

Break Lines and Decomposer Germs. Late Night Musings on the Spiritual and Cultural Structure of Europe

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Most esteemed fellow Europeans!

Thank you for the invitation and the possibility to be here, in this wonderful place, surrounded by a very special aura of intellectual pursuit, history and nature. You, most esteemed Mr Antanas Gailius, have arranged for this gift. To you I owe special thanks, but for a lot more than this. Together with you (and with Michael Feil, who is also here today) we celebrated the Lithuanian independence by the Vilnius Cathedral in 1991. In later years, I had the possibility to come to Vilnius to talk about my pastoral experience with Catholic students, or even about the idea of a Catholic academy.

Today our topic is much broader. By choosing such a topic, the organizers of this Forum confirm what the Hungarian writer Ilma Rakusa, thinking about the spiritual state of Europe, put like this: “Here some actually consider the fact that the concepts of center and periphery are more than relative, that the impulses may come from the margins”¹.

I. A MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS?

“Migraine of Europe 2” – that is the topic of this Forum, so it’s formulated medically. Therefore, as I know very little about medicine, I first took

¹ „Bis der Teufel uns scheidet“, p. 10.

a glance at the medical literature to see what “migraine” actually is. Here are the elements that I found:

Migraine is:

- first, a pain usually in one side of the head,
- second, that repeats periodically,
- third, is accompanied by additional symptoms like nausea and increased sensitivity to sounds or light,
- fourth, in the case of which, two forms are distinguished, “with aura” and “without aura”, i. e., it is or isn’t accompanied by impaired vision,
- fifth, in the case of which, a large part is played by the individual’s genetic heritage.
- and sixth, the cause of which is a disturbed functioning of certain neurotransmitters and also an emerging inflammation of the small blood vessels of the brain, which makes the pain more difficult to manage.

Applying these medical insights to our topic, these are the questions that arose for me:

- First, is the “migraine of Europe” somehow connected to the broken-off half of our thinking and feeling?
- Second, is it going to recur?
- Third, is it the cause of this sensual increased sensitivity that affects the senses, thus, are our brains failing at processing the outside triggers correctly?
- Fourth, can it cause disturbances of vision and hearing, thus, distort our perception of reality?
- Fifth, are we, the Europeans, genetically predisposed to migraines?
- And, finally, sixth, are the signals of pain that come to Europe’s brain not mollified, but exaggerated?

I invite you to look for answers yourselves, by employing the fundamental idea of “break lines and decomposer germs”.

Ans since we’re playing around with medical words, I will organize my statements into the three steps of a responsible doctor:

First, anamnesis, thus, memories, study of the past (what happened in the past?), second, a diagnosis based on this anamnesis, and, third, suggestions for treatment.

II. ANAMNESIS

1. On the borders of Europe

In 2012, the Viennese philosopher Konrad Paul Liessmann published the book *Lob der Grenze. Kritik der politischen Unterscheidungskraft* (An Ode to the Wall. Critique of the Political Power of Division). He writes: “The spirit of the times is trying to cross, to destroy the borders. However, it incorrectly perceives both the function and possibilities of borders, and the significance the borders are supposed to acquire in analyzing and overcoming crises”.²

This *Ode to the Wall* presents the fundamental philosophical arguments, because “in general, a border is a condition of all comprehension and knowledge. If there were no differences, there would be nothing to see, identify, learn”.³ Any knowledge must begin with the single definitive act: this is not something else.

Therefore without minding the borders, it is impossible to speak about Europe as well. The borders define what Europe is. True, as this author talks about Europe among many other areas and attempts to define its borders, he admits he has run into difficulties that are probably our difficulties too. Geographic or ethnic borders are not and have never been firmly defined, and what is often described as a construct of European values turns out to many to be either outdated or, like, for instance, human rights, become universal. Thus all Liessmann is left with is a very approximate geographic space, the borders of which consist of “the East of the continent, the Middle East, the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic”.⁴

In order to understand what Europe means, I think, what is important is not discussing its outer borders, the countries and people that should be included in it, but understanding when and how Europe acquired its shape historically, as its inside borders took shape. It begins in the Antiquity. And its not because – or at least not so much because – of walling off from “barbarians” without. As early as 472 BC Aeschylus in his play *The Persians*, which is the first surviving play in the whole world, reproaches such a cliché. And the Roman *Limes* was, of course, a military defense wall that protected

² Liessmann, p. 12.

³ Liessmann, p. 29.

⁴ Liessmann, p. 93.

from unruly tribes, primarily the Germans. However, it was also a place of meeting, barter, pretty soon even of refreshing personal blood; it's not a coincidence that the German victor of the so-called Battle of the Teutoburg Forest carried the Latin name Arminius and was trained in Roman warfare.

Much more significant in the Antiquity was the tense and culturally most fruitful opposition between the Greeks and the Romans. The significance of the person who is entirely deservedly called the "father of the Western world", Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC–43 AD) emerged precisely from the first success at the tense synthesis of such different traditions.

I will provide a few more typical examples:

- The so-called Theodosian division after the death of Theodosius I in 395 BC into the realms of West and East with centers in Milan or Ravenna and Constantinople delineated the border that can still be seen in the present-day Balkan conflicts. It is not just the military wall of the early 18th century wars against the Turks, but especially it is the border that divides the Christianity into Latin and Greek, in other words, into the Roman and the Byzantine versions.
- Or: the Investiture Controversy in the Middle Ages defined the ideological division between the emperor and the pope, and also the limits of the competences of the state and the Church, thus, it drew the border that had never been so definitively drawn neither in the Orthodox Church, nor in Islam.
- Later, of course, on our side, the West, during the Reformation, both sides were very radical about drawing the line between the confessions, and that was accompanied by devastating wars, but also by different versions of culture.
- With his slogan "Écrasez l'infâme", „Eradicate the infamy“, thus advocating the destruction of the Church experienced as superstitious, reactionary, aggressive and violent, Voltaire, the epitome of the French Enlightenment, drew the line that was essential in secularization of the Western World.
- The way later the typically European nationalism of the 19th century, on the one hand, provided borders with ideological grounds, and, on the other hand, gave rise to such opposite reactions as pan-Germanism and pan-Slavism, is again an indication that inner, rather than outer walls are the trademark of Europe.

- And after 1945, it's enough to just say "iron curtain". That really was an inner border, and its effects are bothering us up to present day.
- Finally, the last example is, true, a failed attempt of the French President Nicolas Sarkozy to declare the "Mediterranean Sea Union" consisting of France, Italy and Iberian peninsula to balance off the "Germanic North".

To sum up: therefore, it is more important for us to consider not the outer, but the inner borders of Europe, its inner cultural divisions.

2. On the absence of cultural innocence

The fact that these borders that so clearly emphasize the nature of Europe are related to the greatest cultural threads of Europe, is a banality. And listing these traditions has already become quite an empty cliché. For example, some mention the three hills on which Europe supposedly stands – the Aeropagos of Athens, representing philosophy, the Capitol of Rome, representing law, and the Golgota in Jerusalem, representing Christianity.

Or some might speak almost in jest, like the Australian historian John Hirst: "Europe is a mix of people: the Greeks, who thought the world was simple, logical, and mathematical; the Christians, who thought the world was evil with only Jesus to save them; and the Germans, who thought waging war was the greatest".⁵ Based on this very varied heritage, he arrives at this conclusion: "It is our fate to be torn, divided and confused. Other civilisations have a single tradition and not this odd threesome. They are not so liable to turmoil, overturnings and confusion that we have had in our moral and intellectual life. We come from a very mixed parentage".⁶

Which means: the memory of those constantly re-drawn inner borders of Europe, conditioned by the very different traditions and spiritual, cultural and religious heritages that are often perceived as opposites, should warn us not to talk neither about "our European values" nor about the "Christian" Western world with too great an ease and abstraction, too much confidence and conviction, as quite recently, to the general astonishment of our Jewish citizens, this world appeared to be "Christian and Jewish Western world" and which – this is the latest insight – also "includes" Islam.

⁵ Hirst, p. 24.

⁶ Hirst, p. 64.

Our European roots are of much more varied nature and are not at all that easily combined as they appear to be. One must also add that both their shifting combinations and exaggerated emphasis on just one of them have always led to destructive, always deathly conflicts.

Rémi Brague writes: “The past of a culture is never rosy. An innocent civilization only exists in the dreams of those who know it not well enough – whether they belong to it or not. This is also true – and on an even greater scale – about Europe’s past”.⁷

Since I’ve mentioned this author, I’m moving on to Chapter 3 of my historical anamnesis.

3. On the Latin identity

Angelo Bolaffi, one of the great pro-European Italian reporters, states: “Why did the philosophers have contributed nothing worth mentioning regarding Europe? Either the philosophers did not care about it, or they preferred the rather cheap, albeit well written, criticism of Europe. So they criticized Brussels. They criticized bureaucracy. Essentially it has to be said: pragmatically, the politicians were better – they had no grand ideas, but they had the courage to go and do something even without a sound theoretical foundation”.⁸

My conviction is different from Bolaffio: there are philosophers who came up with a correct concept of Europe. One of them that I find especially agreeable is precisely Rémi Brague himself, professor of philosophy at the Pantheon-Sorbonne University in Paris, a great expert of antique and medieval philosophy as well as Islam. I would like to first illustrate his main statement on Europe with my own experience in Vilnius.

In August, 1991, after the long trip further and further east, over what still was the Soviet Union, we arrived to a strange land of which we knew nothing at all, and the next morning we found ourselves in front of the Aušros Vartai (the Gates of Dawn) and read: MATER MISERICORDIAE, SUB TUUM PRAESIDIUM CONFUGIMUS. “Mother of Mercy, under Thy protection we seek refuge.” I will never forget this astounding impression of the Latin, the Roman unity. To me it means what the French tradition refers to

⁷ Brague, p. 144.

⁸ Bolaffi, p. 119.

as “Civilisation Latine”, “une des plus vastes, des plus cohérentes constructions politiques et militaires de tous le temps.”⁹ I’d also add “religieuses” to the list of adjectives.

And now back to Rémi Brague. His starting point also consists of the three famous hills of tradition – Athens, Jerusalem, Rome. Jerusalem represents Judaism and Christianity, Athens, of course, the Greek philosophy. Faith and reason, ethics and aesthetics, obedience and beauty, tradition and autonomy – or however else are the two poles described. “In each case the difference was turned into opposition, and each element was scrutinized for an essence that would be the most at odds with the second element. Thus tension became a painful crack in the European culture”.¹⁰

The point of Rémi Brague’s statement is that he suddenly includes in the game the third hill, Rome: “Europe is neither all Greek nor exclusively Hebrew, nor Greco-Hebrew. It is not my intention here neither to prioritize the Roman element nor claim that it synthesizes the other two. My statement is much more radical, that we are and can be “Greek” or “Hebrew” only because we are primarily “Roman”.¹¹

To put it simply, Brague claims: Europe is made of “Romanness”, or, rather: “the Roman secondarity”, which is a certain way of recognizing alien traditions as alien, to comprehend oneself – like in the antique arts or philosophy – like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, to admit to one’s own lesser significance, like Christianity has always been ready to admit its own lesser significance compared to the ancient covenant between God and Israel. Thus when European study their sources, the Roman and Greek classics, they study them not because those are the sources of their identity, but for the sake of the sources themselves, because they seem right, beautiful and interesting. In Brague’s words, this is the European “eccentric identity”. He attempts “to highlight the inner dynamics of the European cultural adventure, the driving force of which I describe as Roman”.¹²

It remains clear that this model of behavior is related to the Western form of Europe. I would also prefer to remain within this framework, because it

⁹ Duby, p. 11.

¹⁰ Brague, p. 36.

¹¹ Brague, p. 37.

¹² Brague, p. 211.

matches my life experience the most evidently. And that is the only grounds to speak from.

III. DIAGNOSIS

- as we look at the inner borders of Europe
- having in mind its highly varied heritage
- remembering its very specific way of adapting the tradition

The anamnesis has led us ever deeper into the unique history of the European identity. Now, if we stick to our medical model, it's time for the diagnosis of the European migraine.

I will attempt to provide it in three steps that will follow the three-fold anamnesis in the reverse order. Thus, now we discuss the break lines and the decomposer germs.

1. It could be that we are overcome with modern Marcionism

As you might be aware, Marcion was the Christian who in the 2nd century BC completely rejected the Old Testament as part of Christian self-consciousness. All he found there was the angry God, the lesser creator God. The Church revealed its hand in this respect and, in Rémi Brague's terms, turned out to be "Roman", thus, it acknowledged its own secondarity, even though very soon this secondarity very soon came to be interpreted as surpassing. Brague even concludes: "Maybe... the rejection of Marcionism was the founding act of Europe as civilization, because it shaped the matrix for Europe's relationship to its past, by establishing this relationship at the very highest of levels".¹³

One might reverse this statement and ask. Are we not in peril of consciously or unconsciously accepting cultural or historical Marcionism, thus, rejecting our "Roman secondarity". Two distinct versions of Marcionism:

- When we either completely cut off our knowledge and the relationship with our history and believe that we can live only forwards, only towards the future, relying on nothing but ourselves. To put it sociologically: when in each case we understand our individual, personal uniqueness as the central motif shaping our life.

¹³ Brague, p. 118.

- Or, when we only define ourselves as a “closed space isolated from others”; because “the true danger to Europe is the possibility that it will no longer identify with this alienness that it considers to be superior, and will only consider itself and its exclusiveness as an example... and will treat the universality that it brings (the “Greekness” to which we are “Roman”) only as a local feature that only applies to it and cannot be transferred to other cultures”.¹⁴ Quite recently this danger was again remembered by Ronald G. Ash. Whoever is standing up for human rights has no right to dismiss Europe; as they have emerged there not by accident.

2. We no longer have a strong common narrative of Europe

The North Italian writer Claudio Magris is not the only one to observe: “There is an obvious lack of utopias, projects and hopes for a different future in Europe and the West.” But narratives and utopias cannot emerge because someone says they should, one cannot even invent them. They emerge through a common central experience.

The former German minister of finance and the father of the Euro, Theo Weigel, often visited our Bavarian Catholic Academy. As he presented the introduction of the common currency as a difficult, but nevertheless a success story, he was perfectly convinced that in this story, there is also a place for his elder brother who died in WWII as a common soldier. To Theo Weigel, the common Euro is a direct outcome of his family’s tragedy.

But this generation of Europe is shrinking. What has remained as a connecting narrative until recently was the official goal of becoming “the largest space of knowledge-based global economy”. But after the Euro, economic and financial crises of the recent years, even this goal has lost a lot of its charm. So what can and should we talk about when we talk about Europe?

Another factor to add to this is the ever greater divide between the European East and West. The Bulgarian political scientist and philosopher Ivan Krastev believes that it seems like one of the main reasons of such division is the desire of many Central and Eastern European people “to shake off the colonial dependency implicit in the very project of Westernization”. Ant the Polish-American author Anne Applebaum adds the the goal of that is

¹⁴ Brague, p. 118.

to “forget the humiliation that one is not a founder, but just an imitator of the West, a follower”.¹⁵ I am very curious as to whether you, who have gathered here, agree with such evaluation.

3. We (still) live in separate worlds

In the late 60s, very intense spiritual cultural arguments took place between East and West. The main idea of some of the thinkers from behind the iron curtain living in Central European space was “socialism with the human face”. That, for instance, was the way in which the “International Society of Paul” founded as early as 1955 attempted to maintain a dialogue with the humanist-oriented thinkers of the Eastern Bloc. For example, that was where the great theologians Karl Rahner and Baptist Metz held discussions with Roger Garaudy, who later killed his wife in a fit of madness. There were hopes for enlightened socialism. Therefore the entry into Prague in 1968, while was denounced, did not really meant abandoning such hopes. Thus in the West, as far as I have experienced, 1968 did not create the major rift of ideas.

Only in France the shock of the August, 1968, did give birth to a new generation of thinkers – the “nouvelles philosophes”, who realized what went astray in the Western heads and what actually happened in the East. As early as 1974, the forerunner of this line of thought André Glucksmann published his programmatic work “La cuisinière et le mangeur d’hommes” (“The Stove and the Man Eater”), which appeared in German in 1976. It begins as follows: “Looking from Russia: to everyone who has survived the lager sentences, everyone close to them, to the newly deported to Siberia, who are now locked up by the politicized police in psychiatric institutions, however they look at it, we appear feeble-minded... They are surprised by the innocence we demonstrate, they still have a hard time believing we are innocent”.¹⁶

The Czech resistance hardly affected “the new left in the West, as if all of that had been just a show in which lame artists in 1917 costumes walk around some sad stage of wax figures office”.¹⁷

¹⁵ „Bis der Teufel uns scheidet,“ p. 28.

¹⁶ Glucksmann, p. 7.

¹⁷ Glucksmann, p. 7.

It must have really been a different world in which “the mood of a breakthrough and the short-lived political resurrection, much stronger than in the West, that reigned there back then came from the core of the society. In the case of Czechoslovakia, the initial impulses actually came from (in the terminology of the Western protest movements) the establishment, as in, the Party”.¹⁸ If we overlook these sociological reasons, back then the main flow of thought was most probably defined by the unbounded single-mindedness of the left. The text that the Berlin lefties sent to Prague on 20/21st of March, 1968, as a congratulation, is typical: “We are united by more than the reaction would desire. True, our struggle is different in one essential way: you are trying to expand the socialist base to a free communist system, and we are working at the outskirts of such possibility in capitalist countries”.¹⁹

One way or another, 94 dead, victims of the military intervention of the Treaty of Warsaw, and the self-immolations of Jan Palach or Ryszard Siwiec (in Warsaw) and the political winter that followed played no part in the minds of the bright fighters of the West. And I remember even the last year, 2018: there were plenty commemorative articles and radio shows about 1968, the barricades in Paris in May, the protests against the Vietnam War, or about the state of emergency laws in Germany, about the student revolt against “thousand-year-old rot under the mantles of their professors”: but Prague and the 21st of August were not mentioned at all. The 50th anniversary of the Woodstock Festival resounded ever more loudly.

In the Western European mind there is probably nothing from what the Polish historians Włodzimierz Borodziej and Maciej Górný wrote about in their 2018 German-language book “The Forgotten War. The European East 1912–1923”. Or in general about the whole of the Baltic countries. Who in our parts knows anything at all about the guerilla war against the USSR that took place in the Baltic States after 1945? I think in Germany, we might care just a little about Poland and Hungary, we worry about the populism there. But our range does not cover anything further. As proven by the discussions about the new “Nordstream” gas line, or rather, the lack of such discussions.

¹⁸ Frei, p. 190.

¹⁹ Frei, p. 193f.

IV. TREATMENT?

Finally, after the anamnesis and the diagnosis, it's time for treatment. However, I have put a question mark after this step. I've learned this much from doctors: migraine is incurable, it is only possible to reduce its intensity and frequency; it wanes with age and sometimes disappears after the menopause.

So can we hope that, in spite the not insignificant age of our Europe, we are still living in the climactic times of Europe? After all, such hope is not unrealistic.

Good treatment requires to also include all the circumstances under which the disease is happening. In the case of our disease, I see a certain set of concentric circles surrounding our symptom of the European migraine. That is, the question of a harmonious, healthy identity of the European men and women will mean nothing if one does not take into account the contemporary megaproblems that far surpass just European matters. I will just list them, without attempting to go into detail:

- The political fragmentation of the West, caused by the growing self-focus of the USA – and not just because of President Donald Trump, regarding whom “the governments of the EU states... continue calmly along the process of integration without worrying about how to be heard in a differently ordered world”;
- the globalization of the world economy, due to which Europe is ever more tightly squeezed between the scissors of the USA and China;
- the digitalization of all our lives, starting with economy and media and ending with everyday life;
- the worrying debates whether democracy may thrive without capitalism and successful economy, one of the most important contemporary African thinkers, Achille Mbembe from Cameroon, has been drawing attention to them since not quite recently.
- A closer concentric circle would consist of the EU with all the factors of its dispersal and liquification, even though it is by far not the same as all the European states, it is also not necessarily the same as what is understood as Europe in terms of spirit, culture and history.
- Finally, a sociological outlook at us, individual Europeans with our contemporary features. In our context I find important the analysis

whose slogan is “the society of singularities”. It refers to the ever growing individualization of life projects and world perceptions, but also the effort to define one’s exclusivity: “Wherever one looks at the contemporary society: what is more and more expected is not commonality, but exclusivity. The hopes of institutions and individuals, their interests and efforts are connected not with standardized and regulated, but with unique, singular things”.²⁰

Bearing in mind these very complicated conditions, how can the European migraine be treated at all?

I don’t really have a miraculous cure, but I will try to suggest some behaviors how to treat the break lines and the decomposer germs. The break lines are experienced, they are usually pre-existing. The decomposer germs may be prevented from propagating further.

1. Talk about Europe in less weighty terms

We often use fateful words to talk about Europe. Then Europe “has no alternative”, is the only possible project of peace, our historical duty, it brings a value message to the world. All of that may be true. However, to put it rudely, we might describe such heavy talk about Europe, along with the South Korean-born Byung-Chul Han, as almost “pornographic”. “The age of pornography is the age of single-mindedness. Today we are unaware of such phenomena as secret and riddle. Even equivocations and ambivalences we find uncomfortable. Even jokes are judged for equivocation... Political correctness judges equivocations. Multiple meanings essentially belong in the language of eroticism”.²¹

Thus, it is desirable to talk about Europe in an easier, elegant, equivocally erotic fashion. As early as 1988, György Konrád wrote in his “Meditations on Central Europe”: “We have a European utopia integrated in the past and the present: the art of nuance and subtle comparison, artistic understanding of our surroundings, the humorous independence of personality in relation to the fetishes of state and money, the primacy of the person before their work”.²²

²⁰ Rechwitz, p. 7.

²¹ Byung-Chul Han, p. 105.

²² Konrad, p. 114.

So it would be useful to Europe if we, in spite of all the unavoidable structural debates, were to discuss it more often in lighter tones, more playfully and humorously. It would be more consistent with the inner dynamics of history, as history does not happen according to clear, obvious, unambiguous rules. The Bulgarian Ivan Krastev says with good reason: “A closer examination of the fall of political units indicates that the art of survival is the art of constant improvisation. Eventually Europe could still be saved not by rigid immobility, but by flexibility.” Therefore he compares our actions and words for Europe to writing a poem: “Even the poet isn’t sure how the poem will end till it does”.²³

2. Be friendly

Correct language leads me to another thought. 60 years ago, on the 28th of September, 1959, in the speech she gave accepting the Lessing Prize in Hamburg, Hannah Arendt spoke about “friendship in dark times”. Even if our time in Europe is by far not as dark as Hannah Arendt experienced in her decades, what she described as fundamental to preventing the world from slipping from our hands in “dark times” still stands. If you replace “world” with “Europe” in the quote below, you will have a reason why meetings like this one in the Lithuanian Thomas Mann Center in the Curonian Spit are so important to the future of Europe and why I am so grateful to attend.

Hannah Arendt said: “In conversation, the political significance of friendship and of humanity integral to it is revealed, because such conversation (unlike intimate ones, where individual souls talk about themselves), however joyful about the friend being near, is for the world at large, which remains inhuman in the very exact sense, as long as people don’t talk about it constantly. Because the human world is not just because it is created by humans,... but only when it has become the object of a conversation”.²⁴

3. Reinstitute an old concepts

Let me include a personal observation. What are we talking about all the time, what is the correct term for the object of our musings?

²³ Kastev, p. 132.

²⁴ Arendt, p. 76.

- “Europe”, of course. But today it is often identified with “eurocentrism”, and the raised tones that we hear in this word often evoke in the contemporary people and their politically correct thinking the memories about the “old white man”, in other words, the true image of the enemy.
- “European Union” first of all evokes Brussels, the correct shape of cucumbers and other actual or presumed jerking around of free people.
- “The West”: as a political value, at least since Donald Trump this term is no longer living.

Why don't we reactivate a very ancient concept? In German it is “Abendland” (literally, “Evening land, Evening lands”, meaning West). It does not necessarily have to be “das christliche Abendland”, “the Christian West”, this primary element of fixing one's identity and task especially during the first decades of the iron curtain and the Cold War. No, it's just “Abendland”.

- First, this term carries no lordly ambitions, on pronouncing, it rather makes itself relative, because it is associated with its opposite, “Morgenland” (literally “Morning land”, meaning East). And in such a context, Morgenland acquires a quite positive connotation.
- Second, this term reminds its own history without being obnoxious about it.
- Third, it has a geographical content, albeit it is not very clearly defined, and does not require to immediately mark its outer limits, just like in the case of “Europe”.
- And, fourth, whoever so desires, may still remember the Christian roots of Europe, its, as the beautiful saying goes, Christian soul.

So let us dare speak about Abendland.

4. Cherish typical European institutions

By this, I don't primarily mean the European Parliament, or even the European Court of Human Rights. I mean the institutional structures whose origin and spirit is clearly European in terms of history and cultural history.

The first such institution is the university. Of course, there were highly intelligent people who were even capable of foreseeing the eclipses of the sun and the moon in old Babilonia, there were highly educated scholars of nature or the Quran, or philosophers in the cultural space of Islam. However, the university as a community of teachers and students, as *universitas*

literarum and the place for studies transgressing the boundaries of a single discipline, in its ideal shape, a place for qualified professional, and later ever broader education, as an institution with special right to self-government, is “a creation of medieval Europe... No other European institution in the world took root to the extent that the university did, with its inherent structures and scholarly achievements”.²⁵

The institution of the university embodies the ideal of the education of free people, its oldest origin lies in the *Heros akademos* grove in the ancient Athens, and its path then takes it to the schools by the cathedrals and monasteries of the early Middle Ages, the schools under protection of their founding fathers, emperors and popes. Therefore it is right to say: “The university is a European educational institution par excellence.” It’s no coincidence that the renewal of the university structure of the European Union is named after the oldest European university, “the Bologna process”, even if the process itself does not always match the ancient ideal of the university. But what can ever match that ideal? It is all the more reason to cherish our universities with gratefulness, pride and responsibility, as they still remain the exclamation marks of the whole European ideal of education. They embody everything that Europe cannot be imagined without – they embody education in the broadest sense.

Another foundational European structure is closely related to the university. By that I mean the city. The same can be said here: of course, developed cultures, from Teotihuacan in Mexico to ancient Babilon or Angkor Wat in Cambodia produced great, central unique and intellectually lively cities.

But a European city is something unusual, unique. The Greek city-states in Greece itself, in Asia Minor, South Italy, *Urbs Roma* as the embodiment of the city in general, the late-medieval and early Renaissance cities in the Northern and Central Italy, the dignified German trade cities, the Hansa Union in the North – all these highly politically active communities are a soil for generations of “citizens” who gradually come to comprehend their own freedom and responsibilities socially, politically and even in terms of religion, for example, in spite of ubiquitous Christianity of the Middle Ages, such German trade and cultural cities as Ulm, Frankfurt and Nuremberg were always resistant to housing a bishop within their walls.

²⁵ Rüegg, p. 13.

I cannot linger here on the history of the European cities, but I would like to draw your attention just to one theological aspect. In the Middle Ages, the city was the only societal unit complex enough to practically reflect and understand the Aristotelian “episteme politike”, “sciencia civilis” concept. The starting point is a specific interpretation of the Christian universe as an image of the perfect civil community, based on “the heavenly Jerusalem”. The 12th century scholasticism, the pinnacles of which were Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, later was capable to develop the image of a Christian in general in the example of the perfect citizen of a city. According to Thomas Aquinas, the human being is even “animal naturaliter civile”, thus, not only “zoon politikon”, “community animal”, as Aristotle had it, but a “civic being”, “city being”, even though not all people in fact live in cities²⁶.

In our present-day cities, as we care about common issues and the community, particular responsibility and local democracy, we will not just cherish a great European tradition, but also follow a theologically based anthropology.

5. Maintain an oval of memory

What do I mean by that? Aleida Assman, a scholar of societal cultures of memory, speaks about the “competition of victims” as she looks at the growing distance between the European East and West. In the West, the necessary memory of the Holocaust has almost become the “founding myth” of the united Europe. A related idea is that the uniqueness of this event may never be relativized. It is infinitely significant not only to the Jewish side. Therefore the mainstream intellectual life of Western Europe strictly rejects any generalized version of the theory of totalitarianism that attempts to include all the victims of the 20th century national socialism, Stalinism, communism, fascism. Conversely, the East believes that their own suffering during the times of WWII and communism are hardly registered at all in the common consciousness of Europe, or registered much too weakly.

Ms Assman reminds the outrage of Western Europe when the Gulag survivor former Latvian Foreign Minister Sandra Kalniete declared that

²⁶ Gebhard, p. 139–162.

without the experience of the millions of residents from the Central, Eastern Europe and the Baltic States, the memory of Europe will “remain one-sided, incomplete and unfair”, because – and that was the cause for the complete misunderstanding – “both totalitarian regimes – nazism and communism – were equally criminal”.²⁷

In her attempts to find a way how Europe could remember together without at the same time negating important differences, Aleida Assman offers a formula that permits neither relativization nor equalization, and as an oval with two centers, could make a common European culture of memory possible, and without it, the European break lines and decomposer germs cannot be removed. The formula is as follows: “1. The memory of the Stalinist crimes must not relativize the memory of the Holocaust. 2. The memory of the Holocaust must not relativize the Stalinist crimes”.²⁸

However, Assman also quotes the Lithuanian literary scholar Irena Veisaitė and her demand: “It really is necessary to talk also about Gulag and its horrible crimes against humanity. However, the Western world is not yet ready. In the people’s mind, the symbol of the Holocaust is Auschwitz. But where is the symbol for Gulag? It’s not there yet”.²⁹

This is probably the central point of the things that divide Europe, where the pain is the greatest, the break lines stretch the deepest, the germs breed the most poisonous, where we understand each other the least – in spite of the important books that have appeared in the West, of which I will mention only three. They are the shocking 987 pages of *Livre noir du Communisme. Crimes, terreur, répression* (The Black Book of Communism. Crimes, Terror, Repression), published in 1997, or *Bloodlands* by Timothy Snyder, or, on the German part, Karl Schlögel’s *Das Sowjetische Jahrhundert*, published in 2017.

V. PERSPECTIVE

And thus I reach the end. Recently, the historian Dan Diner wrote that identity is “a word of disappearance”. Thus, a word that only emerges when

²⁷ Assmann, p. 160.

²⁸ Assmann, p. 163.

²⁹ Assmann, p. 164.

whatever it describes begins to shrink, to disappear. Could “the European migraine” be a description of the fact that Europe has become incomprehensible or not comprehended correctly? That we have problems of vision or hearing regarding Europe, that it is alive only in half-memories? That this is what pains our heads and hearts?

Is that our Europe?

Or maybe the diagnosis of “European migraine” is not correct? Maybe it only describes the “image of disappearance”, as Dan Diner wrote? Regardless of all the criticism and relativization: there’s more in this head. Its eyes are looking further, far into the distance and far back.

I remember Czesław Miłosz. In 1943–44 he is working underground against the German occupation, and what is happening in Europe is so much more dramatic than your basic “migraine”. Surrounded by all the horrors, Miłosz creates a twenty poem cycle titled “The World: A Naive Poem”.

One of the poems is called “Through the Window”. We should keep this look through the window of 1943–44 in our heart today, in 2019, as we speak of Europe. And during the Cold War, Milan Kundera wrote the a European is someone who is missing Europe.

The Czesław Miłosz poem goes as follows:

*Beyond a field, a wood and a second field,
The expanse of water, a white mirror, glitters.
And the golden lowland of the earth,
Bathes in the sea, a half-sunken tulip.
Father tells us this is Europe.
On sunny days you can see it all clearly.
Now it is smoking after many floods,
A home for people, dogs, cats and horses.*

*The bright towers of cities shine there,
Streams intertwine their silver threads,
And the moons of mountains are visible in spots
Something like goose feathers scattered on the ground.*

Translation by Gabrielė Gailiūtė-Bernotienė

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