, though now for different reasons.
Because in the meantime, we've had the internet, search engines, Wikipedia, and now AI and artificial intelligence.
The old, encyclopedic way of learning—where you try to be a walking Wikipedia, but without any kind of cross-checking system—is completely outdated.
I mean, sure, a long time ago, let's say back in the 1800s or early 1900s, this kind of learning dominated European education systems, but now it's completely obsolete.

EDUCATION QUALITY.

I don't want to sound like Kočić, but the truth is, it was outdated even 20 years ago, and even before that. Even back then, it didn't make much sense. I used to explain it like this... Was it useful? Let me put it this way—imagine going to a shooting range. You have a target, and you have 13,000 bullets. You fire off all 13,000 bullets, and of course, you're going to hit the target at least once. That's how law school worked back then. Now, with the Bologna Process, I think they've adjusted things a bit, so those 13,000 bullets have been spread out more, so at least you're not getting hit with all of them at once.
But back then, that's what it was like.
Let me give you an example—we had to study the cycles of Mongolian constitutional law during communism as part of our constitutional law course.
That's vital information for your future, right? And we're talking 2005 here—so the Berlin Wall had been down for a long time already.

That's what I mean by 13,000 bullets.
We even went to the trouble of counting how many pages it actually took to graduate, depending on your program.
I remember, in my program—which, by the way, was so unpopular that there were only 13 of us in it—economic law... The total number of pages was 14,700.
Now, imagine reading all of that just once.
If you wanted to get a high grade, you had to go through it at least three times.
So, we're talking about 50,000 pages just to get your degree.
Sure, you gain some valuable knowledge, but at way too high of a cost.
There are far more productive and efficient ways to achieve the same level of understanding.
That's what Bologna did to some extent—it split up our old program into two degrees, so what used to be a seven-year degree is now a bachelor's plus a master's.
I mean, none of us from those generations even write it that way. But, you know, a lot of things needed to change. I was actually curious, so I looked into it—what was the incentive for professors to write such massive books? Now, I never fully verified this, but it kind of makes sense to me.
Under communism, both in the Soviet Union and here, after '45, intellectual property had a different status. Because, by its very nature, it was seen as a capitalist construct. That's why, despite all the remarkable Soviet achievements, you'd struggle to name three individuals who held patents for anything.

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Because intellectual property is fundamentally individualistic—it rewards the creativity of an individual. And that doesn't fit within a system where we're all supposed to be equal, where everyone is born equal, where we all achieve the same results, and where all those idealistic narratives exist. So, when it came to books, the question arose—how do you compensate the author? That's when they established a system where books, at least during the communist period, were paid based on what was called an "author's sheet". An author's sheet was a unit used to calculate how much an author would be paid, based on the number of pages they wrote. Now, if you consider that a professor at the University of Belgrade—especially a full professor—had a de facto monopoly over the subject they taught (and still does, to some extent), and if you look at how textbooks were published, the system worked in a way where younger academic staff—junior researchers, assistant professors, and the like—would be assigned as co-authors by their superiors.
So, professors controlled the market.
And the way to make more money was simple—write more pages.
Students would have to buy the books anyway, and on top of that, the "illusion of great knowledge" was created.
Because back then, knowledge wasn't measured by the quality or practicality of your advice, but by how big of a book you could write.

Ivan Minić: How many kilograms does your knowledge weigh?

Bogdan Gecić: Exactly. I remember that time well—our professors would actually brag about how thick their textbooks were. That was a big deal.
I mean, look, let's put it in coding terms, in the language of natural sciences.
It would be like a programmer bragging about how many lines of code they wrote, instead of explaining what the code actually does. I mean, obviously, everyone would be like, "Come on, man, don't just write for the sake of writing."
I don't know if that annoys you, you haven't said anything about it.
But you know... That's just another peculiarity of our legal education system, and, more or less, it was the same all across Eastern Europe.
Now, this practice is slowly fading, I think the Poles have gone the furthest in reforming it. But, in general, they are the most advanced among the former communist bloc countries, in every way—including legal education.
That being said, it wasn't great back then, and to be honest, I'm not sure how much better it is now.

Ivan Minić: One thing I always like to ask people—because I think it's important to leave some kind of record—was there anyone, any professor, who was particularly interesting or useful to you? Were there any courses that, in the sea of subjects you had to go through just to get a degree and be able to practice law, actually stood out as engaging? Was there anything you found truly interesting?

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Bogdan Gecić: See, now... you asked me so many things that I actually lost track!
So, how did I even get through it all?
To be completely honest, I experienced the whole thing as torture—the sheer number of pages, the countdown to each exam...
For me—and I know this might sound strange—my brain has always worked on long-term goals.
From the moment I decided, somewhere in my senior year of high school, which faculty I wanted to go to, my goal was always to pursue postgraduate studies.
Of course, I never dreamed that I'd end up at Harvard—because, let's be honest, you'd have to be a little insane to think that!
We'll get to why I say that later.
But I always knew I wanted to try to get into a competitive postgraduate program.
And I knew that GPA was everything.
So, I understood early on that grades were my primary focus, and that I had no choice —I had to maintain a high average.
So, like a good soldier, I just pushed through, with a ridiculous amount of persistence.
I'd be lying if I said I ever enjoyed it.
Because everything I've said so far—I believed that back then too.
The difference is, when you're that young, your perspective on the world—and your self-confidence—are very different.
And, I mean, we keep learning our entire lives, right?
I hope that in two years, I'll look back and see how much I've changed and grown compared to today.

But at the time, yeah, psychologically, it was really draining. Exhausting, actually.
And you find ways to cope—you make sure to go out at night, go to the gym, do something to unwind. Because, essentially, you're locked in a room for 8–9 hours with a set quota of material you have to get through that day. And that's it. It's like dieting—you just have to stick to the plan.
It requires military discipline. I know people who had that natural ability to retain huge amounts of information easily, and for them, studying was fun.
They breezed through law school.
But those are exceptionally rare types of intelligence—people who are just wired that way.

Ivan Minić: And they usually don't end up studying law.

Bogdan Gecić: Exactly. And even when they do study law...You know the type—they could memorize entire books.
You could cut them off mid-sentence, and they'd start over from the beginning.
All sorts of tricks like that.

Influences During Studies

Now, what I did—what I figured out as a kind of shortcut—was that I sought out the so-called "outcasts". I went to the toughest professors—the ones who were considered "crazy". And what does crazy mean?
Crazy was the professor who asked "why?"
Of course, back then, on undergraduate studies, those kinds of professors were seen as lunatics. And I loved them. Why?
Because this is where I transition into talking about the people who really made an impact on me.

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So, I often sought out professors with a bad reputation, because for me, that was a great experience. Those turned out to be the best courses and exams. One of them was Taboroši. He was a brilliant mind.

Unfortunately, he passed away, and after his death, in agreement with his family and academic successors in his department, we established a scholarship in his name.As far as we know, this was the first time since World War II that an alumnus created a scholarship in honor of a professor, to be awarded to students specializing in his field of study.
Taboroši was a genius who worked on something he called the law of economic systems.That was his term, something he invented himself. Today, we call it business law. But essentially, it was a general introduction to the legal framework of economics. And he shaped us in an incredible way. Our class was so small—only 13 students—that our lectures felt more like roundtable discussions.
Unlike other courses, where you'd sit in huge auditoriums, this was a completely different way of learning. He would challenge us with questions, make us think, and force us to engage with the material rather than just memorizing.
That's why he left such a lasting impact.

Because, of course, at that time—and I think it's still somewhat the case today, although there are fewer students now—there was a policy of admitting an enormous number of students.
We had 1,800 students in our first year. And then you'd hear those horrific speeches from professors, like:
"Look to your left, look to your right—only one in five of you will make it to the second year." And things like that.
I mean, just awful. And professors would say this without any shame, completely oblivious to the fact that, ethically, this should be completely unacceptable.
I mean, why did you accept these students in the first place if you already knew the failure rate would be that high? Why did you take their tuition money if you knew most wouldn't make it? Back then, half of the students were self-financed. I was on a government scholarship—I did great on the entrance exam—but for most students...
Basically, for every five students they threatened with failure, at least one had paid for their education. So think about that—if you're paying for a service, the service should be to teach you something. It's like if you paid me to represent you in court, and then you lost the case, and instead of helping you, I bragged about it.
And even before we go to trial, I tell you, "Only one in five of my clients wins their case, the other four will lose."
But I still charge all five of you full price.
And somehow, this was considered totally fine to say in lecture halls with 800 students. Now, in contrast to that system, there were 13 of us in Taboroši's class.

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And that small number created an incredibly intimate atmosphere.
At the time, The Alchemist was wildly popular, unfortunately, and Taboroši came to us and said: "I want you to read my book like you would read that novel. And then tell me what you think." This was around 2005. His footnotes and all references in his book were from 2003 and 2004, taken from original English sources or other relevant publications. And when I say his references were from 2003 and 2004, I mean literally—from the time he read them until they were printed in his book, that was the timeframe of his references. Now, I don't know how things look today, I don't want to assume, but back then, every other professor had references at least ten years old. Taboroši was ahead of everyone. It was with him that I first heard about economic analysis of law.
It was with him that I first learned about all these incredible schools of thought. Because he studied the great macroeconomists, the major legal schools dealing with economic regulation, and then conducted comparative legal analysis. He guided us through everything that existed in the field. It was with him that I first read about antitrust and competition law—before such laws even existed in our country. Our first competition law wasn't passed until 2010—No, wait, I think the first one was actually in 2005. Yes, I think that's right.
And he lived until around 2009, after which we introduced a new version of the law.

But whatever the case, the man was a pioneer in everything. And he didn't just list existing laws— He would make you think by framing everything as a question. "What do you think? Is this regulation good? Why? Why not? How could it have been done differently? What are we achieving with this?" In economic policy, when we have conflicting objectives, how should we draft the legal norm?
I mean, let me give you a really basic example— This whole school of thought came to the conclusion that fines should be percentage-based. Because they realized that it doesn't make sense to fine someone with €100 million in revenue the same amount as a small entrepreneur.
I mean, I know it sounds obvious, but if we agree that law is actually logic and programming, then we can agree that previous solutions were flawed.
Because back then, especially under communism, and even during Milošević's time, all fines were fixed amounts.
And then hyperinflation hits—and fines become meaningless. So you can break the law all you want, pay the fine, and keep making a profit. I mean, businesses are rational actors. If they realize it's more profitable to break the law and pay the fine than to follow the rules, they'll break the law every time.

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Ivan Minić: I mean, we still see that happening today... It often seems illogical to us, but you have these big corporations that say: "Okay, the fine for this is €50 million. No problem. We're going to make €200 million off of it anyway. We'll just pay the fine."

Bogdan Gecić: Exactly. And that's the entire point—The school of thought behind economic analysis of law asked, "Okay, let's look at the industry's average profit margins. And let's discourage violations by calculating fines based on profit margins." So if the profit margin in an industry is around 10%, then set the fine at up to 10%. Because what's the real purpose of a well-designed legal system? It's not about constantly enforcing punishments. And it's definitely not about that cliché about the state having a monopoly on physical force, blah, blah, blah... No. We're not law-abiding citizens because we're afraid of punishment.
And I saw this firsthand when I lived in Boston. That region—New England—is mostly Protestant. Ethically speaking, when it snows two meters in a few hours, people don't wait for the government to tell them to shovel their driveways.
By 7 or 8 AM, everything is already cleared. Not because they fear getting fined—but because they believe it's the right thing to do. A well-functioning legal system works because people believe in it.
It doesn't rely on force, it relies on trust.

Ivan Minić: But that's exactly the moment when, through stories, examples, and the relevance of the topic itself, you push students to be active participants. And on the other hand, the moment you ask "why?", you immediately see whether someone actually understands the material or not.

Bogdan Gecić: Look, it's the same thing. But there's another side to it that I didn't even realize back when I was a student. In high school, I had—and I don't know if she'll ever hear this, but a sincere shout-out to her—an amazing philosophy teacher. And somehow, I ended up with the task of preparing "The Apology of Socrates". And now, think about it—this is a school of thought that's over 2,500 years old. I read some of his other works too, but the point is—that was the extent of my exposure to Socrates until I got to America. And then I realized that in the U.S., every single law school uses something called the Socratic method to train law students. For every statement I make, the professor asks "why?". And then either I run out of answers, which means one of my underlying assumptions is wrong, or the professor runs out of questions.
And that's how young lawyers are trained. The Socratic method is the foundation of legal education. You get what I mean?
And yet, back home, I was actively seeking out professors who were seen as "crazy", just because they dared to ask "why?".

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Ivan Minić: They say that kids between the ages of three and five tend to ask "why?" an unlimited number of times.

Bogdan Gecić: And they keep doing it later, too. My daughter constantly asks “why?”—especially since I’ve always encouraged it. Now, here’s another thing. Okay, so there’s this whole issue with how law school functioned back then—it’s changed quite a bit now, which is great. But for the generation that enrolled in the late ‘90s and early 2000s, law school was still one of the few public universities you picked when you had no idea what else to study. And honestly, that was pretty sad.
Another huge difference between Western law schools, especially in the U.S. and the UK, and our own, was in the quality of the entrance exam.
Because, at the end of the day, how do you filter the people who get admitted?
In the U.S., the law school entrance exam is a logic test. Once again—a logic test.
It’s an intelligence test. At the Faculty of Law here, even today, they still test two subjects: Serbian language (including literature) and history. Okay, sure, in Serbian language, there are traces of logical reasoning when it comes to literary analysis and grammar—more so in grammar—but in history?
I mean, that’s just rote memorization of facts—the way it’s taught, and especially the way it’s tested in our system.
So even at the entrance exam stage, the way candidates are filtered for law school is questionable.

And this was the same throughout the former Yugoslavia. Everything we’re talking about—it’s not just a Belgrade thing. Belgrade Law Faculty was actually the best within the Yugoslav system of law schools. They were all the same. And what we still see in practice today is that, unfortunately, not much has changed. There have been some improvements, but compared to the real needs of society and the economy, change is way too slow.

Ivan Minić: Were there any other interesting people or events during your studies that, in some way, defined or influenced your path forward?

Bogdan Gecić: Well, look—Taboroši was definitely one of those people. But that’s also because of the subject matter I ended up working in. The field fascinated me.
And you know, every year, we had one or two professors who were a bit out there.
Another thing—at the Faculty of Law, there’s a long tradition of professors being active in public life. So, in my generation, you had people like Kosta Čavoški, Miroljub Labus, and Oliver Antić.
All across the political spectrum.
And they were all very active participants in public discourse. It was also a time of major political changes. We adopted a new Constitution in 2006, which was a huge topic. Before that, the Europeans were trying to introduce a Constitution for the European Union, attempting to unite Europe into a single state. If you were a law student who was really passionate about your studies, there was so much happening.

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And there were so many fascinating discussions. For example, my constitutional law professor later became a judge on the Constitutional Court.
So, we had plenty of opportunities to engage with some very influential figures. In that sense, it was an extremely interesting time. But honestly, law school is always an interesting period.
Because law follows life. And since life itself is an endless stream of creativity and innovation, and because people are constantly inventing new ways to structure society, the legal system is always playing catch-up. It's impossible to have a legal system that stays ahead of social developments. The law is always lagging behind, trying to catch up with what's already happening, figuring out how to regulate it, whether to regulate it at all, and to what extent.
That's why law is always exciting.
For me, that aspect of law school was fantastic. But I was also really into the academic side of things.
In my first year, we had a great professor for Introduction to Law—which is basically legal theory. He was a brilliant guy.
And often, the really smart professors were a bit sidelined. I had a wonderful experience early on. I remember, when we first started law school, I was still figuring things out. And then, on a midterm for General Legal History—which, as the name suggests, is exactly what it sounds like—I think I got a one or a two.

Something like that. And the assistant professor, who was running our study sessions at the time, was so kind to me. She didn't say my name out loud. Instead, she just said: "This student has a really great way of thinking, draws wonderful conclusions, but just needs to study a bit more." Then she pulled me aside and told me: "I don't know what you're doing, but whenever I ask a question—especially a 'why' question—you know how to answer it. You could be getting straight A's. Just sit down and study a little." And honestly, I'm so grateful to her today. Because at that age—at least for me, and for a lot of people I know—identity crises were a real thing.
You know, puberty, adolescence, all of that. And she was exactly the kind of person who saw potential in me and said: "You have everything it takes to be a great student. Come on, shake yourself out of it." That was a huge favor she did for me.
And I could name a professor from every year who had an impact.
But, as I said, Taboroši stood out the most, because we clicked over a subject that we both genuinely loved.

Ivan Minić: One thing I find particularly interesting is that, during the period when you and I were growing up, the system was such that business law essentially didn't exist—because there was no need for it. Companies were socially owned; the only private businesses that existed were maybe small craft workshops or something similar.

BUSINESS LAW.

But in reality, everything that exists today in the field of business law—which is probably the most lucrative area of law if you decide to specialize in it—only really started emerging in the ‘90s but truly came into being after 2000 as part of the entire transition process. So, while you didn’t literally grow up alongside it, in a way, you kind of did.

Bogdan Gecić: Exactly, exactly. Look, we didn’t even have... The first Companies Act in our country that recognized classical private ownership was passed in 1996. The first Law on Business Enterprises came only in 2000, followed by updates in 2003. So, yes—what you’re saying is spot on. When I was in law school, we still had—luckily, at least as an option—the subject of social ownership in our first year, or maybe second. Either way, it was part of property law, which, put simply, deals with ownership rights. I mean, social ownership—I read about it out of curiosity. But I never understood it. Because the whole concept was—who is responsible here? No one could ever give me an answer. You receive money...

Ivan Minić: Everyone, everyone...

Bogdan Gecić: No, no—when it comes to receiving money, it gets distributed very easily, and everything seems great. But the moment you enter the world of debt, or, God forbid, bankruptcy, suddenly no one is responsible. Responsibility gets collectivized, and then the entire society is to blame. The entire concept of social ownership was, to me, completely incomprehensible.

Ivan Minić: Fantastic.

Bogdan Gecić: Yeah, amazing. I mean, it really explains a lot about how things functioned in our country. So, we were just starting out at that time—we had a handful of courses dealing with business law. Just a few. That’s why I chose the business law track—so I could get more of it. And here’s the paradox—which I didn’t realize at the time... I was thinking the same thing you just said—this is something new, we all had the mindset of: "Who even works in this field?"
We were like our IT industry six or seven years ago—everything was booming, privatizations were starting, everyone was excited about it, but nobody actually understood it. It was cool, it was new, and it seemed exciting. And that part of the story is completely true.
But what we didn’t know, and what we unfortunately lost compared to Yugoslavia, was precisely this— In Yugoslavia, there was no private ownership, no entrepreneurship, and no classic corporations. And because of that, we lost out massively, because social ownership led to static business relationships. Private ownership is like clay—it’s incredibly creative. It allows me to, for example, issue bonds with you, then repackage them into some digital coin, use that as collateral, get funding elsewhere, and enter into a sixth business venture. None of that was possible under social ownership.

BUSINESS LAW.

But Yugoslavia was a very interesting country in terms of foreign trade.
It had an extremely advanced legal and business practice when it came to international trade. Because our large state-owned corporations, like Genex, Inex, and others, were trading globally during the Cold War. We had intellectual property development, because Yugoslavia was open—we had brands. The first McDonald's in all of Eastern Europe, behind the Iron Curtain, was at Slavija in Belgrade. That trademark had to be legally protected. And all of that—Genex, Inex, Voder—those were the companies handling trademark licensing.
Essentially, most of the licenses for big Western brands heading into the Soviet Union went through Yugoslavia.

Ivan Minić: That's something we actually researched the other day.There are photos, maps, and documents showing what was being produced. We don't really have a detailed, official list explaining exactly what was produced and in what quantities. Because, in some cases, it was just for show, a way to appear legitimate. But there was a lot of real production, all across Yugoslavia. And these were products that global brands had no problem putting their logos on—because they were genuinely high quality.

Bogdan Gecić: Exactly. And not only that—But what's interesting is that law schools never really studied this.Instead, these were people who learned everything through practice. For example, if you look at KLUZ, which, if I remember correctly, exported for Bosch, their lawyers were drafting contracts with German companies on everything—from franchising and licensing, to foreign trade, cargo transfers, and whatever else you can think of. There was a wealth of expertise in international business law. Then came the '90s, and everything fell apart. I don't like drama, but let's call it what it was—a tragedy. For 45 years, we had been building an incredible knowledge base. Okay, it was never institutionalized in law schools, but we had experts in the field who could teach and pass on that knowledge. And then, we lost all of it. How? First, because of the 1992 sanctions. And second, because the country remained isolated for too long—ten years. Ten years was just enough time for all those experts to reach their 50s or 60s by the 2000s, just as their companies were collapsing. Think about it—during COVID, we all heard about supply chains breaking down. Now imagine what happens when a supply chain is cut off for an entire decade. You were a supplier to Germany for 30 years, and then suddenly, in '92, your business is shut down for eight years. You're never getting that client back—they've found a new supplier and moved on.

HARVARD.

So, not only was the country isolated, but the people who had knowledge got old, their companies failed, and we lost an enormous amount of expertise. One of the areas we specialize in at our law firm is European law. And here's something we all grew up with—the Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAAs). And when I say we grew up with them, I mean it literally—they were supposed to last 3–4 years, and then we were supposed to join the EU. Instead, we've been talking about them for 20 years—just like Turkey has.
But what very few people know is that Yugoslavia had its own association agreement, signed in 1980. If you read it today, it's a far more impressive document—technically and legally—than anything signed later across the region.
And this was all lost. Law schools didn't feel the impact—it wasn't reflected in their curriculum. But Yugoslavia was a founding member of GATT, the precursor to the World Trade Organization (WTO)—which, by the way, we still haven't joined.
We went from being a leader in global trade law, to a country that doesn't even have a proper textbook on the subject today. And that's a huge problem.
Because our economies are small, we depend on exports, and yet international business and trade law is still an afterthought in legal education.

The Dream of Harvard Becomes Reality

Ivan Minić: So, you finish law school, and now you have to figure out what's next. Alright.The situation is really interesting, a lot is happening. What are you thinking about? What are your plans for the future?

Bogdan Gecić: Well, look, I knew I wanted a master's degree—that was always on my mind. I had a really high GPA. In the meantime, my mom retired—they were pushing people into early retirement at the time. She got a severance package, and she gave me the option: "So, son, where are you going to put mom's money? What are you going to do with it?"
And I decided to pay for English lessons, complete Cambridge Proficiency, and get C2 certification. That was my reasoning—because, as we talked about earlier, a strong command of English was essential, and I needed proof of my proficiency.
And honestly, looking back today... wow, I was a strange kid for thinking that way at 21. Instead of buying a car or something—something that would be totally normal for a young guy thinking about other things—I wanted that certificate.
I mean, it wasn't just about the piece of paper—objectively, Cambridge Proficiency is a great experience for truly mastering the language. But that's how I put together my own puzzle pieces.
I was thinking about my options.
And I was lucky because two professors actually asked me if I wanted to stay at the faculty.

HARVARD.

To the absolute shock of my parents, I turned them down. Which, of course, made me the black sheep, the crazy son, and they couldn't understand why I would refuse such an opportunity. But on the other hand, my parents didn't have a legal background, as we established earlier. And I really didn't have anyone who could help me get a foot in the door professionally. So, my logic was: "Okay, let's see what's out there in the job market." I started looking around, and at that time, there was this first wave of law firms emerging that focused on business law. That's how I got started. And back then, there were only a handful of firms handling business law. But one of them was, at the time, by far the most interesting in terms of creativity and approach—they treated this as something completely new, something that happens once in a hundred years. And honestly, that was accurate for our situation. Because, I mean, transitioning from communism to capitalism—hopefully, God willing, this is something that only happens once in a hundred years in our country. I really hope we've used up that credit. And this firm was cool, everything was incredibly creative. That was just the spirit of the time, and that was the kind of team leading it back then. I found it super exciting. So, I was lucky enough to gain solid experience in my first year and a half. I used that time to apply for a master's program—that was Plan B.

More like risk diversification, because, as I said before—you'd have to be crazy to expect to get in anywhere. Especially for American master's programs at Ivy League schools. Those programs are designed to be extremely competitive. Back when we still had magister degrees, those American master's programs were already being recognized as equivalent to a magister degree. Because, as I mentioned earlier, in the U.S., law is a postgraduate study—they don't have undergraduate law degrees. Their graduate studies last nine semesters. So, when you enroll in an LL.M. at an Ivy League school, they give you three semesters—which is a third of their entire law degree. And the admissions process is brutally competitive. On average, they accept only 4–5% of applicants from around the world. That's why I said—you'd have to be insane to believe you'd get in. You can hope and work for it, but beyond that, it's not realistic. And then, you face that moment. This has happened to me before, and it happened again later in life — You set yourself a goal that feels like a dream, but you have no plan for the day after. Because the dream seems so unrealistic that your brain doesn't even dare to think beyond it.

Ivan Minić: Why would I plan for something that isn't going to happen anyway?

HARVARD.

Bogdan Gecić: Exactly. It's not even that I thought it wouldn't happen. I really hoped it would, and I dreamed about it. But, you know... Those fantasy dreams... Who can even—? I mean, it would be arrogant to plan for something so big. It would be arrogant to plan for it.

van Minić: Like when a team goes to a tournament and only buys tickets for the quarterfinals—then they make it to the quarterfinals, and no one minds paying extra to stay longer.

Bogdan Gecić: Exactly! That's exactly it! And that's exactly what happened to me. I remember when I was applying for postgraduate programs, the first university to accept me was... I had saved up everything I had and set a goal to apply to ten schools. Which is very expensive because the entire application process is costly. The first acceptance letter I got was from Chicago—this was in January. And school starts in August, but applications are due in October/November of the previous year. After Chicago, I got a call from Bruges—the College of Europe there has a different application cycle. By March, most of the top U.S. schools send out their decisions. I still remember it like it was yesterday—March 21st, in the evening. I called my best friend, who's now my best man, to wish him a happy birthday. At the time, he was living in Copenhagen—he's originally Ukrainian. We kept in touch, and I called him through Skype, because back then, you had to log onto a computer to do that.

So, I finished wishing him a happy birthday, and like a lunatic, I thought: "Let me just check my email." I had been refreshing my inbox every single day to see if I'd gotten a response. I opened the email and started reading. I had even mentally prepared myself for the rejection, expecting the classic: "Dear [Name], we regret to inform you..." But as I got to the second sentence, I realized—

Ivan Minić: Wait, when are they going to reject me?

Bogdan Gecić: Right! And then—boom!—short circuit. Because that's when I found out—Harvard accepted me. Later, I got accepted to Columbia and a few other schools, but in my head—that was it. That was March. And just like that, by August, I was in America. With absolutely no plan for what comes next.

Leaving for Harvard

Ivan Minić: So, August comes, and it's time to go to America.

Bogdan Gecić: And it was so cool. Looking back now, it was really incredibly cool. Because, in reality, I was both terrified and excited—but I didn't want to show it. The truth is, I had no control over the situation. I mean, I didn't know where my head was or where my ass was.

HARVARD.

I had zero idea what I was walking into. We all have our preconceived notions—seriously, prejudices—about what Harvard looks like, what America looks like, what a bunch of places in the world look like. And where do we get most of those ideas? From pop culture, from movies, TV shows, and now, from social media. But in reality, very few people actually experience these places firsthand. So I had no idea what to expect. Like everyone else from our generation at that time, I was still pretty dependent on my parents—if not financially, then at least for logistical support and everything else. So becoming fully independent was a big deal in itself—let alone doing it on another continent, in a different time zone. And to make it even more insane, I had absolutely no plan for what came after landing. I knew that from the moment I left home until I arrived there, I was set. But beyond that? Nothing. Even finding where I was supposed to live was an adventure. I arrived late at night and got to the main gates of Harvard Yard, which is the heart of the campus. And I had no clue where or how to find the guy who was supposed to give me the keys to my dorm. So, I was just standing there like... I always joke that I was like a little Borat from Kazakhstan. Because, honestly—that's exactly what we were like.

Ivan Minić: Kids today have no idea. We all remember—back then, going to Greece was a dream because you needed a visa. We grew up needing visas for everything—until 2008.

Bogdan Gecić: Exactly! It was a life achievement just to travel abroad—even for a short trip. Let alone going to America. We had no points of reference for anything. We were just isolated. And now, I love the fact that kids today—I see it with my daughter—they aren't even aware of their own privilege. Which is great! They have Erasmus exchanges, they study a semester here, a semester there. They don't just have the internet, they have access to everything—to all sources of information.

Ivan Minić: Yeah, they have visa-free travel, cheap flights, and they can actually see Europe—or even beyond.

Bogdan Gecić: Exactly! And we had none of that. Flights were insanely expensive—low-cost airlines were just starting out. I mean, we lived in a completely different world.

Ivan Minić: The internet arrived in 1995, but people didn't really start using it properly until around 2001–2003.

Bogdan Gecić: Exactly! I mean, if you had dial-up internet during the NATO bombing, you were basically... I still remember—we all used it just to go on chat rooms. But what I'm saying is—our perception of the world was so limited. We were literally like Borat from Kazakhstan.

Ivan Minić: You get an idea from movies and TV shows—how universities work, what they look like. I've visited a few major universities, but unfortunately, I've never been to Boston—though I'd love to go at some point.

HARVARD.

But I've been to California, Texas—I saw the University of Texas, the University of Houston in detail, I visited Stanford. Stanford is stunning in a thousand ways, but the moment you actually realize what it is, it hits you— You recognize the buildings, the parks from all those movies, TV series, documentaries... But those are just fragments. Even if you put together everything you've ever seen on screen, that's maybe 2% of the full picture. The Stanford campus is massive. It's not even just in one place—it's spread out across two locations near San Francisco. But just the main part of the campus is so big that you need 30 minutes by car just to drive around it. There's so much infrastructure that, honestly, you never need to leave.
But my mental image—probably the same as yours—was: "Okay, so they have dorms, maybe a sports hall, the university building... and that's it. Everything's within a hundred meters, like half a block in New Belgrade."

Bogdan Gecić: Exactly! That's exactly what I mean—we had no frame of reference. Which is why I keep joking about being "Borat from Kazakhstan". We had nothing to compare it to. I remember my friends who came from Western countries or developed Asian countries—they had already done exchange programs in the U.S., worked summer jobs, moved away from their parents at 19...

They had a whole system of preparation so they wouldn't feel completely lost when they got there.And we?Nothing.Which is actually a challenge even today—even with visa-free travel. Because since we're not in the EU, work permits for our students are a totally different story. A student from Milan can just hop over to Amsterdam and work there all summer, fully registered, with healthcare and everything. Our students still don't have that option. And back then? We couldn't even dream of it. So, you arrive with no reference points at all. I'm not complaining —I'm saying that's what made it so interesting. Looking at it from today's perspective... Man, I had no clue about anything. And at the same time, I thought I knew something. Then you arrive, and reality just smacks you in the face.
I get there, and—imagine—by 2010, the entire Harvard campus had WiFi.
So, I opened my laptop, and my family watched the whole campus live on Skype.
They had digital money—Harvard had its own campus currency called Crimson Cash. You loaded money onto it, and you could pay for everything with it—laundry machines, food, anything. You could even book laundry slots online—so you knew exactly when to go down to do your laundry. There was an Apple Store—just for Harvard students. And back then, that was a huge deal. I mean, this was Apple.
You have to remember—in 2010, there were barely three iPhones in all of Belgrade.

HARVARD.

It was wild. And suddenly, you realize—you're in the center of innovation. People are boldly experimenting, working on new ideas—and nobody shuts you down. Nobody tells you, "That's stupid, don't bother." Instead, they say, "Let's see what you've got." And you realize—there's a whole other world out there. And honestly, our culture wasn't built that way. Whether because of communism, our rigid school system, or the '90s—it was always: "Sit down and be quiet."
Then suddenly, you're in a place where new ideas are encouraged. Where someone like Mark Zuckerberg drops out of Harvard to start a business—and by 2010, he was already a legend for what he'd built. For me, stepping onto that campus felt like time travel. Like I had walked into the future. It was literally like Back to the Future. That's how I felt the moment I arrived.

The Scale of America and the Harvard Experience

Ivan Minić: I've had a few moments like that in America—not too many, because America isn't really built that way—but there were a few. Moments where I found myself somewhere that felt brand new, cutting-edge, futuristic at that very moment. For example, in Texas, where I've been relatively often, I saw this happen between two visits—they had built a brand-new stadium. It wasn't the biggest, but it was stunning, super high-tech, and impressive.

It didn't even need to host an event—I could just walk around and explore it, because it was fascinating. And in America, I rarely had the experience of visiting a place and thinking, "Wow, something happened here 200 years ago, something significant took place right on this spot." Maybe only in New York did I get that feeling—walking through certain places and realizing, "Okay, something major happened here two centuries ago." The places where I did get that sense in Texas were places like San Antonio, with the Alamo and that whole area. Or Austin, which has a deep cultural and historical tradition. But overall, there aren't many places like that. On the other hand, Harvard is a place that holds deep historical significance in that way.
Bogdan Gecić: That's a tricky thing, because you're absolutely right.
Harvard makes you realize that, in the grand scheme of things, history isn't really a big deal in America. I mean, it's not even a decimal point in the vastness of what America is. But back then, I had no idea. I was basically Borat from Kazakhstan all over again. I know people might roll their eyes at how often I use that phrase, but honestly—I had no concept of how big America actually is.
There was no point of reference for me to compare it to.
America spans five time zones—just in terms of physical size, it's massive.
And when you add population into the equation, there's no Western country with a population of 300+ million people—now closer to 340 million.

HARVARD.

Ivan Minić: Or take this—last year, I had a realization about this. Now, I know a lot about geography. Like, before Google Maps and Google Earth, I memorized atlases. I knew every country's flag, every capital, every major river—I was that guy. You couldn't beat me in geography.
So, I had a business trip to Puerto Rico. And I thought—"Yeah, I know where Puerto Rico is. Nobody needs to tell me. I got this." But since I was already going there, I figured— "Hey, why not take a quick detour to see one of my best friends in San Francisco?" So, I check flights. And I think, "Wait, why isn't there a direct flight?" I look it up—and suddenly, it hits me. There's no direct flight for a very good reason. The best options involved a layover —most commonly in Charlotte. I had a rough idea of where Charlotte was, but I remember thinking— "Why would anyone ever go to Charlotte?" Honestly, the only reason we even knew about Charlotte was because of Vlade Divac. Otherwise, it's a total non-factor. And then, when you actually land there, it becomes crystal clear— There's absolutely no reason to ever know that Charlotte exists. And yet, I look at the flight time— "Okay, it's not that far." 5.5 hours from Puerto Rico to Charlotte. Then another 6 hours from Charlotte to San Francisco. Wait a minute — "But Belgrade to New York is only 7 hours??" Yes. That's how ridiculously huge America is.

Bogdan Gecić: Exactly! I had no frame of reference for it—none whatsoever. And I wasn't some clueless kid. My dad was a diplomat for Yugoslavia back in the day. In the '80s, we lived in Bangladesh.
And my parents were part of that classic "Trst shopping generation"—the idea that, if you had a good diplomatic salary, you wouldn't save anything (God forbid!), but instead, you'd spend it all on cultural experiences—which, of course, meant traveling. So they traveled all over, dragging me along, under the logic of— "It'll be good for him!" But I was a kid. What did I actually remember? To be honest—not much. For me, travel only started making sense when I was around 14 or 15. Before that, my memories of traveling were just... toy stores. Like, my biggest memory of Singapore? A massive Voltron toy I saw there. I could have seen that anywhere—we didn't have to go to Singapore. But my parents traveled all over Asia before sanctions hit.
So, in theory, I should have had some kind of reference point. But still—America completely shocked me. Not just in terms of size, but also in terms of how dynamic their society is. Because when you scratch beneath the surface, their numbers are insane. Take this— 50% of their workforce relocates every four years. Let's say—just as a rough number—there are 100 million working people. (Realistically, it's probably much more, but let's use 100 million.) That means that in four years, 50 million people move. That's insane.

HARVARD.

Think about what that means in terms of job mobility— The ability to move for work, the ability to find new opportunities.
First of all, it tells you how fast-paced their economy is. But more importantly, it means that if you're ambitious, you can chase better opportunities. That was another shock for me at Harvard.
Because not only did I have no plan, but for the first time in my life, I experienced something that had never happened to me before— I wasn't fighting for a single opportunity. Instead, I was standing in front of an overwhelming number of options. It was like that old cartoon they used to show on RTS before the evening news— The one with the two orphans staring hungrily at a bakery window, overwhelmed by all the cakes and sweets inside. That's exactly how I felt. I got to Harvard, and I had no idea what to choose. My biggest problem wasn't fighting for a spot—it was figuring out what I DIDN'T want to do, so I wouldn't completely overload myself.
Because I wanted to try everything.
The courses were amazing.
The extracurricular activities were unreal.
You had everything—

- Law Review, where Obama had been Editor-in-Chief.
- Internships in private law firms.
- Internships in public sector law.
- Entire departments dedicated to helping students find government jobs.
- Centers like Berkman Klein for Cyber Law, working on cutting-edge legal issues.

And when I saw all that, it hit me—"Holy. This is a completely different world."
I wasn't fighting for survival. I was drowning in opportunities. And that, in itself, was an entirely new experience.

Ivan Minić: And in the boards of some of the companies in the field you want to work in, there are probably professors or alumni.

Bogdan Gecić: Exactly. So now you have to come to them with something innovative —that's the key. It was a total mind-blowing experience. Honestly, it wasn't anything like I expected. Looking back, I don't think I could have even imagined what it would be like.

Ivan Minić: Let's go back to something from the beginning of this discussion.
Over the years, many people from here—especially from the early '90s to the 2000s, and even today—have gone to the U.S. either for studies or, more commonly, for postgraduate degrees.
But no one had gone for a law degree.
And no one had gone to Harvard.
We've had people from Columbia, Syracuse, Stanford, and other top schools. And their stories have always been fascinating, especially about how the admissions process worked in the '90s. Because back then, it wasn't like today—you couldn't just send an email.
If you were an athlete, you sent VHS tapes. And you had to send dozens of VHS tapes to dozens of universities.

Bogdan Gecić: Yeah, exactly—that's what we talked about. It was insanely expensive.

HARVARD.

Ivan Minić: And what's particularly interesting is this— Even people who were top students back home would arrive in the U.S. and face a huge cultural shock. Because they came from a system where your job was to memorize and repeat what you had read or heard. There was very little discussion. Then, suddenly, they'd land in an environment where EVERYTHING was based on discussion. And where, most of the time, everyone else was better prepared than them for that style of learning. Not because they knew more, but because they were better speakers. They had better rhetorical skills, better public speaking abilities—even if it wasn't classic public speaking. They just had the vocabulary, the articulation, the flow—so even if you had a better argument, they could present theirs better.

Bogdan Gecić: That's absolutely true. But let me break it down. First, about admissions—you reminded me of something I had completely forgotten. I think this actually happened with my Harvard application. Back in my day, you still submitted applications in two ways— Some parts were electronic, but a large portion had to be printed and mailed as hard copies. Now, it's all digital. My daughter just applied to some schools, and there's not a single physical document anymore—just PDFs. But back then, you had to prepare all these hard copies. And first of all, FedEx charged you an arm and a leg just to send them.

That's why I said—this was an expensive process. And second, it was a huge bureaucratic hassle. Everything had to be certified, translated, signed by professors writing your recommendations—there were so many steps. It was a serious administrative process. For example, my then-girlfriend, who was literally the best student in Ireland, started preparing her Harvard application a year in advance. Whereas here? If you tell someone you're preparing for something a year ahead of time, they'd slap you and call you an idiot. We just didn't have a concept of long-term preparation like that. We learned everything on the fly. And you couldn't even ask many people for advice—because there just weren't many people who had done it before. And then, the craziest thing happened—I think it was Harvard's application specifically, but my mail got delayed because of a volcanic eruption in Iceland. A volcano, man. As if the universe itself was messing with me. And suddenly, I had to email Harvard and say— "Hey, uh, so there was this whole volcanic eruption thing... Can you count this as a force majeure event? If my documents arrive late, can you still consider my application?" I even had official proof that it wasn't my fault. But of course, they didn't care. They probably read my email and went— "Yeah, sure, buddy, the volcano excuse. Nice try." That kind of thing doesn't happen today—everything is electronic now, which makes things so much easier.

HARVARD.

Ivan Minić: Okay, but back to the real challenge—adjusting to their system.

Bogdan Gecić: Oh, man... I showed up with no preparation, and whatever I had expected, it was completely off the mark. I was totally clueless. And to be honest, when you finish law school here, you leave with zero confidence in your actual problem-solving abilities. At least that was my experience. I had no idea how capable I actually was. I had no sense of how intelligent or competent I was.
For the first few years of university, I even had a bit of an identity crisis—I genuinely thought I was stupid. Because law school was just memorization. And I saw people who excelled at that, and I thought —"Something must be wrong with me."
At Harvard, everything was case-based. You got real-world legal problems to solve. And they put Americans and international students on the same grading curve. Which meant I was competing against students who had been raised in this system. Harvard only accepts the top 550 American students into their JD program. And another 150–170 international students for the LL.M. (master's program). And then they curve the grades—so your score depends on how well the best person in the class performs.
I was like—"Excuse me??" How the hell was I supposed to compete with people who could read and process information at lightning speed? My first trauma—I tried to read four pages of case law in the morning.

By evening, I still hadn't finished. Meanwhile, the top students could read 100 pages in two hours. I was completely lost.

Ivan Minić: But what was the benefit of this system?

Bogdan Gecić: The biggest benefit was—for the first time in my life, I figured out what I was actually good at. Because hard work alone wouldn't cut it. Their library was open 24/7—and, believe me, there were people sitting there at 5 AM, still reading. But no amount of studying could make up for a lack of natural ability.
That was the biggest difference from our system. At home, if you're hardworking, you'll get by. Over there, your raw output is what matters. It all depends on what you're naturally good at. And once you figure that out, you start to thrive.
At first, it was uncomfortable—I wasn't used to debating professors, challenging authority, or even asking questions openly. But that was their whole culture—
They wanted you to challenge them.
It wasn't about memorizing what they said —it was about picking their ideas apart.
It was like a mental battleground.
At Harvard, you didn't just learn the law—you tested it, broke it apart, and rebuilt it.
By the time graduation came around, I wasn't just a different student—
I was a different person.
And for the first time ever, I was actually confident in what I could do.

HARVARD.

ORGANIZATION AT HARVARD

Ivan Minić: Tell me, how does it actually work? The exams, preparation, workload—how does the whole process unfold over those three semesters?

Bogdan Gecić: Well, listen, it's great—from where I stand today, though, insanely hard. We all scattered in different directions after it ended. That Irish girl I mentioned earlier, who was literally the best student in Ireland, said it was the hardest academic period of her life.
And mind you—she was from a common law system, English was her first language, and she still found it brutal. So for the rest of us? Man, it was a whole other level of struggle. But when you step back and look at how it's structured, the system is actually brilliant. The shortest exams last three hours. The longest ones? Eight hours—a full workday.

Ivan Minić: (Makes a shocked face)

Bogdan Gecić: Yeah, I knew you'd react like that! But it's not as bad as it sounds. Because they give you three cases and say: "Here's 3,600 words. Write different solutions for each case." And you have from 9 AM to 5 PM—just like a real workday. Because, at the end of the day, we're all going to be working. And that's the whole point of the system.

They simulate real life. Which is fantastic because it actually does what education should do. School should first and foremost be job training. If you ask me, that's its primary purpose. Everything else—intellectualism, academia, philosophy—that's extra. That's nice to have, but the core function of education should be to prepare people for work. But in our system, it's the complete opposite.
You finish your undergraduate degree, and you don't even know how to write a formal email. Even today, in our business world, 90% of emails start with "Dear" and end with "respectfully." Like, come on—those aren't the only two options! And my personal favorite? When someone writes "Dear" followed by a first name—so then it's completely unclear what the tone is supposed to be. Over there, every single exam is a real-world simulation. Even the more unconventional ones—where you have professors who are giants in their fields, and they just say: "Alright, here's a topic. You've got a month. Write me a full research paper on it and submit it."
Why do they do that? Because they actually read everything. And this is another crazy thing—every professor reads every single paper. They know everything published in their field, because that's their job. So you can't fake it. You can't plagiarize, because they know exactly what they're reading. So when they give you a month to write something, they expect real innovation.

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Ivan Minić: Okay, but back to the real challenge—adjusting to their system.

Bogdan Gecić: Oh, man... I showed up with no preparation, and whatever I had expected, it was completely off the mark. I was totally clueless. And to be honest, when you finish law school here, you leave with zero confidence in your actual problem-solving abilities. At least that was my experience. I had no idea how capable I actually was. I had no sense of how intelligent or competent I was.
For the first few years of university, I even had a bit of an identity crisis—I genuinely thought I was stupid. Because law school was just memorization. And I saw people who excelled at that, and I thought —"Something must be wrong with me."
At Harvard, everything was case-based. You got real-world legal problems to solve. And they put Americans and international students on the same grading curve. Which meant I was competing against students who had been raised in this system. Harvard only accepts the top 550 American students into their JD program. And another 150–170 international students for the LL.M. (master's program). And then they curve the grades—so your score depends on how well the best person in the class performs.
I was like—"Excuse me??" How the hell was I supposed to compete with people who could read and process information at lightning speed? My first trauma—I tried to read four pages of case law in the morning.

Most exams are also anonymous. You can't write anything that reveals your identity—you're assigned a unique number, and the professor only sees that number on your exam. Then, later, administration deciphers who got what grade—like a freaking Enigma machine. If you accidentally include any personal information, you're disqualified. It's a very serious meritocratic system. And that's awesome—because whatever grade you get, you know you earned it. It wasn't because you got lucky with the questions. It wasn't because you sucked up to the professor. It was purely based on the quality of your work. And that's what I really loved about Americans at that time. Yes, their system has flaws, and they have social inequalities like anywhere else.
But on the whole, it doesn't matter where you're from, who you are, or what your background is. The only thing that matters is what you can actually do. And when you come from our part of the world, where that is not at all how things work, it's mind-blowing. We come from a culture of forced equality—not equality of opportunity, but equality of outcomes. Which is the worst kind of system. And even in Europe, things aren't much better —it's a rigid, stagnant place, where everything is cemented in place. Over there, it doesn't matter if you're German, English, or from anywhere else.
Americans just care about what you bring to the table. And when you see that in action, not just as a concept but as a reality, it's mind-blowing. Of course, the system isn't perfect—far from it. But it's damn impressive.

HARVARD.

Their entire approach to entrepreneurship is also fascinating. 75% of young people under 30 in America think they should start their own business. At the same time, in our generation, 70% of people wanted a safe government job—because it was "secure". Those are massive differences in mindset and risk tolerance. Even their career services reflect this difference.
Their law school career office measures its success by how many students have a job lined up by graduation day. Harvard Law had something like a 98% employment rate at graduation. And here's a fun fact—
If your resume is too perfect, it's actually a red flag. They think it means you've never taken risks. Because in their culture, failure is normal. They want to see "bounce back" stories—they care about how you recover from setbacks more than whether you were always perfect. Whereas in our system, if you screw up once, you're done. Like, game over—your reputation is ruined forever. Ivan Minić: Right—failure is just part of the journey. Bogdan Gecić: Exactly! But here, the mentality is completely different— If you make a mistake, everything you've ever done is invalidated. So for me, this whole perspective shift was mind-blowing. And honestly, a lot of things I had intuitively sensed, I finally saw in action for the first time. At the same time, I was lucky to go to a place like that—
Because it gave me a benchmark for excellence.

If that's the top, then you can easily measure everything else against it. Whether it's other parts of Europe, China, or anywhere else—once you see the gold standard, you can see through the nonsense. And that helped me tremendously later on.

CONCLUSION OF THE CONVERSATION

Ivan Minić: Let's wrap up this episode with your time in America. You arrived without a plan. By the end, did you have at least some idea of what you wanted to do next?

Bogdan Gecić: By the end? Yeah, I realized I wanted to go into private practice.
And I actually got a job offer from a Wall Street law firm. That's when I also realized that even with a Harvard degree, where you come from still matters. Employers look at you and think—"What market can I place this person in?" And I spent 180 hours that year in career training workshops—offered by the university.
At the same time, I was in a serious relationship and got caught up in the whole "let's see if I can stay abroad" thing. But honestly? I also wanted to come back. Because at that time, Serbia's startup scene was booming, and it was the first-ever big transformation in corporate law. It was the birth of an entirely new industry. And I wanted to be a part of it.
But before that, I decided to give Brussels a shot... And that's here the next chapter begins.

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+381 11 4043 570 www.geciclaw.com office@geciclaw.com