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## **EUROPE BETWEEN IDENTITY AND UNIVERSALISM**

We were recently witness to disputes in two countries, Slovakia and Poland, in connection with the Lisbon Treaty. They were two different, but equally important disputes. In Slovakia, during the dispute in relation to the Lisbon Treaty, an attempt was made to prevent a law against free speech, directed against the independent media, which the governing coalition was trying to force through. Slovak democrats believed that the European Union would come to the defence of free speech when this was violated in member states. It was thus a test of the extent to which the European Union was prepared conscientiously to defend its own principles.

It was different in Poland. We were witness to a new outbreak of anti-Europeanism. Each of the two disputes, in fact, was a different project of the future. What questions were raised by the Polish eurosceptics, who characterised themselves as the national-Catholic right?

They asked: »Is this the end of Polish sovereignty? Is this the end of the Polish national identity? Is this the assassination of Catholic morality?« And they answered: »The European Union is a focus of evil and sin; abortion, contraception, pornography, euthanasia, homosexual unions, divorce and narcotics«. It is also the dictatorship of relativism, permissiveness, liberalism.

The Polish dispute, consequently, had a civilisational extent. Two camps confronted each other, which advocated different value systems and different dreams of the future. The eurosceptics lost, but they showed the essence of the dispute. They showed, in fact, that the European Union is a region of freedom, a community of democratic states. For the eurosceptics, however, such

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a Union and such democracy are not worth a great deal. They want sovereign democracy, to use the well-known formula of Vladimir Putin. Sovereignty in this context means a rejection of respect for democratic values; a rejection of respect for European standards, a democratic legal state. This principle is supposed to be democratic, but the substance must be authoritarian. Putin's team, therefore, under the banner of the struggle against the oligarchy, destroyed the independent media. The independent judiciary was destroyed. Presidential and parliamentary elections took place, but it was as if they had never been.

This is well illustrated by a well-known Russian anecdote, which is a paraphrase of the fable about the crow, the fox and the cheese. It goes like this: a crow was sitting in a tree and held a piece of cheese in his beak. A fox beneath the tree wanted to persuade it to open its beak and let go of the piece of cheese. So it said to the crow: »Crow, will you vote for Vladimir Vladimirjevič Putin at the next election?« The crow was silent. So the fox repeated: »Crow, I haven't come on my own behalf, the security services sent me from Moscow, so I ask you again whether you will vote for Vladimir Vladimirjevič Putin at the next election?« The crow was silent. This time the fox asked him: »Listen, crow, the Moscow mafia also sent me. If you don't answer the question, they'll come here and wring your neck, so I ask you again whether you'll vote for Vladimir Vladimirjevič Putin at the next elections?« The terrified crow answered: »I will!«

The crow let go of the cheese, the fox grabbed it and ran away, and the crow sat on the tree and said to itself: »How could I have been so stupid, since even if I'd said no, it wouldn't have changed anything«.

This anecdote felicitously tells what might be the fate of many states in post-communist Europe. When I noticed the behaviour of the Polish government when Jaroslaw Kaczyński was prime minister, I had the impression that a Polish equivalent of Putinism was emerging in front of my very eyes.

The role of the Church is important in new democracies. In Putin's Russia, the Church is publicly privileged but, at the same time, completely subordinated: it sings the praise of the Russian government, kindles xenophobia in Russian society, boldly arrogates the imperialist tradition. It appears that after the collapse of Communism, the political elite of authoritarian groupings arrogate the slogan of nationalism and religious integrity and thus attempt – with the aid of legal and material privileges for the Church – to change this institution into an ideological tool of their authority. It was like that, for example, in Spain in the Franco period. The Church was generously plied with privileges, but the state was arbiter in internal church matters. The Spanish experience thus needs to be carefully analysed in states of young democracy, in which the Church

has an important role. The role of the Church in the struggle against Communism was undoubtedly positive. Precisely the Church was the shelter of human dignity, but the link between altar and throne is also an important part of the European tradition, the same as the Reformation, as the revolt of Jan Hus and Martin Luther, as well as the fate of Galileo or Giordano Bruni. So the question of the role of the Church and religion in European democracy is still topical. I therefore understood the position of the government of the Republic of Poland, which submitted the demand that memory of the Christian tradition in the history of Europe be noted in the Preamble to the Constitutional Treaty. I thus also believe that the path of Spanish Prime Minister Zapattera, who wants to exclude religion and the Church from public debate, is mistaken. Criticism of individual decisions of Catholic bishops or the Holy See, namely, is completely understandable but, in my opinion, religion is a completely inseparable element of human existence in a community. The Jacobins were the first to persuade us of this and then the communists. Europe must not forget these lessons. However, religion – and Europe must similarly not forget this – can be exploited. Today, in Central and Eastern Europe, this resistance to religion, transformed into national ideology, with ethnic nationalism – I believe – is the last, highest level of communism. This is demonstrated by the cases of Tuđman and Milošević.

Fundamentalist religion faces democracy with a Jacobin challenge: »Be my brother or I will kill you«. It is possible to put it differently; a religious fundamentalist says: »When I am in a minority, I claim rights for myself, because such are my principles; when I am in a majority, I do not give these rights, because such are my principles«.

The answer of European democracy to this challenge should be a philosophy of »well-intentioned separation of Church and State«. The European Union is a lay construction, but this construction must have its memory; the Union is a creation built on tolerance, but even tolerance has its boundaries: The French conflict in connection with the Muslim head scarf highlights how very open is the question of boundaries.

The European Union is a creation of a political and spiritual revolution which goes beyond the classical idea of national states and, in the midst of national diversity, creates a unity of a new type. The European Union is thus neither a supra-state nor a community of European nations, but it is a community that respects and supports the pluralism of nations and cultures, languages and religions; this is not an artificial garden in Versailles, but a natural meadow with a large number of different flowers. The principle of the Euro-

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pean Union must thus be multi-culturalism. This is clear but, at the same time, very difficult. How very difficult is demonstrated by the experience of former Yugoslavia and former Czechoslovakia; today this is shown by the problems of Spain, Belgium and, of course, also Cyprus.

It appears that we are seeing two types of threat. The first threat is the position of big brother, who dictates his will to smaller brother: Jacques Chirac behaved in such a way when he told the Poles to sit quietly; Chancellor Schröder behaved in such way when he took negotiations into his own hands in relation to a gas pipe under the Baltic Sea, without consulting other countries of the Union, who would be affected by the matter. However, this is certainly not the only threat – since the position of a frustrated young person with a complex who believes that he must get everything for nothing and that all his whims must be fulfilled is also dangerous. The former prime minister of Poland, Jarosław Kaczyński, occupied that position.

94 In both the aforementioned positions are hidden traps; both the first and the second lead to a rebirth of national egoism or even to a complete de-politisation of European structures, in place of which invade nihilism, cynicism, and with them political corruption, tabloidisation of any discussion, a deficit of democracy and the death of the citizen's security.

Europe is a memory of the past and needs to deal with the past: with Fascism, Nazism, Communism, Francoism. We must not forget that a large number of European countries found themselves in the snare of two totalitarianisms. This affects Slovakia, Croatia and the Baltic countries, which remember the communist terror as considerably worse than the Nazi one. This also affects the complex Polish-German or Polish-Ukrainian relations. Each of these nations has its own bones in the cupboard, which still constantly prevent honest discussion about the past and the future.

There is probably no other help than to bring these bones to light in an atmosphere of respect for truth, human dignity, historical context. All this must be done with thought for the future, and the future can only be built if you strive to cleanse your own memory in such a way that you can understand your partner. It seems that it is difficult, but Polish conflicts connected with Polish-Jewish relations are a good example that it is possible to preserve both fidelity to historical truth and human decency.

In our countries, the countries of post-communist Europe, a reckoning with the past is extremely difficult. This is palpably shown by all discussions on so-called lustration or de-communisation, which were supposed to cleanse the collective memory for truth but became an opportunity to destroy political

opponents. This political operation, called lustration, contributed to the emergence of distrust, fear and extortion. It appears that a just (arbitrated) solution would be the principle: amnesty – yes, amnesia – no.

Our nations have various traditions: good ones of which we are proud, and bad ones of which we should be ashamed, but we normally expunge from our memory. However, it is necessary to talk about tradition; it is necessary to nurture it, but it is also necessary to pose delicate questions. In Poland, two books by Jan Tomasz Gross were an opportunity for such delicate questions. Thanks to such books, our nations will not be prisoners of tradition. We cannot, namely, justify Stalin's crimes with those of Hitler but, similarly, neither can the crimes of Fidel Castro justify Pinochet's crimes. It is necessary to respect the truth and call a spade a spade, but not to turn it into a baseball bat for beating political opponents. Revenge cannot be called justice. The fanaticism of the communists must not be replaced by the fanaticism of anti-communism with a Bolshevik face.

Europe is reminiscent of a family home that has survived a terrible family brawl. All have come to be affected by this brawl. Each of us has quite a lot on our conscience, so we are obliged to think about forgiveness and reconciliation, but not at the price of forging memory. So we cannot allow the indifferent well-known German historian who rejects the idea of German guilt and explains Hitler's success by the cruelty of the Russian Bolsheviks. The same historian calls the Second World War the »European civil war«. In spite of everything, namely, it is not possible with an honest conscience to claim that on 1 September 1939, Europeans attacked Europeans. No – Germany attacked Poland and occupied our country with exceptional cruelty for five years. There is no reason and no sense in Polish leaders repeating this clear fact daily, but both Poles and Germans must always retain this truth in their memory.

Europe is the continent of the holocaust. This was an experience without precedence which always requires us to ask how anti-semitism is possible on a continent which became the graveyard of the Jewish nation. Is it possible today to forget the monstrous sickness of the European spirit? No – it is necessary constantly to ask how anti-semitism is possible in countries in which Jews are only an insignificant minority. Why for some environments is anti-semitism still a recognisable sign of the conceptual community?

It appears important to remember that it is difficult to talk here about symmetry. I have personally met a lot of Poles who cannot stand Jews, and I have met a lot of Jews who cannot stand Poles. However, I must completely sincerely recognise that I have never met a Jew who claimed that the Poles rule the world.

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A few years ago, two well-known philosophers published an article together in which they explained the wave of anti-American demonstrations in large European cities as the birth of a new European identity. The sign of the European Union would then become anti-Americanism. A Pole would accept this view with difficulty. He could understand that the policies of the Bush administration, its arrogance and incompetence have tended to give rise to anger and opposition; but the birth certificate of the new Europe was, is and will remain 1989, when the communist system was destroyed and freedom reigned. I will never forget that the Euro-Atlantic Alliance was for decades the only defence of the democratic world and I do not believe in the value of a new Europe built on the ruins of this alliance. I came to such a conclusion precisely on the basis of the history of Europe in the 20th century.

96 Today, Europe is faced with a challenge of a special sort: is it possible to be simultaneously a patriot of your own nation and of the wider community, i.e., such as a multi-national state, a supranational community like the European Union. I do not know whether it is possible, but I do know that it is necessary. To return to a philosophy of national egoism would bury the greatest opportunity in front of which our continent finds itself.

The European Union suffers from a lack of democracy, and free independent media are the key to democracy. Precisely they caution against the tabloidisation of debate; they uncover corruption; they perceive the new wave of xenophobic nationalism. We must not underestimate these dangers, to repeat the mistake of the period in which we underestimated Fascism and Communism. Fragile democracy in an unstable world always conceals within itself a threat. The first sign of the activation of these threats is an attack on the free media. Free media, namely, are an indispensable mark that an independent public opinion is functioning, and these together represent the foundations of democracy. Dictatorial governments abolish free media: sometimes decisively, overnight, like Hitler or Franco, sometimes gradually, step by step, like Mussolini or Putin. This is an inevitable sign that freedom is disappearing, this metaphysical basis of democracy. Independent media are probably not the fourth branch of authority, they are a form of anti-authority, condemned to natural and constant conflict with ever new establishment elites.

The European Union is also based on the fact that we, people of the public media, perform the function of the Capitoline geese, which, by clucking warn the government of their mistakes, but very often save the city. The European Union must therefore protect the free media, which will mercilessly warn it of its mistakes.

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