WELFARE STATE FAILED
WHAT’S NEXT?
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POLITICS AND SOLIDARITY IN EUROPE
Adam Michnik
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FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE
A debate between key actors

BOOK REVIEWS BY: András Bozóki, Justyna Czechowska, Pavel Mandys, Jan Němec, Cezary Polak, Ivana Taranenkova
The International Visegrad Fund supports the development of civil society and contacts among people in the Visegrad region and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and in the Southern Caucasus. With an annual budget of €7 million the fund operates several grant programs and mobility projects (scholarships, fellowships). By the end of 2012 more than 3,700 grant projects and over 1,500 individual academic scholarships and artist residencies have been financed in total sum of €77 million.

Project approved in 2012:
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IN LATE OCTOBER 2013, THE BRITISH PRESS DECRIED “BENEFIT TOURISM.” ALLEGEDLY, THE NUMBERS OF MIGRANTS FROM EU COUNTRIES THAT RECEIVE SOCIAL BENEFITS IN THE UK INFLUENCE THE BRITISH ECONOMY. THEREFORE, ALREADY IN 2004, LONDON INTRODUCED A “RIGHT TO RESIDE” TEST THAT RESTRICTS BENEFITS TO ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE INDIVIDUALS. FIRSTLY, ISN’T THAT A PARADOX? AND SECONDLY, IS THAT THE WELFARE STATE SERVING ITS PURPOSE?

The uproar in London came after László Andor, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, presented the latest report on the impact of non-active EU mobile citizens on social security. It is small: less than 1% of all benefits are spent this way. The EC has clearly expressed its dissatisfaction with London’s policy and has urged Britain to abandon the test. In response, the UK authorities continued to speak about the benefit tourism that is allegedly corrupting Europe.

This strikes at the heart of the issue. At the national level, staggering economies and shifting demographics are challenging the current model of the welfare state. At the European level, there is a great deal of solidarity rhetoric but a scarcity of the tools needed to properly institutionalize this virtue. This begs the central question: can the solidarity principle be subject to any boundaries at all? Including the boundaries of Europe?

In this volume of Visegrad Insight we investigate the welfare state in crisis and delve into the challenges that lie ahead for ever-shrinking generations. Martin Ehl writes a policy memo for all those seriously considering a responsible political career in the decades to come, and Agnieszka Jucewicz-Kwaśniewska calls for a change in the contemporary model of education. Without such a shift, we will continue to raise little egoists instead of compelling human beings.

We also report on political implications arising from solidarity addressed in public debate. This seems simple: while words uttered in the corridors of the EU Parliament fade into the distance, the practical experience of a natural disaster creates a window of opportunity for politicians seeking more empathy from voters. Matteo Tacconi, an Italian journalist reporting on Central Europe, writes about the ways recent floods have changed policy and politics in the region.

It is worth remembering that the idea of “solidarity” came to the fore together with political transformations in the region. This is emphasized in a lecture by Michael Sandel, a professor at Harvard, and arguably the most prominent public philosopher of our time.

Furthermore, we report on the future of democracy in the developing world and development assistance. In the last ten years, the V4 countries have quadrupled their development assistance budgets. However, as Maciej Kuziemska observes, this increase has not yet been followed by a coordinated effort or public debate. To determine why that is so and what the future holds, we interviewed: Igor Blažević, Tomicah Tilleman or Karla Wursterova - experts and key actors in V4 debate on this topic.

Europe may not be portrayed as perfect, but this criticism is not shared by the struggling and drowning migrants from North Africa who risk their lives to come here. I wonder if that is what political players mean, when they speak of “tourism for benefits.” Even if that were true, would it permit us to confine solidarity to national or even EU boundaries? I think not.
Europe is getting older. The European welfare state is unable to finance itself. These familiar statements have profound implications for all European citizens, particularly for those living in post-communist countries, where quality of life, public policy, and the birth rate are lower than on the Western part of the continent.

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“Europe is getting older. The European welfare state is unable to finance itself.” These familiar statements have profound implications for all European citizens, particularly for those living in post-communist countries, where quality of life, public policy, and the birth rate are lower than in the Western part of the continent.
How will you take care of the elderly when the state most probably fails to provide social welfare benefits less than 20 years from now?

How do you expect to be protected yourself? What is your individual strategy for the upcoming decades?

Can Europe respond to these questions collectively?

My personal strategy is relatively simple: you have to invest in your children, particularly in education. Many people invest in a house or in a business, but investment in the education of your children is the best ever. If you look at the question of intergenerational solidarity, this is to some extent broken and the state should step in. I think that if you look at personal strategy, the education of children is the best path.

Certainly, you can have savings and investments, which is important, but the main question arises when people have abilities and a broad opportunity to be connected to the labor market. In normal life, I am a professor and can go back to the university after my political career. Mainly, it is about maintaining your ability to be flexible on the labor market.

In Europe we have to give member states enough room to make their own decisions on how to manage these questions. There is no common solution. We have talked about personal decisions, which are one thing; the second issue is how the nation state will react at the European level. We can have some general targets, but the situation is quite different in many countries.

My grandparents passed away a long time ago. As for my parents, or actually my mother, I have to take care of her already, as she is of retirement age, but has no retirement entitlements. She did not work enough years, was a housewife to a man she later divorced, and now she has no protection from the state.
There is a widespread debate who should be granted a pension and for what. I think the most alarming are the situations in which a woman who has worked within the family, taken care of the household, remains invisible to the state. We still overestimate the “outside” work in the world. There is constant talk only about how people should manage their career paths. Or – how to arrange it so that they can work as long as possible – due to the shift in the retirement age. What is going on inside the home is not appreciated. And yet this also requires an extraordinary effort, and a significant investment of strength and work. The problem is not seen as long as the marriage lasts – but no one can give anyone a lifetime warranty on this. What about those women (or men, as it happens) who have worked at home and are left with nothing in old age? I am less concerned about taking care of my parents and grandparents; rather, what can I do to not be a burden to my children?

Thinking about what will happen in twenty or thirty years time absolutely terrifies me! What kind of retirement will today’s thirty-somethings have? My husband and I have taken out a mortgage for forty years. My main concern is how to keep a job at a level that I will be able to pay it back and not become a burden on anyone in the family. But will I then be able to support myself on a retirement pension, what it will really be, what else is yet to happen along the way, am I even to get it – I have no certainty of this! And to be such a financial burden to my children ... I can not bear to think it. As a generation we can not give our children as much as our parents gave us – I mean, these savings deposited regularly from even a modest salary to then be able to help with a down-payment on a flat or tuition fees. We will not be able to provide the same for our children. They will have to cope alone. And on top of that, most likely, have to take care of us.

The problem is that this generation is growing up in the cult of individualism. It also does not bode well for the future. I look at today’s model of education and how young people function together. We put terrible emphasis on the individual and what they should achieve in life, how much to invest in themselves, how to develop as an individual. But there is no talk of cooperation with others, of shared responsibility.

I recently read an interview in “Gazeta Wyborcza” with Karol Modzelewski, the Polish historian and politician, who came up with the name ‘Solidarity’ for the Independent Self-governing Trade Union in 1980, about the inception of Solidarity – of a communitarian way of thinking, where people were able to go on strike, not because they got too little, but because they got too much in comparison to others. They revolted against injustice and fought for the weak and disadvantaged. Such thinking today seems impossible. I can not imagine a demonstration by the middle class taking to the streets in solidarity with those who are in a tight spot. I can not imagine that they would be able to give up something to help those who got less in life, or who can not take care of themselves.

I hear voices saying quite the opposite - for example, among the middle class, to which I also belong. I realize that I belong to a privileged group, but their thinking is quite alien to me. My children go to state schools, we use the National Health Service – in full awareness, this is our choice. Meanwhile, those who can afford it, typically look for ways to dissociate themselves from the state – choosing private education, or private medical care. They have a false sense that they do not need anything of the state – beyond being left in peace and low taxes from course. They are sure that they themselves can provide all. The result is that their involvement in the life of the state, the decisions taken here, is a consequence of focusing on themselves, on taking as much and giving as little as possible.

If I was to go by the experience of the European Union in the last ten years – it would be very difficult. I do not feel the community of the union, I have no sense of identity as a European woman – I feel like a Pole. The EU government is so decentralized that in times of crisis everyone cares only about themselves. It would be useful to have a common interest in Europe, but it’s not just a question of pensions, but in general the problem of responsibility for the weak. Of course, the Union rescues its member states, but in such a way that it is not clear if it helps or hurts. The motivation is also questionable: helping the weak, because we want to help them, or because it threatens to weaken us? Anyway, all this thinking is focused only on the financial level, and we need a deeper reflection on communalism. It would be good if we thought through this issue thoroughly. There is a multitude of Poles who are able to share, and feel responsibility or empathy. If everyone were able to, it would be different. But maybe it’s not in our Polish nature? Maybe it is not in human nature in general? Long term change must come from education and upbringing. Lessons in civil society should be a compulsory part of our education from an early age. This is the only way to let the idea of community into the bloodstream. And when it starts to move through the bloodstream, maybe future generations will be able to think and act differently.

Though I am not an expert in this area, as a citizen I think that it needs to be a mix between state care, as it has been until now; people, society needs to take care of their elders, of their senior citizens, if it is still to be considered as a European and civilized society. On the other hand, we need to be realistic, and we need to see that the systems will probably not be able to sustain the changing demographics, so there will need to be much more personal responsibility taken, on behalf of each of us, individually, and there will also be a need for more family responsibility for its own members.
Immigrants are a completely different area, but for homeless people, for example, I think the responsibility is very similar, for socially disadvantaged people, and people who are unemployed, etc. We cannot sustain, in the long run, the systems that are in place now, at least according to the Czech Republic’s experience. It is too costly and too ineffective, but on the other hand, we need to provide basic safety. So we just need to have the basics covered, and we need to agree what the basics are. Or we need to have something that will just make sure that people are not dying on the street, but on the other hand, we need to also make sure that there is always a strong element of personal responsibility involved. And people simply need to be aware that these are their lives and their destinies, they need to be responsible and do the maximum that in their power to ensure their existence and their future.

1
In order to respond to this challenge, two necessary conditions must be fulfilled. One of them is to have competitive and growing economies. Therefore, it is necessary to provide structural reforms, to expand the business environment, to keep sound public finances, and to be competitive in the global economy. If the economies of countries, specifically European ones, grow and become more competitive, that will also create enough money for taking care of our elders.

Another necessary condition relates to the pension system, which in its current form is unsustainable, especially because of demographic developments. The solution involves having a strong funding pillar within the system. It would be a saving pillar where people put their savings, which they can then use during retirement.

In general, both long-term and sustainable public finance, as well as a long and sustainable pension system, depend on these two conditions.

2
If there is no compulsory pension system, any strong funding or savings pillar, than it is possible to save money in private pension schemes. Another possibility is some investment in other assets to provide for oneself in retirement age.

3
No, I don’t think so, because nation states are the most important in this area. I do not support any common European social policy. What can be done collectively is to have stronger rules, not only fiscal, to push governments toward necessary changes, to conduct necessary reforms, to improve their public finances, to decrease deficit, and to push for necessary structural reforms. This includes pension reforms at a national level.

Stronger common fiscal rules would not allow some of the changes we have seen recently. For instance, it was generally accepted when countries like Hungary, Poland, or Slovakia partially destroyed or limited the second pillar of the pension system in order to relieve temporary fiscal pitfall. However, in terms of long-term fiscal sustainability, it was the wrong decision. Fortunately, a new EU economic governance package proposed in 2010, which comes into force next year, will be more strict and will respond to this challenge.
POLICY MEMO
To Whomever it May Concern
– All Europeans, Particularly those UNDER 40
The entire industrial world has seen population decline over the last thirty years. For the nation to reproduce, there is a need for a fertility rate of 2.1 children per woman. No industrial (developed) nation is at this level and only immigration saves countries like the United States from population decline. At the same time, the population is getting older. With age at the center of political, cultural, and social policies, modernity itself – represented by the West – is going to change, with many implications for new conflicts among generations and social groups. Because the welfare state and radically liberal models alike both count on the concept of growing populations, we need to create a new economic model in which a solidarity payment system for welfare (particularly pensions) would need general remodeling.

It is necessary to stress that aging is not a problem of just the West or industrialized nations, but also developing countries like China. In short, the Asian model of family care is problematic because the population is living longer; the more market-based U.S. model because the financial crisis depleted pension funds that were seen as a safe investment for the future. The search for a new model is taking place worldwide.

Post-communist features of welfare state crisis

The situation in post-communist EU states has some specific features. The pension crisis is accompanied by stress in the individual career environment, supported by the prevailing neoliberal notion that the market would take care of everything, including our pensions. Experience in the deconstruction of the second pillar of the pension system in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and most recently, the Czech Republic,
**HISTORY OF THE WELFARE STATE IN EUROPE**

Origins of the term “welfare state”: originated in the German form Wohlfahrsstaat in the late 19th or early 20th century as a state principle of responsibility for social welfare. In Great Britain the term appeared in common use in the late 1930s, associated with Beveridge, who is often referred to as the “father of the welfare state.” After 1850, die Arbeiterfrage, “the social question,” began to appear in parliamentary discussions in Scandinavian countries.

**1883**

Introduction of disability insurance by Otto von Bismarck in the German Reich. The Bismarckian model becomes the ideological foundation for welfare systems in most European countries.

**1880–1920**

Four “classic” welfare security programs – social insurance or income maintenance laws established in most European countries: 1) old age pensions, 2) sickness and disability, 3) women’s insurance, 4) unemployment compensation.

**1891**

Denmark introduces old-age pension laws; Sweden introduces health insurance laws.

**1894**

Norway passes accident insurance laws for industrial workers.

**1900**

National old-age pension circular introduced in the United Kingdom.

**1920s**

The Great Depression leads to many cutbacks in the development of European welfare systems.

**1920–1950**

Period of welfare state consolidation.

**1930**

Importance of industrialization and worker mobilization for further developments in welfare schemes. From a comparative perspective, three different paths to welfare consolidation were established: 1) “Autocratic legacy”: Germany and Austria among the first nations to introduce welfare systems under autocratic rule. 2) Liberal and Conservative government pacts (United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark) 3) Catholic paternalism (Belgium, the Netherlands)

**1942**

The Beveridge Report, entitled Social Insurance and Allied Services, was released in England. It was an influential report that sold half a million copies and set the stage for further changes initiated in the postwar era. It sought to establish “a comprehensive program of social reform directed at dealing not only with Want but with the four other giant evils of Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness.”

**1948**

The National Assistance Act passed by the English government, considered a landmark often referred as the “modern welfare state” because of its universal philosophy and services covering the whole social security scheme, e.g., unemployment, illness, maternity, widowhood, old-age benefits, and funeral grants.

The austerity mindset governing in the last years in Europe is not conducive to creative thinking about future economic and solidarity models. The only alternatives discussed are new debts and fashionable state investment models, deepening the debt hole for future generations.

Debates focus mostly on retirement age. Research and global experience suggest that official retirement age is one thing and effective retirement age another. Only Europeans retire according to the law or even earlier, while the rest of the world is aware of the fact that one cannot retire at the official age because one cannot survive on a state pension – if there is any state pension. In India, for example, only eleven percent of the workforce is covered by any pension scheme, mostly by a governmental one.

There is no pan-European view or approach on how to tackle the demographic, pension, and welfare state crises. Basically, there are three models of welfare in Europe (Igel at al, p. 204):

— both public and private providers fulfill the same function together and stimulate each other

— public and private substitute for each other (strong family, less state, and vice versa)

— two sources of support may be complementary and both providers specialize in certain dimensions of support

The problem of any new economic model, which in Europe is necessary to
replace the current welfare state, is that after a crisis, political and social spheres are separated from the economic as never before. The global capitalist economy lives in a different time and space framework from democratic political processes. Put simply, economic decisions must be quicker than electoral processes, and the global economy does not respect any national state boundaries, for the most part. The economy is driven mainly by the financial sector, not by manufacturing, as in the times when the Bismarckian pension system was created. The global financial sector has different priorities than middle class families trying to secure education for their children, health care services for themselves, and a decent retirement. The old system, in which human activity was driven and led by the functional needs of society, is disappearing, as French sociologist Alain Touraine wrote in his book *After the Crisis*.

**Crisis of solidarity**

In a certain sense, we come back to the natural historical situation before the Bismarckian scheme. While savings and an older working age are nothing new, the welfare state is only about 150 years old. We need to rethink the model of social solidarity, which is under pressure from a healthier and older population, in which a grandmother working as an au pair to her grandchildren will be a scarce commodity, because she would still be of active working age.

Polish economist Pawel Dobrowolski of the Civic Development Forum presented a visionary thesis in Poland two years ago at a conference about the young generation. One of the conclusions seems very striking: at times of low natality (in Poland, but this could also be true in other Central European countries) the model of intergenerational solidarity no longer works. Young people and the unborn are exploited as a source of wealth for older generations, which improves their standard of living while creating piles of debt. So far we have not witnessed open conflict between young and older generations only because the young, as a political group, are not aware that they are being exploited. Europeans under twenty-nine are a very large group, but they have the lowest electoral participation not just in Poland, but also throughout Europe.

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**1950**

Further differentiation of the types of welfare systems depending on political models. Two clear categories:

1) The “Christian-centrist” model founded on earlier authoritarian rule: Germany, Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Generous benefits but far from universal coverage. 2) The “Social democratic” model centered in the UK, Sweden, Norway. Universal coverage but low to average benefits.

**1950–1970**

Period of “The Golden Age” in welfare development, beginning with the end of the Second World War and ending with the oil crises of the 1970s.

**1959**

England introduces earnings-related pensions and contributions, departing from the earlier principle of flat-rate contributions and pensions.

**1950s–1990s**

The socialist welfare state roughly matched the continental European Bismarckian system. Socialism maximized labor participation, unemployment was practically absent, and most socialist countries had a unified pension scheme, which was included in the state budget. The system guaranteed horizontal equity, but could not prevent vertical efficiency problems. Welfare states were more common in East European states, especially in Hungary.

**1960s**

Social care services expanded at the local government level in Scandinavian countries, e.g. kindergartens and institutional or home help care for the elderly. Since its inception, the so-called Nordic model of welfare state was characterized by two factors: public responsibility for welfare provision and the principle of universal coverage based on the idea of social rights.

**1970s**

France introduces the basic public pension scheme called the régime général, an old-age income-security scheme founded in the interwar period and expanded until the 1970s, becoming more and more universal (covering all private sector employees and about 60% of the insured population). The German welfare state is founded on the basic pension insurance called Grundrentenversicherung, covering more than 80% of the insured population in a single-pillar, Pay-As-You-Go-financed system.

**1973**

England passes The Social Security Act, which introduces earnings-related contributions, annual reviews, and phases out the graduated pensions scheme. Two year later The Child Benefit Act replaces family allowances with child benefits, and free family planning services are made available to all irrespective of age and marital status.

**1980–2000**

Period of recent welfare developments. European countries must face the rapid transition to post-industrialism, globalization, changes in demography and social relations and new models of politics.

**1989**

Contrary to expectations, the economic transition in Poland and other post-communist states did not diminish the welfare state constructed during the communist years. Spending on social services (e.g. health care, education) has suffered, however, e.g. from recession – during the transition process, public resources were shifted mostly to pensions and social assistance. The welfare systems were gradually liberalized as the economies of the post-communist states recovered during the 1990s.
1990s
Scandinavian reforms presenting generous schemes for maternity/paternity benefits, parental leave schemes and childcare services have led to high female labor force participation, making the Nordic model not only woman-friendly, but generally, work- and family-friendly.

1998
Poland introduced a new three-pillar system, including a mandatory government-managed notional defined contribution program, second-pillar mandatory individual accounts (open pension funds called OFEs), and third-pillar voluntary retirement savings accounts. Collected money is paid out after retirement age is reached.

1999
In the United Kingdom new laws are passed: The Welfare Reform and Pensions Act. From now on all benefit claimants must attend interviews to discuss entitlement, providing reasons for not working. Also, benefits for the chronically sick, children, widows, and widowers are reformed.

2011
Pension reform in the Czech Republic is changed into a three-pillar system, but the second pillar is not mandatory and interest is very low. A radical change in retirement age means that people born after 1983 will be able to retire at the age of 68 or even older.

2011–2013
The Hungarian government radically changed regulations for private pension funds with de facto nationalization. Together with the subsequent change in regulation in Poland and Slovakia, the reform notion of the “second pillar” was shaken and these mentioned states started to return from liberal to a more social democratic (classical) model of welfare pension system. Funds in the second pillar are simply unable under the present circumstances to accumulate and create enough money for expected profits for future pensions.

Modern understanding of welfare state
Absence of clear definition of the term, among the most ambiguously used terms in contemporary political vocabulary. Welfare state categories introduced in The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism, an influential work written by Esping-Andersen, who identified different historical “welfare state-regimes”: 1) liberal type regime; 2) conservative-corporatist type regime; and 3) social democratic type regime.

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tem is individual solidarity, an individual survival strategy – or selfishness, if you prefer: how much would I be able to give myself to prepare for pension age? This could affect intergenerational solidarity the other way round: would I have enough to save for my children and myself at the same time? Selfishness becomes the argument itself.

We now have foundations for a few different types of new conflict in European society:

- **POLITICAL**: older generations are much more politically aware and active than younger ones. We see this in the electoral participation of different age groups, but the stakes for the younger generation are higher.

- **ECONOMIC**: higher youth unemployment, protected and overregulated labor markets, and existing pension systems create very disadvantaged economic situations for the young citizens of developed countries. The elderly are in a much safer position.

- **CULTURAL**: the way young people see the world, time, and space with the help of modern technologies is very different from the view of their parents. They have never experienced any form of real crisis like their parents (e.g., war, occupation, or food shortage).

To anticipate these conflicts we need to:

**CREATE NEW ECONOMIC THINKING**

The new approach need not be about different investment and savings strategies. It must be a different way of thinking about the future, a new meaning of the term “active age,” and long-term individual development strategies combined with a rapidly changing working, institutional, and technological environment. The new model should include education about individual future strategies, longer employment, and the financial education already in place in schools, but also correspondingly targeted to the entire population in a transition period.

**ATTRACT YOUNG VOTERS AND MAKE THEM AWARE OF WHAT IS AT STAKE**

With the exception of the first Czech presidential election in favor of Karel Schwarzenberg and the populist Palikot Movement in Poland, no political party or political force in Central Europe has seriously attempted to capture the attention of the youngest voters, who have the biggest stake in the future of the welfare state – and to call it that. Palikot received the support of the young because he attacked traditional Polish conservatism and offered to legalize soft drugs, not because he charted a new vision for the Polish economy affected by the upcoming demographic catastrophe and state budget constraints. The Czech Green Party and LMP in Hungary have made a serious effort, but they are seen as too “exclusive” for a wider audience. The same happened to the Pirate parties. On the other hand, politics is a dirty thing in the eyes of the young generation, full of corruption and misbehavior. To attract the group of voters under 29 is the key challenge for any future change of the welfare state model. We will see what happens during the next wave of elections in Central Europe in 2014.

**INVENT PROACTIVE FAMILY POLICY**

The birth rate is hard to influence for any political force, but a higher birth rate is one of the keys to a better future, so governmental pro-family policies will be important. The fact remains that all post-communist governments went in a very liberal direction in family policy by – rightly – not forcing citizens to have as many children as possible. For example, during the 1970s and 1980s, Romania experienced a very restrictive anti-abortion policy under dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. On the other hand, state municipalities – wrongly – not made the decision for the Polish economy affected by the upcoming demographic catastrophe and state budget constraints. The Czech Green Party and LMP in Hungary have made a serious effort, but they are seen as too “exclusive” for a wider audience. The same happened to the Pirate parties. On the other hand, politics is a dirty thing in the eyes of the young generation, full of corruption and misbehavior. To attract the group of voters under 29 is the key challenge for any future change of the welfare state model. We will see what happens during the next wave of elections in Central Europe in 2014.

**CHANG LABOR MARKETS**

1. A flexible system of different employment opportunities would help a great deal. To be able to offer part-time employment, or other forms of flexible jobs for young mothers, but also for older people who live longer.

2. A different form of social support for people who are not disabled but cannot find work for another reason. State support is usually very generous; an issue that the post-welfare state should rethink because will need money to support the elderly, who really are too old to work. This, along with the previous point, could help to solve the macro-economic dilemma of the growing average age and costs of medical and social care for the elderly. The welfare state was designed for people with much shorter lifespans.

3. Like it or not, if Europeans want to keep their welfare state ticking, they need more immigrants. American author Daniel Hamilton, in his Europe 2020 study, wrote that to compensate for declining labor participation rates, “the EU would have to add a net amount of 1.9 million labor migrants a year between 2005 and 2025 and 2.3 million between 2025 and 2050.” (Hamilton 108) By 2050, Europe would need to bring in 102 million people of working age from outside its borders. A significant shift in immigration policy is desperately needed for the sake of Europe’s pensions. But this notion goes directly against increasingly obvious anti-immigrant public feeling.

What any policymaker cannot change is mindset. All the aforementioned recommendations could lead to significant

**SOURCES**


15
RIVERS OF EMPATHY
FLOODS, POLICY, AND POLITICS
Weather conditions are a force of globalization. Perhaps unless climate change were an established fact we would not have a global discourse about ecology and solidarity across regions and generations of inhabitants of Earth. Yet, in taking a closer look at the regional level, one can see that natural disasters not only generate cross-border policy changes, but are also part of the political theater.

Villages submerged in floodwaters spilled over the riverbanks, firefighters carrying out relief operations and soldiers piling sandbags along the Danube, Oder, Elbe, and Vltava embankments. Footage and pictures of floods affecting Central Europe in May and June 2013 were broadcast and published by many media outlets all over the world. To a certain extent, news consumers have become familiar with such images, since these situations have occurred several times over the last two decades. In 1997, 2002, 2009, and 2010 big floods wounded the region, causing huge economic losses and even death to some. One might assume that the inundations in May and June were just another snapshot of a bigger picture.

In the Visegrad Group countries, recent floods primarily hit the Czech Republic. Some 20,000 people were evacuated, 2,700 of them in Prague, where the rising waters of the Vltava, a major tributary of the Elbe, reached some neighborhoods. The government declared a state of emergency.

In Western Hungary, thousands of people were forced to leave their homes as well. One of the most critical scenarios was that of Győrújfalu, a tiny town close to the Slovakian border. Authorities evacuated more than 2,000 inhabitants as a precaution, since the dike protecting Győrújfalu was weakened by water pressure. Floods threatened Budapest too. The Danube broke its all-time record peak reached in 2006 (8.6 meters), since then it started receding slowly.
July 14, 2010, Edelény, Hungary. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (C) and Minister of the Interior Sándor Pintér (R) wade in water as they visit flooded areas.
In Bratislava, the water level of the Danube exceeded any previous records as well. However, authorities succeeded in preventing evacuations. In Poland, water levels exceeded the warning line in more than fifty locations in the Oder middle basin, but infrastructural damage and economic losses were limited compared to those seen in the past.

As The Economist reported, despite peak river flows and threats related to floods, the situation was well-administered in all the V4 countries. State bodies informed people minute by minute and all the measures aimed at containing floods were swiftly deployed. If one looks back at 1997 or 2002, a big change can be noticed in terms of the promptness of the authorities’ response. Lessons from previous disasters helped Central Europe tackle floods in May and June with more preparedness, The Economist praised.

“Crisis management in the Czech Republic has changed a lot since the nineties,” Czech firefighters’ spokeswoman Nicole Zaoralova said, explaining that the Integrated Rescue System (IRS), adopted in 2000, guarantees efficient cooperation between Fire Rescue Service, Police, Medical Rescue Service, and other actors tasked with tackling floods. Furthermore, the government has invested considerably in reconstructing and building infrastructure and barriers along the riverbanks, as well as in training personnel.

Marek Stys from People in Need, a Czech NGO committed to distributing aid and channeling money to regions affected by floods over the last two decades, states that these efforts brought unquestionable results. “Although People in Need provides complementary aid, and therefore does not cooperate directly with state authorities, I can affirm that, by staying on the ground and having a chance to observe public officers at work, tackling floods has significantly improved since the nineties.” There has also been progress in terms of infrastructure, Stys added. Nevertheless, he adds that more should be done in this field. “The floods in May and June highlighted the need for addressing the management for dams even better, through comprehensive discussion between the government, mayors, and experts.”

Despite these advancements, the Czech Republic and neighboring Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, which have also increased their standards of crisis management, are not sheltered from floods. After all, nobody can stop heavy rains and recent history clearly shows that in a region crossed by many rivers with such high flow rates, anything can happen. For these reasons the V4 countries are investing massively in prevention mechanisms. Poland recently launched a sophisticated IT platform, ISOK, whose goal is minimizing risks depending on extreme hazards. Special attention was paid to ensure flood prevention, as Visegrad Insight was told by the media office of the Ministry of Environment. Mapping critical areas, providing records, and the constant monitoring of weather forecasts are supposed to help Poland prevent material and human losses related to floods, the ISOK webpage reports.

Slovakia’s authorities are also committed to enhancing flood prevention. “Several times a year the government discusses the reports drafted by the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Interior on the course and consequences of floods in the country. Phenomena causing inundations are carefully analyzed in order to secure the highest rate of protection of population, economic activities, and environment,” says Maroš Stano, the spokesman of the Ministry of Environment.

In addition to prevention, regional cooperation is also key in addressing the problem, as each of the last four presidency programs (Poland 2012/2013, Czech Republic 2011/2012, Slovakia 2010/2011, and Hungary 2009/2010) emphasizes, underlining the need for strengthening flood prevention and protection. Furthermore, a special meeting between experts was held in November 2009 during the Hungarian Presidency.

There are frameworks other than V4 with which flood related issues are more comprehensively dealt. The main schemes are those enlisted in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and the EU directive 2007/60, which requires member states to assess if watercourses are at risk from flooding and map-affected zones.

This does not imply that the V4 framework is not important. It increases the level of coordination in order to achieve results under European frameworks, Nicole Zaoralova states. She remarks that cooperation can be also achieved through bilateral agreements and that Prague finalized apposite protocols with Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland. Támas Kiss, head of the international department of the Hungarian National Directorate General for Disaster Management, echoes Zaoralova’s reflections. When asked for a comment, he said that Hungary has signed agreements focusing on calamity management with sixteen countries since 1995.

Maroš Stano points out instead that the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), a transnational body set up in 1998, is another valuable cooperation framework. In 2004, countries taking part in this initiative adopted the Action Program on Sustainable Flood Protection in the Danube River Basin, deploying seventeen flood action plans.

Now, having verified that the V4 countries’ performance in tackling floods in May and June was satisfactory and discovered that there are several cooperation frameworks, we can return to those images of flooded Central European towns to which media consumers became accustomed. Pictures and video featuring politicians visiting areas deluged by heavy rainfall are included in the archive. Doing so, as well as directing financial aid to people who lost their houses or to entrepreneurs who had economic losses, can indeed help them get votes or refresh their approval ratings. In connection with that, the most known example in Central Europe comes from Germany, where Gerhard Schröder surprisingly overturned electoral expectations in 2002 and slightly won a second mandate as chancellor due to his activities during the floods.

Some prime ministers from V4 countries have played this card, too. Paradoxically, impressive floods in 1997 that killed dozens of people and caused enormous economic losses helped postpone the fall of the fragile coalition headed by Václav Klaus by some months. The then prime minister’s visit to regions left underwater, as well as a resolute release of funds, temporarily put aside conflicts undermining the stability of the majority, as Jiří Pehe, a former adviser to Václav Havel, wrote in 1997 in an analysis distributed by Reuters.

Ferenc Gyurcsány also benefited from the floods. In 2006, Hungary suffered from severe inundations just a few days ahead of the parliamentary elections, which Gyurcsány narrowly won thanks to his tour of affected areas and financial assistance promised to the victims, some analysts believe.
However, sometimes floods push politicians to the wall. If their response to an emergency is ill-administered, they may have to pay a high price. Although the coalition headed by Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz officially collapsed for other reasons, many people in Poland believe that the poor approach to tackling historic floods in 1997 remarkably contributed to sink the prime minister, who also made a very unhappy statement at that time, saying that those hit by floods should have insured themselves.

As for the recent heavy rains in May and June, the politician who tried most visibly to turn his response to the floods into consensus was Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Televisions broadcasted images of him checking and managing the situation on the ground, striking a commander-in-chief posture. According to Júlia Vásárhelyi, a former journalist of the authoritative HVG magazine now working freelance, Orbán tried to exploit the floods for electoral reasons as parties in Hungary are targeting a parliamentary vote in 2014 and the campaign has already been launched, though unofficially.

This is not news. Many other politicians have acted like him in the past. Instead, what should be stressed is the evolution of Orbán’s PR and how the disaster came to be used as yet another instrument of it, highlights Anita Sobják, an analyst of the Polish Institute of International Affairs. “If during his first mandate (1998-2002) Orbán distantly labeled floods ‘very unfortunate events,’ now he publicly empathizes with the people, at the same time demonstrating by his personal engagement that the government perfectly knows how to handle the situation.”

However, the political aspects of Orbán’s approach to floods should not be overestimated. Basically, Sobják argues, such deeds will not convince citizens who criticize the prime minister; it only feeds their skepticism. On the contrary, loyalists will certainly reconfirm their support for him. This applies to other stories involving floods and politics. Responses to heavy rainfall do not push so many thousands of votes from the right side of the barricade to the left, or vice versa. They might just influence very tight electoral races, like the ones won by Schröder in 2002 and Gyurcsány in 2006. It is still unclear whether Hungary’s vote in 2014 will be so fraught. /
he European integration project is built upon a set of accepted and recognized values, principles, and norms. One of these values is solidarity. In many speeches given by European politicians, social solidarity is often called the “fourth pillar” of the EU, perceived as a community of values. It appears in EU documents, named as a strategic goal of its actions (e.g., European Commission Annual Policy Strategy 2008). But what exactly does solidarity mean? Jürgen Habermas called it a “difficult, yet genuinely political concept.” It is socially constructed and interconnected with a sense of community, togetherness, and the collective identity of particular groups. The concept originates from Roman legal foundations, the Christian tradition, and the French Revolution and its cry for fraternity. In the 19th century, Marxist reflection added an international dimension to the concept, as the solidarity of workers beyond borders. Since the 19th century, solidarity has also become a scientific term helpful for analyzing the way societies

“Solidarity” in European discourse most often refers to the solidarity of member states rather than solidarity among European citizens, although the latter is often brought up as well. For Polish Members of the European Parliament, solidarity predominantly means that within the European Union the poorer and less developed are legitimate in demanding assistance and help in order to level the differences in their welfare.
function. In the works of August Comte and Emile Durkheim, solidarity became a principle allowing for the functioning of wider, modern societies. Durkheim famously distinguished between mechanical and organic solidarity; while the former characterizes relations between members of traditional communities, the latter is when "people are linked in interdependent relations with others through an extended division of labour." In the 20th century, solidarity became interconnected with nation-states and was linked with the concept of justice. Solidarity among the citizens of a nation-state forms the basis for "individuals agreeing to cooperate in a scheme of fair distribution of benefits and burdens." Therefore, it "refers to the bases of intersubjective acknowledgments of belonging, shared membership, and mutual shared identity that together can be offered as the motivational basis for individuals’ willingness to realize their duties to one another beyond self-interest." This understanding of the concept of solidarity resonates in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) as a result of its symbolic potential for national communities and its connection to the democratic transformation in the region. As Hauke Brunkhorst argues, it was "the Polish union movement of the 1980s [that] reunited both aspects of its [solidarity’s] meaning, which have become independent of one another in the twentieth century: social emancipation and political equality."

European Solidarity: How could that be?

The concept of solidarity was present in the founding documents of the European Communities back in the 1950s. It explained why integration was initiated in the first place, stressing two main aspects: the prevention of possible war, and certain, though initially limited, distributive justice. This distributive aspect was further developed in the Rome Treaty (1957). However, it was the preamble to the Maastricht Treaty that anchored the project in "solidarity among the people of Europe." As is made clear by the solidarity between member states, which was the initial level of operation of solidarity in the EU, the concept expanded to the level of citizens. This new quality coincides with that stage of the European integration that envisioned the creation of a European polity. As a result, solidarity occupied a significant position in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE), particularly in Chapter Seven of the Charter for Fundamental Rights (CFR), and as such, was also included in the Treaty of Lisbon (TL). In the CFR, solidarity stresses specifically distributive aspects.

In European discourse, solidarity is predominantly perceived within the framework of distributive justice and the rules and procedures of the fair distribution of goods. It is best encapsulated in Jacques Delors’ famous quotation that Europe requires “competition that stimulates, cooperation that strengthens, and solidarity that unites.” It was, however, the crisis in Europe in recent years that has sparked debate about the necessary, immediate steps required to build solidarity among the states and the people of Europe. The crisis also catalyzed a normative debate about the nature of the EU polity and the transnational political and economic order. The European Parliament as a transnational forum of political debates became an important setting in which debates on European solidarity occur.

For whose benefit?

Based on a qualitative analysis of claims made by Polish members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in the 6th and 7th EP referring to solidarity, we may distinguish several areas where the concept is particularly often cited. The first area is connected with EU cohesion policy. Traditionally based on the supranational notion of solidarity within the EU, cohesion policy calls for leveling the differences of development among the regions in the EU and support in the form of structural assistance to poorer regions. This policy was of great importance for the CEE countries, providing unprecedented support for regions in this part of Europe. The claims of solidarity are mostly used by Polish politicians in the EP to maintain the high level of financial support within the cohesion policy. The analysis of justifications given in support of such claims shows that in terms of foundations of solidarity, politicians from CEE in general see the European community as suitable for providing and organizing such a distribution of resources. They give various examples and reasons why this is the case, invoking European identity and the feeling of European togetherness, shared common cultural and political heritage, and ultimately compensation for the historical injustice of communist regimes and “being abandoned” on the other side of the “Iron Curtain.” As regards the objectives of solidarity, all manner of reasons are presented: from reference to the very existence of the EU polity, through the creation of a “sense of Europe” up to the economic arguments for the operation of a single market. It is also interesting that solidarity is uniformly employed by MEPs from all political groups in the European Parliament.

Welfare and justice in the EU

One of the most interesting aspects of these debates is obviously the connection between welfare and solidarity. The foundations and inclusiveness of solidarity become visible when it comes to sharing with those who are in need. As many have pointed out, the main unit in which Europeans express solidarity with those in need is the nation state. This is also the foundation of the current welfare regimes in Europe. The existence of the EU’s redistributive policies opens a new dimension for reflection on how solidarity operates in Europe. The prime source of interest in this context for Polish MEPs is fighting poverty and discrepancies among the citizens of the EU. They frequently call for an increase in equality, both in terms of operation on the common market and other policies such as CAP and widening the so-called European social model. Increasingly, the call for intergenerational solidarity is emphasized, stressing that in the aging societies of the EU more stress needs to be put on policies directed toward the elderly (especially in the context of the European Year for Active Aging).

Another context in which solidarity is often expressed is as a fundamental principle of the EU. The principle of solidarity is often linked in such debates with justice, and refers to the practical implementation of the principle of equality of citizens and/or of member states of the
EU. As regards the former, the direct link with citizens of the EU is often raised as a foundation for the EU and solidarity as its prime principle. This is specifically visible in debates on the TCE and in the context of preparations and ratification of the TL. The proponents of both treaties stress that the reform would enhance European solidarity and strengthen those policies that are envisioned to foster solidarity. Often, European citizens’ solidarity is contrasted with the renationalization tendencies in the EU, and perceived as counterbalancing such tendencies.

The founding principle of the EU

Very often too, however, solidarity is understood as solidarity among member states, rather than a principle for citizens (for whom it is nation states that are the unit for expressing solidarity). A good illustration of this is the area of security, particularly energy security. It is well known that CEE countries, due to their high dependency on external supplies of energy sources, call for increasing cooperation among member states on a common energy policy (of both internal and external dimensions). In this context, European solidarity is demanded in order to share a scarce resource (energy) and act together when facing powerful energy suppliers. A good case study for analyzing European energy solidarity claims was the creation of North Stream – a gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea connecting Germany with Russia, bypassing the CEE region. The initiative was often perceived as undermining the very concept of European solidarity, specifically so by Germany. Very similarly, calls for solidarity among member states frequently appear in debates on European foreign policy. In this category, Polish MEPs mostly call on the EU and its institutions to show solidarity with their eastern neighbors. Often, solidarity is demanded with those suffering as a result of natural or man-made disasters. The frequent appeals for EU action in order to express solidarity with persecuted Christians all over the world are an interesting case.

In recent years, more and more prominent calls have been made for the need for solidarity among member states and citizens alike in the context of the global economic crisis. This has been particularly visible in the seventh term of the EP. A recurring issue in this context is the problem of the division of European countries into the Eurozone and those outside it, which is mostly perceived as a threat by new member states. The fear of creating a two-speed Union and sacrificing the very principle of European solidarity arises in many contexts, most frequently when the legal instruments for the Eurozone are debated. Some have stressed that the crisis is a shock test for the principle of solidarity in the EU, and that it gains a new political dimension crosscutting the existing divisions in the EU. For MEPs from Poland, the cohesion policy and its redistributive volume are a matter of special care and interest. Secondly, it is the idea that the crisis should not exclude those who are not in the Eurozone, which recurs in their pronouncements. Finally, in the perturbing years of the crisis, the very idea of European integration based on solidarity was widely defined by Polish MEPs against the populist backlash against Europe. It was expressed across political divisions.

Solidarity as a “genuinely political concept” is frequently used in political discourse in the EP, yet it lacks clarity. An analysis of the context in which this concept is invoked by political actors can tell us what it means for them in practice. For Polish MEPs, solidarity in the European Union refers to the concept of welfare and means that those poorer and less developed (both states and citizens) are legitimate in demanding assistance and help from those in a better position. This is not surprising, as this motivation was one of the most important factors in the high support for the idea of European integration in the country before enlargement.8 It also shows that regardless of what type of polity the EU is, or ought to be, most MEPs from Poland actually support the idea that there are some affinity, bonds, and common identity that makes this claim for solidarity valid, be it cohesion policy or energy solidarity. Even those otherwise Eurosceptic MEPs express an acceptance of some form of European solidarity.

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AFTER THE WELFARE STATE EUROPE

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The level of solidarity has been low throughout Central and Eastern European societies. Reversing declining trust and weakening social cohesion would be crucial to the success of post-communist democratic transition. According to several sociological surveys, solidarity and social cohesion throughout Central and Eastern European societies have been in decline since the 1989-1990 democratic changes. Post-communist societies have been characterized by apathy and distrust. The 2010 European Social Survey shows that trust towards individuals as well as institutions is significantly lower in the former Communist bloc countries than in the Western part of the continent. Central and Eastern Europeans in general have a high level of distrust towards collective action. They are less likely to have membership in civil organizations or to vote in elections. The post-communist region is marked by socially fragmented societies and high levels of distrust.

The low level of trust is a major obstacle both for democratic rule and economic growth. Although vigilance and a healthy level of suspicion are useful in keeping governments under democratic control, no democratic society can operate without a general spirit of trust. As republican political theorists from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Michael Sandel assert, free institutions require that individuals have confidence in each other. Francis Fukuyama adds that “a nation’s well-being, as well as its ability to compete, is conditioned by a single, pervasive cultural characteristic: the level of trust inherent in the society.” Without a healthy level of mutual confidence, social life would be similar to what Thomas Hobbes called the bellum omnium contra omnes, or a police-state, where rule-bound behavior is enforced by constant policing and threats of reprisal rather than widely-recognized legitimate norms.

The reason for the high level of distrust in the post-communist countries is manifold. Fragmentation and distrust are to a large extent the heritage of the past dictatorial regimes. As Hannah Arendt (following Alexis de Tocqueville) in the 1950s observed, totalitarian regimes thrive in atomized societies. Arendt contended that the Nazi and the Communist dictatorships wanted to gain full control of public and private life through the elimination of civil society and independent associations. In such a context, people learned that they needed to trick the system on an individual basis in order to somehow get by. In the late “Goulash Communist” era, authorities were more willing to tolerate cultural, social, and economic initiatives, provided that such undertakings did not challenge the establishment’s monopoly on power. The trade-off was that no positive rights could meaningfully be exercised by the public. In return, they were given the opportunity to withdraw into a relatively safe but completely apolitical private sphere.

Recognizing the importance of civil cooperation, intellectuals of the demo-
Solidarity has been institutionalized by the welfare state, and redistribution can be seen as the tangible manifestation of pooling risks and assets. Bruce Ackerman, commenting on the post-communist market fundamentalist mentality, could rightly compare laissez-faire liberal ideas dominant in the region to “inverted Marxism.”

The demise of the “prematurely” born welfare state, of course, was unavoidable. Democracy and freedom entails political and economic competition. More than a decade into the transition, Leszek Kolakowski in a somewhat disillusioned essay noted that the Communist welfare system was by nature unequal, unfair, and oppressive. Kolakowski, who during the dark years of Communism spoke of “living in dignity,” and hoped for a democratic community of free people, in 2002 noted that “a society in which greed is the main motivation of human acts, for all of its repugnant and deplorable aspects, is incomparably better than a society based on compulsory brotherhood, whether in national or international socialism.”

He, however, never completely abandoned his social democratic ideals, which, he believed, help to strengthen solidarity with those in need and fight “Social Darwinism.” But Kolakowski did not detail how solidarity could be boosted.

Despite the social importance of solidarity, it is still far from clear how public trust in post-communist societies can be built. For laissez-faire liberals, the realization of long-term, rational self-interest necessitates the voluntary cooperation of free and self-interested individuals. But as the economic crisis hit Europe, the free markets were seen more as facilitators of fragmentation and greed rather than a source of cooperation and mutual benefit. As trust in democratic institutions is weakening, it is not less unrealistic to assume that Habermasian “constitutional patriotism” and normative legitimation of basic rules could serve as a source of solidarity. Declining economic growth, high unemployment rates, and welfare cuts further deepen social cleavages. As a result, the competition for resources is becoming a bitter, zero-sum game that undermines the fraternity essential to social democracy.

In light of the popularity of nationalist and xenophobic parties, it seems that the most successful contenders advocating social cohesion endorse ideas akin to what Émile Durkheim described as essentials of “mechanical solidarity” prevalent in traditional societies. Social cohesion grounded in commonalities and kinship by definition requires relatively small and homogeneous societies. Mechanical solidarity fortifies internal cohesion by excluding non-members not sharing common ancestral, tribal, religious or ethnic traits. In contemporary plural societies, such group-making strategies lead to exclusion, inter-group tension, and entrenched tribal segmentation that undermine large scale social cohesion and solidarity.

Solidarity, as well as trust in institutions and individuals, grows out of long-term cooperation. But, conversely, effective social cooperation requires a high level of trust and solidarity. It remains to be seen if and how the post-communist states find a way out of this catch-22 situation.

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THE ELUSIVE DISCOURSE OF UNION

While the European Union will most likely be more united by an institutional framework designed to overcome recent economic pitfalls, its public sphere remains much more fragmented, with little prospect for change.

Recent speeches by key political leaders in Europe illustrate the challenge of the "political union" concept.

Viera Knutelská

The recent crisis has brought about not only many reforms of economic and fiscal governance in the Eurozone (and beyond), but also led to the renewal of constitutional debate that died down after the Constitutional and Lisbon Treaty debates. However, while the debate is rich, its clarity may easily be challenged. For example, in the economic and fiscal area, 2012 saw various calls for the creation of different "unions" – fiscal, banking, political – from top representatives of both EU Member States and European institutions. The relevance of different aspects of these "unions," and indeed, the perception of their key components, has led to a real debating conundrum. For example, the German Bundesbank claimed that there should not be a banking union without a fiscal union, Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that there should not be a fiscal union without a banking union, and President François Hollande declared that a banking union should precede the political union. And while some of these suggestions became clearer as they are transformed into specific legislative or treaty proposals, the debate on institutional – or constitutional – issues seems no less blurry.

A perfect example is the term "political union". It has been used widely at least since the preparation of the Maastricht Treaty, but it does not have any official definition, nor, apparently, is it understood in the same sense throughout the EU. In the last two years, many prominent political figures have used the term in key speeches describing their vi-
visions of the future of EU with apparently different meanings, while others avoid it even when speaking about similar issues.

The term is presented most clearly in the most pro-European texts. First and foremost, Radoslaw Sikorski, in his famous Berlin speech, used the term “political union” for both the EU and the former Yugoslavia, and used it as a synonym for the term “federation,” which he clearly prefers. He was also quite specific about defining federation in the EU context – ECB as a lender of last resort, the commission as a smaller, stronger, and political institution, a more “European” European Parliament (partially elected from pan-European candidates lists), and a single institutional framework for integration. He acknowledged that this would mean “pooling sovereignty,” but also listed national prerogatives (national identity, culture, religion, lifestyle, public morals and rates of income, corporate and VAT taxes). On the other hand, the call for a more European parliament was the only point defining political union as presented by Jose Manuel Barroso in his State of the Union Address, in which he also referred to the “federation of nation states” as a further step, without any detail on what that would look like (except a note on sharing sovereignty).

Next, Hollande called for “stronger political union,” apparently suggesting that some kind of “weaker” political union already existed, also without any specifics. His “stronger political union” is again a blurry term, associated with some aspects of the current debate, such as new financial and budgetary measures and undefined control by both national and European parliaments. Interestingly, Merkel, in her speech presenting her vision of the future of the EU in front of the EP, mentioned neither political union nor federation, and her unnamed model for a future institutional framework – member states and their parliaments concluding agreements at the European level / European Commission – is not specific enough to compare with the “political union” definition of either of the speakers, although as a relatively “strong” proposal it is probably closest to Sikorski’s ideas.

On the more Euro-skeptical side, former Czech Prime Minister Petr Nečas was much less specific; although he did refer to the idea of a “closer political union” as something that has been part of European integration since the beginning – in order to secure peace in Europe – it is apparently limited to other than purely economic aspects of integration. David Cameron, in his speech promising a referendum on British membership, used the term “political union” only once, in claiming that his vision of a flexible union (emphasizing the need to re-examine the distribution of powers between national and European levels) “is not the same as those who want to build an ever closer political union.” However, interestingly, both he and Sikorski, who may represent two poles of the discussion on future integration, mention similar issues (such as working hours) as matters that do not need to be harmonized at the EU level.

Although identifying labels of political visions and defining them may seem like an academic exercise, this aspect of the European debate has real implications for democracy at the EU level. A true democracy cannot be based only on free choice by citizens between alternatives offered by those “above,” but it requires debate in which the alternatives emerge. The process of deliberation is no less important than the process of election. A true European democracy cannot be based on twenty-eight national debates; it requires one European debate. Moreover, an effective debate requires understanding, and understanding requires a common discourse. This does not, however, necessarily mean that we all must speak the same vernacular language, but it does mean that we need the same political language. Such discourse is a meta-lingual language, defined “in the sense that the meaning communicated relating to a particular subject matter is roughly similar and reflects a common conceptualization across different vernacular languages.”

The existence of this political language would be a condition sine qua non for a true democracy at the European level. It could emerge through debate and new initiatives reinforced through the current crisis, just as a common economic discourse has emerged through the building of the internal market. However, it could also be prevented by each state developing its own political discourse for issues related to European integration within that states’ own cultural context. This can easily happen with terms that already have established meaning in national political languages related to nation states, such as “federation,” which can be – and is – interpreted as the reallocation of powers and creation of several layers of partially sovereign political communities (“German” interpretation), but also as a simple centralization of powers (“French” or “Czech” interpretation). The term “political union,” however, is not that strongly embedded in national narratives and could have potential for a truly European meaning. Unfortunately for EU democratic legitimacy, there has been no evidence of that so far.

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Disappearing peoples fertility crisis in the Visegrad region

Illustration by Kaisu Almonkari, who studies sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, Poland.
With the transition to democracy and the introduction of free market economy, fertility dropped sharply in the CEE region. Insecurity about the previously uncompetitive, centrally controlled labor markets, and the shrinking of public childcare were the main socioeconomic factors responsible for the consequent demographic decline. Good family policy should drive both employment among women and fertility up, says the Institute of Public Affairs, a Poland-based think tank. As OECD reports corroborate, there is a positive correlation between women’s employment and birth rates in the OECD countries. Job insecurity and difficulties in obtaining employment causes women to withdraw from the reproductive market.

The reforms of the 1990s acutely manifested a lingering problem rooted in the previous system. In the socialist era, women were encouraged to be active professionally, but at the same time charged with running the household. This “double burden” persists today, worsening the gender gap; a publication by the Friedrich Ebert Institute and the International Centre for Research and Analysis has even coined the term “maternity penalty.”

The V4 societies are generally more attached to traditional family life patterns, while at the same time influenced by the cultural changes that propelled the second demographic transition in Western countries.

Plummeting fertility rates are at the heart of the debate on the future of the pension systems: it is generally acknowledged that something has to be done in order to slow the depopulation tendency in the region. With the exception of a few critical voices, such as the Mises Institute, which opposes extra expenditure on demography, claiming that ushering new waves of children into a jobless world would actually make the country’s fiscal situation worse, the common ground is that dedicating specific public policies to stimulate natality is desirable.

Helping women reconcile work and personal roles is a core challenge for modern pro-natalist state policies. There is a wide range of mechanisms employed by governments to encourage women to have more children, but their effectiveness more often than not leaves much to be desired.

**Parental leave**

“The longer, the better” – while easily drawn, such a simplistic conclusion turns out to actively prejudice the principle of egalitarianism, and contributes very little to an actual increase of birth rates.

Long, remunerated maternity leave debilitates a woman’s position on the labor market and decreases her competitiveness. Excluded from their professional environment for an extended period of time, mothers lose their qualifications and motivation. Generous maternity leave also ends up encouraging discriminatory practices, by making employers less likely to take on young women. “Longer maternity leaves won’t save our demography and will worsen women’s position on the job market” is a title of a recent paper by FOR, an NGO created by the celebrated Polish economist, Leszek Balcerowicz.

Despite that, long parental leaves prevail in the region. According to Gender Studies, an NGO based in Prague, most Czech mothers of one stay at home for three years after giving birth. There are very few provisions for women who would like to return to work sooner.

Rather than excluding mothers from the labor market, liberal organizations call for increased subsidies for families, improving work opportunities for women and investing in childcare institutions. The proponents of such “development” policies also point to economic advantages that would have resulted from greater female participation on the job market.

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Fertility rates in the V4 countries are among the lowest in the European Union. With 2011 values of 1.45, 1.43, 1.3, and 1.23 for Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary respectively, the distance from the EU fertility rate of 1.57 is sizable and well below the replacement level. This situation is almost universally understood to pose a great threat to the national pension systems and raises calls for urgent reforms.
On the other hand, the Energy For Europe Foundation published a brief applauding long maternity leaves, claiming that they benefit infant health, allow for extending the period of breastfeeding and tighten the bond between children and their parents. The brief concludes that generous leave allowance improves the “quality” of children, not only their quantity.

There is, however, a third way. “Maternity Leave, or Parental Time?, a report by Gender Studies, shows how Nordic state policymakers managed to turn long and well-paid parental leave to women’s advantage. An obligatory leave for the fathers distributes hiring risk equally between men and women. In parallel to politically and socially difficult legal reforms, educational campaigns are put in place to promote gender parity. The idea behind such efforts is that building a more egalitarian society, apart from having a beneficial influence on the labor market, is the best recipe for improving demographic indicators.

Flexible forms of employment

The key to averting the demographic crisis is helping citizens reconcile family life with work. With that in mind, solutions have been proposed to allow for adapting mothers’ working hours to the exigencies of childcare and promoting flexible forms of employment. The “flexi” approach is gaining momentum among organizations concerned with the position of women on the market. Gender Studies lobbies very hard for alternative job arrangements to help Czech women reconcile motherhood with professional activity. For example, in Denmark, labor law dictates that after maternity leave, women be given the option to work part-time. Three of every four Dutch mothers choose to take advantage of this opportunity.

It is, however, important that such measures are properly guarded against discriminatory practices. Supporters of flexible forms of employment point out the necessity of introducing elements of gender mainstreaming alongside part-time work policies. This is even more relevant in post-communist countries, where the labor market is still tangibly discriminatory against the second sex.

Both the legal system and social practices around the labor market are affected by existing social norms and beliefs held on the division of social roles. Hungary and Poland are especially conservative when it comes to assigning roles to sexes. Hungarians and Poles are also among the strongest opponents of switching traditional roles, out-rivaled only by Romanians. A poll by the Hungarian TÁRKI Social Research Institute leaves no doubts: on a scale of 100, Magyars averaged 71 on the claim that men should earn and women do chores. In the V4 region, it seems preferable that the husband remains the breadwinner of the family.

This specific social context stands in stark contrast to the growing tendency towards a dual-earner family model in Europe. Policies oriented towards degenderization rather then refamilization are needed to help mothers relaunch their careers, while promoting flexible forms of employment in V4’s current social landscape contributes to maintaining the gender gap, rather than eliminating risk from the decision to bear a child.

State-provided childcare

The availability of childcare facilities is low in the region. According to a report by the European Institute for Gender Equality, in 2010 in Poland only 2% of children under the age of three were enrolled in formal childcare, while the average number for all the member states was 28%. A 2007 policy brief by the OECD reports almost 100% of children between three and the...
age of mandatory schooling in Belgium, the Netherlands, and France are enrolled in some kind of state-provided childcare institution. The brief continues to explain how lack of state support increases the financial burden of raising children and correlates with low birth rates.

The Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland all implement a similar model, known as familialism. It allocates the responsibility for childcare with the families and incentivizes citizens accordingly. In the case of Poland, the scarcity of express state policies combined with the unwritten expectation that young parents will fend for themselves caused the term “implicit familialism” to be coined. Hungary, on the other hand, boasts a wider range of options, allowing citizens to choose between state childcare infrastructure and subsidies to provide care at home.

As social-democrats would have it, a lack of state-provided care for infants has high social costs in and of itself. Education in the early stages is great for equalizing opportunities and the availability of preschool childcare is a prerequisite for female emancipation, which consequently could improve fertility rates.

All in all, it seems that investing in public childcare is a fundamental piece of degenderization policy. Shifting the burden of responsibility for infant care from families goes in the direction the entire productive model is evolving – towards a dual-breadwinner paradigm. Emancipation and improved economic situation could prove key to turning the tide of the demographic crisis.

Conclusions

Both neoliberal and conservative policies have failed to reverse the tendency of falling birth rates. The debate on gender issues is still incipient in the V4 region and cultural differences leave little hope for the CEE states adopting solutions that proved to work in northern Europe. A much-needed change in mentality is necessary for the degenderization of institutions, providing families with affordable and accessible kindergartens and encouraging fathers to assume the role of care-takers. The fertility crisis may indicate that the existing family paradigm has become a little rusty in the face of rapid economic changes that Central and Eastern Europe recently underwent.

What young people really need in order to take the plunge into parenthood is secure employment, an accessible system of childcare facilities, and reliable health care. Until that happens, none of the ad hoc policies will avert what looks to be a grave problem looming over the Visegrad region.

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Since 2010, the Eurozone debt crisis has highlighted the strengths and the weaknesses of each European country’s economic growth model. Yesterday’s economic success stories – Ireland and Spain – proved unsustainable and have experienced a deep banking crisis. France, the second largest economy of the Eurozone, is being threatened by its loss of competitiveness. At the opposite end, Germany – depicted in 1999 as “the sick man of the euro” by The Economist – has affirmed its indisputable economic leadership. Finally, Poland is about to make the “green island on a red map” speech of Prime Minister Donald Tusk (first given in May 2009) a reality. Indeed, Poland is the only European country that has avoided stagnation and recession since the beginning of the international a year ago published on Open Democracy a paper under the provocative title: “Why Poland is the New France for Germany.” Obviously, this is not going to happen for a decade at least. National accounts compiled by Eurostat show the gap by which Poland must catch up to France: in 2012, the GDP of Poland (381 billion EUR in current prices) slightly surpassed the GDP of Belgium (376 billion EUR – 4 per cent of the EU-17 GDP), standing at the 8th position in the EU-27.
country rankings. The GDP of France (2 032 billion EUR) is still 5 times bigger than that of Poland (it was 8 times bigger in 2004).

Nevertheless, something has actually changed in the “Weimar triangle” – given that raising such a question would not even have crossed our minds ten years ago, when Poland joined the EU. Both economic and political factors may help us better understand what is going on. Certainly, the Franco-German tandem still represents 50 per cent of the GDP of the euro zone. But for a decade, economic indicators of France and Germany have been increasingly divergent. External trade performance offers a clear picture of this growing economic asymmetry between Paris and Berlin: while Germany hit a record trade balance surplus in 2011 (159 billion EUR), France hit a record deficit – 74 billion EUR, including 17 billion EUR deficit with Germany. France remains the first trading partner of Germany, but now represents less than 10 per cent of German exports and 7 per cent of German imports. By contrast, Germany still accounts for 17 per cent of French foreign trade. So where does the difference lie? The successful, export-led economic growth model of Germany depends far less than France on the Eurozone (especially on PIGS), which represents 40 per cent of German exports – against 55 per cent for France. BRICS and V4 countries are twice more important to Germany than to France in foreign trade. Still, what is more striking is that the V4 countries altogether (with a total population of approximately 65 million people, equivalent to that of France), became exactly as important as France in German exports (101 billion EUR in 2011) and that since 2001, they even exceeded France in German imports – reaching 98 billion EUR in 2011, which is 51 per cent more than French products (65 billion EUR).

This growing interdependence between Germany and the V4 countries is directly the result of the massive FDI inflows from Germany towards its Eastern partners since 1989. Indeed, German firms invested twice more than their French competitors in the V4 countries. The OECD even pointed out that since 2005 Germany has more invested in the V4 countries than in France. Truly, Central Europe has become a hinterland for German industry – to the benefit of both sides. Together with the structural reforms implemented ten years ago by Gerhard Schröder, the organization of the division of the industrial process by German contractors on a regional scale, taking advantage of relatively low labor costs of the V4 countries within the single European market, played a great role in the current German economic success.

Nonetheless, building mutual economic interests is necessary but not enough to ensure political convergence between former enemies. The Czech Republic is, for example, far more economically integrated with Germany than Poland, but Prague is still closer to London than to Berlin in most of aspects of European policy. Consistent political will on both sides is essential to validate the Jean Monnet approach to the building of Europe. From that point of view, decisive steps were accomplished by Warsaw and Berlin in the past few years – precisely and directly related to the very founding mission of the Weimar Triangle in 1991: making the Polish-German reconciliation as strong and irreversible as the Franco-German one. Given that no other European country suffered as much as Poland during the Second World War, this achievement shall not be underestimated. For the first time in contemporary history, Angela Merkel and Donald Tusk have personified, for six years now, a stable and cooperative Polish-German tandem. The large victory of Merkel in the September elections is clearly very good news for Tusk. Together, they have taken bilateral cooperation to the highest level ever since the German reunification. Many diplomatic symbolic gestures served this political rapprochement: e.g., after the 2009 parliamentary elections in Germany, new Foreign Affairs Minister Guido Westerwelle paid his first visit to Warsaw; in March 2012, the same choice was made by newly elected German Federal President Joachim Gauck. Too little attention was paid in French media to the iconoclastic speech...
In saying that, Sikorski took a political risk and was strongly criticized by the opposition in Polish Parliament. But that was the point, too: promoting Polish-German reconciliation as a political strategy for differentiation with the Law and Justice Party. For the record, in 2010, Jarosław Kaczyński depicted “a Russian-German condominium” while speaking about Poland under the Tusk foreign policy.

This is probably the main achievement of the Tusk administration: successfully proposing a strong enough national narrative to convince a slight relative majority of Poles to support him for another term – a unique case on a domestic political scene so “dynamic” since the democratic turn of 1989. When we come to examine the record of the Tusk government as far as structural reforms go, it is true that too little has been done, especially when compared to the Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Jan Bielecki, or Jerzy Buzek administrations. Leszek Balcerowicz’s concerns are being heard loud and clear on that matter in the Polish media. The political talent of Donald Tusk rather lies in having told his fellow citizens a tale of a “green island” resilient to external shocks, going through a phase of accelerated modernization – thanks to the massive inflows of European funds. The total EU funds actually received by Poland increased from 8 billion EUR in 2007 to 14 billion EUR in 2011 – that is up to 4 per cent of the gross national income! It is a fantastic booster for domestic demand, financing about half of public investment expenditures in 2009–2011. In the upcoming EU budget for 2013–2020, Poland is even entitled to receive up to 73 billion EUR, which is 5 billion EUR more than in the previous EU budget.

Tusk’s narrative also puts forward the strong entrepreneurial spirit of Poles and the business-friendly domestic institutional framework to attract further FDI – especially from emerging countries looking for a gateway to access the single European market. Combined with the discovery of the huge potential resources of shale gas – which have yet to be confirmed – and the international mass media impact of the Polish Presidency of the EU Council in 2011, followed by the UEFA European Football Championship in 2012, the Tusk national narrative definitely contributes to improving the self-confidence of Poles. Poland even clearly expressed its ambitions to replace Argentina in the G20. However, together with the Eurozone crisis largely reported in the media, the Tusk “green island” story demonstrated a strong adverse effect: the appetite of Polish public opinion to join the Eurozone has declined sharply from 64% in 2002 to 25% ten years later. Now it’s time for Tusk to build a new narrative in an attempt to convince Polish citizens that adopting the euro is the best – and only – way for Poland to join the very political core of the EU, as Tusk said before: “to be at the table, not on the menu.”

The author is an economist and director of the French Centre for Research in Social Sciences (CEFRES) in Prague.
Artur Frank helps German and Austrian senior citizens find places in retirement homes in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. Elderly care in Germany is too expensive for many families and a senior citizens’ home situated close to the German or Austrian border is an interesting alternative to more and more families. His company, Seniorpalace, initiated cooperation with Czech retirement homes this year. Next year, he would like to start a similar project in Poland.

How did the idea of taking German and Austrian pensioners to senior citizens’ homes in Eastern Europe come to mind? By chance. When I moved to Slovakia, I was helping secure Slovak caregivers for German families and then I had the idea of offering places to German senior citizens here. It started slowly in 2006.

And then you saw the potential in it? Yes. However, we first had to find senior homes with an adequate care standard. It wasn’t easy in the early years. There were old communist facilities everywhere that were modernized a bit but not enough for us. Then we succeeded in finding a satisfactory one and others gradually appeared. We cooperate only with new senior homes or with those that have been completely renovated.
What other problems or challenges did you encounter at the beginning of the project?
The worst thing was really to find suitable places of appropriate quality. Another problem was related to insurance companies that didn't deal with the issue several years ago, so nobody knew how to properly proceed in accordance with the legal and insurance requirements. Fortunately, this has already changed, and today insurance companies know exactly what to do if, for example, a German pensioner wants to go to a senior home abroad.

You offer senior citizens’ homes in Slovakia, Hungary, and in the Czech Republic. What are the differences between them with regard to your work? There are no significant differences between these countries. The language competencies of caregivers could use improvement. Further inland it is more difficult to find staff that speaks German well. On the other hand, it’s not a problem at all in border areas. The bigger challenge is further inland.

Do you perceive any problems rooted in history that may be related to your work? How do people react to them? That’s how media interpret it. Older people look at it pragmatically and have much less problems with history. Actually, politicians planned to form a European union of states with free movement of people. I have to say that I don’t know of any client who would be dissatisfied by being in the East. The media like to describe reality differently.

Don’t you encounter a negative attitude from local people as Germans and
Austrians move into their retirement homes?

We place great stress in our facilities on not forming a separatist environment. We try not to accommodate only Germans or Austrians there. Our aim is to create places that overcome linguistic and national barriers and that create a real home for senior citizens from different countries. We don’t have a single home devoted exclusively to Germans or Austrians. There are, for example, Hungarians with Germans, in Slovakia there are even Bulgarians with Hungarians, Slovaks with Austrians, and it’s similar in the Czech Republic. I wouldn’t like to open a facility only for German and Austrian citizens. That is not and should not be the aim of the European Union. You know, we have some people with dementia here who don’t speak Slovak, for example, which does not have to be an obstacle. There is a Bulgarian man in one of our homes who speaks only his mother tongue. A German lady lives also there. And these two people spend together a lot of time speaking in their own languages. They even watch Hungarian TV together and they are happy. It’s nice to see that. For these people, it’s not just language that matters.

What are the reactions to your activities outside the homes in these countries? It’s a very interesting topic for the media. It has shifted in the media and I don’t understand it. It’s being written that families transfer their old relatives. But I say that those who want to transfer and get rid of an old person can do so within Germany or Austria, by simply not visiting. It doesn’t matter where the person is. There is only one kind of a transfer, not a transfer abroad. The options should be considered. What is the best way to spend the rest of one’s life with regard to a family and its means?

Aging in Europe is becoming a big issue. How do you look at the problem? Didn’t this become a hot topic too late?

Politicians have overslept. The situation won’t be easy in several years with the current age structure. We have to prepare ourselves for a senior citizen boom in the coming years. It is positive, in the international context, that European borders are open, and that the EU has created the possibility of spending the autumn of one’s life in other countries where it can be the best option under the specific conditions and financial situation.

As we are talking about demography, where does the so-called welfare state stand on elderly care in your opinion? Regarding only Germans and Austrians, there won’t be any significant changes. I see little room for change, given that the coffers for social services are empty and the budget structure is final. However, I do hope that the current practice will change. Senior homes in Germany and Austria are basically being rewarded for an increase in client care, meaning that more pensioners are doing worse and need more care. This strategy should be changed and I believe it would positively influence the current situation more than other measures. At the same time it is and will be beneficial to focus more elderly care in Eastern Europe. Costs are lower there and the documentation system and administrative burden are not as inflated as in Germany. In Eastern Europe, where we operate, everything necessary is being done without senseless piles of documents as in Germany and Austria.

Do you expect projects like yours to arise more often? Will private and state institutions cooperate more frequently?

Eldery care falls under state competences. In this respect, I don’t think that significant private initiatives will appear. It is important how plans being discussed in the EU will develop. The thing is that, for example, German and Austrian insurance companies could enter into a contract with senior citizen homes throughout the EU. That would mean further increased interest in retirement homes in Eastern Europe. It would then be based on broader grounds and the connotations wouldn’t be as negative as today, thanks to the media. If there is a legal precedent from the EU, more people among those now considering the matter will choose homes in Eastern Europe. I’m convinced of it.

Do you see it as a touchy topic when Germans and Austrians “go back” to areas from which they were displaced after World War II, or are there negative memories from the past?

That’s just fantasy made up by the media. A not inconsiderable number of Sudeten Germans want to spend the autumn of their lives in their former homeland. And it’s not linked to fears or worries, they just want to be close to the places where they grew up and used to live. There are no prejudices. We also receive enquiries from war veterans who fought on the Eastern Front, and even they don’t have any prejudices and are willing to go to a retirement home in Poland. On the contrary, Poles are more worried about the Germans. Also, thanks to the EU, people in general don’t fear other nations as much and are open to this decision.

You mentioned concerns in Poland. What’s the situation in other countries? I have experienced these kinds of fears and worries related to war and history only in Poland. I haven’t encountered it elsewhere. Quite on the contrary. For example, Slovakia doesn’t have any preconceived notion about Germans, who often confuse it with Slovenia. They know the Czech Republic well and they equate Hungary with the Balaton, where many Germans have gone on holiday and of which they have good memories. I haven’t encountered any fears or negative reactions from local people in these countries in Eastern Europe.

You cooperate with retirement homes in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. Do you plan to start cooperation with homes in other countries, for example in Poland?

Yes. Poland doesn’t belong to our portfolio yet. They are building a lot there. I expect that next year we will manage one facility there that corresponds to our standards and which we could offer to German pensioners. Austrian senior citizens aren’t very interested in Poland. On the other hand, we do have positive feedback from Germany thanks to proximity to German border. We are involved in several projects in other countries in Eastern Europe but right now I can’t say how they will develop. We do have, for example, contacts in Croatia. However, that doesn’t mean that we have set any deadlines for the near future.

With how many facilities do you cooperate now?

Currently, nine homes, and 10 percent of our clients are Austrians and the rest are from Germany. Altogether we do have many clients, it’s not a mass phenomenon as some media report. Families consider this decision very carefully. They come here and think about it. For some families and pensioners it is a good alternative to senior citizen homes in Germany.

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The author is a reporter of Czech economic web daily lhned.cz.
Central and Eastern Europe needs to find its place on the globalized market. This is not an easy task. Culturally, the region belongs to the developed world but lacks the social and institutional structure essential for innovation and fast growth. Lower labor costs hardly compensate for these drawbacks. Interestingly, there are opportunities in the most technologically advanced areas of the economy and the young seem to be ready to seize them.

TOMASZ KASPROWICZ

Globalization has caused countries to specialize in various sectors of the economy. Most Asian countries, with the notable example of China, took a chance with traditional industry, enticing it with unusually low labor costs. At the same time, the West decided to operate in the high-tech industries, which require even more capital and highly skilled labor. The position of Central European countries therefore became very challenging. The revolution, which resulted in the abandonment of communism, was mostly caused by problems of an economic nature. Defunct, centrally-planned, and state-owned enterprises could not even provide for society's basic needs. In opening their economies, these countries found that their industry could not withstand global competition. Labor costs, while low by Western standards, were quite substantial compared to Asia. In 2011, the average hourly wage in manufacturing in CE countries ranged between $9 in Poland to $13 in the Czech Republic, which is ten times higher than those estimated for China and India. The low-tech industry had no chances at survival. At the same time, high-tech industry was either nonexistent or obsolete. That universities could provide neither know-how nor sufficiently skilled researchers and cooperation with industry was a myth.

But there is still hope. Primary and secondary education inherited from the
former system was focused on mathematics and science at a much higher level than in most Western countries. For example, the level of mathematical proficiency in the Czech Republic was deemed more similar to far-east countries like Japan or Hong Kong than to the Western countries. This, of course, had visible impact on the international performance of programmers from Central Europe. The International Olympiad in Informatics is dominated by people from these regions – seven all-time top performers are from Belarus, Poland (2), Bulgaria, Estonia, and the Czech Republic. The first contestant outside of CE is eighth and comes from the U.S. The ACM International Collegiate Programming Contest is dominated by Russian, Polish, and Chinese universities. We can observe the same pattern in looking at the results of Google Code Jam. There must be something to it.

These facts could not be overlooked by corporations looking to offshore certain tasks. The opportunity to tap into local talent must have been one of the main reasons for IBM’s decision to invest in Katowice, Silesia, where 2000 people are to be hired by the end of 2015. This outpost’s purpose is to secure global needs in the area of operating systems’ management and security. IBM is not alone in the region. Central Europe has become a hub for the near shoring of various business services from accounting to IT. Many Western corporations target CE not only because of the low cost but also cultural proximity. This is how Peter Ingram, IT director at Addison Lee, describes the differences in work culture between Russia and India:

“The guys in India said yes to everything, copied the mistakes we had deliberately put in there, and didn’t ask us anything about the business – it was all very systematic. The team in Russia looked at our proposition, asked if it was functional, noticed the mistakes and asked us why we did things in this way. They really challenged us and had much better engagement.”

This leads even outsourcing Indian companies to invest in CE in order to benefit from time zone and cultural closeness. These outlets, like ones by Mphasis in Poznań or SGS Technologies in Warsaw, are growing rapidly. No wonder this segment of the economy went through the crisis of 2008 with almost no harm, increasing in volume and market size.

Becoming just the source of a highly qualified yet cheap labor force is not the limit of people’s ambitions in the region. It is hard to imagine that some of the world’s greatest coders would be satisfied with the role of corporate hired help. The story of four Estonians, Ahti Heinla, Priit Kasesalu, Toivo Annus, and Jaan Tallinn, who developed Skype, shows that great ideas and skills are not enough. The founders of the company eventually
acquired by Microsoft became people that could secure funding and access to markets, not the brain-power behind the product. They also received most of the fame and glory, not to mention the money.

This lesson was learned by many of the companies, big and small. The Polish CD Project opened a video game developer. But unlike many other existing companies that catered to the needs of large publishers like Hungarian Black Hole Entertainment, CD Project decided to act on its own. It developed a series of games based on the Witcher novel series written by Andrzej Sapkowski. With its third game in the works, the company has sold over a million copies of the previous titles. The latest title, Witcher 3, received 49 awards at the E3 2013 fairs – the most important gaming event in the world – including “Best game of E3”. The future could not be brighter.

Yet developing a game requires thousands of hours of programmers, not a trivial investment, and a lack of capital was always an issue in this part of Europe. Fortunately, many innovative, Internet-based businesses may become global with barely more than a couple computers. Hungarian Prezi is a company that changed the way presentations are made. Foregoing the standard slide-by-slide framework, they developed an idea-map approach that gives presentations a completely unique feel. Thanks to this, Prezi is today a global trendsetter, growing by a million users per month.

We cannot forget that even the Internet itself creates business opportunities on its own. The Czech company Socialbakers decided to expand based on the importance of social media. With the wealth of options available, marketing departments are often unable to decide whether their strategies are good and have the chance of bring in profit. This is where Socialbakers come in. They publish information about the popularity of various fanpages by industries, visitor flow, and other useful statistics. Starting with Facebook, they now also monitor Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

Being innovative in meeting clients’ needs is essential to business success and sometimes a brilliant idea is sufficient. Sometimes, however, much more involved tools are required. As long as capital requirement is not an issue, there is no limit to development. Cutting-edge technology involving artificial intelligence is used by IVONA Software, based in Gdynia, Poland, to produce a leading speech synthesizer. Products offered previously were artificial-sounding due to a lack of expression, but this is not the case with IVONA, as anyone can confirm on the company’s webpage. The software won a competition with products by Microsoft, Nuance Communications, and AT&T. The company was acquired this year by Amazon to fight the competition of Apple. On the day the news was released, Amazon shares increased to a 52-week high, while Apple shares plunged by 12%. Of course, we cannot say that the takeover announcement was the sole reason for such stock price behavior; but it is nice to think that a small company from CE can rock the international financial markets. This year, Ivona founders Łukasz Osowski and Michał Kaszcuk were decorated by the President of Poland with the Gold Cross of Merit – clearly there was much merit in such a decision.
Still, the state is far from embracing innovation as a way of securing the country’s well-being in the future. Politicians are preoccupied with large, often partially state-owned firms. They believe building large corporations, often at the expense of small companies, is a direct way to global power. At the same time, due to the low culture of bureaucracy and corruption, many companies are destroyed for apparently no reason. A notable example is Polish Optimus and JTT, two companies dealing in computer hardware, which were closed due to alleged illegal tax evasion practices. Years later, in both cases the courts ruled in favor of the entrepreneurs, but by that time companies were long closed, and opportunities and workplaces lost. No bureaucrat was harmed during the process. These are unfortunately not isolated cases and repeat themselves occasionally. An entrepreneur therefore never knows whether she will get a Cross of Merit or foreclosure. This is a huge deterrent to taking risks and to innovation in the region.

There are, however, initiatives to change this sad state of affairs. The growing third sector is becoming an important factor. Initiatives also come from young and innovative people who have already had their share of success. Peter Arvai, the CEO and founder of Prezi, is one of the founders of Bridge Budapest, an organization devoted to helping students gain experience at the most innovative companies in the world. This approach is very similar to that applied in Silicon Valley, where new ideas and companies are welcomed because talent and innovation attract more talent, benefiting everyone. Arvai, raised in Sweden, wants to show young Hungarians the best practices and is trying to change their mindset. Examples of great success should be an inspiration to take risks and not to be discouraged by failure. Unfortunately, the latter is considered a stigma and an end to a professional career, while in high-tech it is just a good beginning.

The future could be bright for Central Europe. We have many pieces in place for global success. Innovation cannot be easily outsourced to China and, as these examples show, the quality of new ideas is at the highest global level. Yet the young tend to leave looking for better futures elsewhere. One can easily find skilled engineers from CE dishwashing at a London pub. The number of startups is still low due to difficult access to financing and the open hostility of the state. Many entrepreneurs clearly state that the best thing politicians could do is to stay away from the economy. These are low expectations, yet impossible to meet. This is because politics are dominated by well-organized groups fighting to retain their privilege, which results in conservatism and the high involvement of the state in the economy. The challenges are substantial and nobody in power is willing to tackle them. For now, we can only hope that the bright people of the region will yet again succeed, despite the obstacles they face.

Translated by Nicolas Furnival

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The choice between the European or Eurasian Union is a civilizational and political choice, a choice of historic fate. The dilemmas that Ukraine now faces were being addressed by Central Europe not so long ago. Does this, then, mean that Ukraine’s route to integration with the European Union runs through the Visegrad Group? On what foundations should this cooperation be built and how can threats be responded to?

WOJCIECH PRZYBYLSKI
TALKS WITH ADAM MICHNİK
What is your understanding of the term, Central Europe? Above all, the experience gained in connection with this term allowed me to see my own fate reflected in the fates of my friends and associates from other countries in this region. Our histories have very often overlapped. This has helped everyone understand others and themselves. For example, Yuri Andrukhovych describes the moment his grandmother saw Archduke Franz Ferdinand ride past her balcony in Stanislau. This intertwining of the histories of various nations that are now geographically divided shows a certain common heritage, even if that heritage is diverse. It also shows a common set of experiences and I consider this common ground valuable. I have the greatest respect for those groups and institutions that consciously make reference to it. This common ground could on the one hand be the whole Visegrad idea or on the other hand what Barbara Toruńczyk called the Europe of the Middle in her “Literary Notebooks” (Polish: “Zeszyty Literackie”). The Bronislaw Geremek Foundation has just published the essays of István Bibó; I feel the book has a great deal to teach Poles, but also Czechs, Slovaks, and Ukrainians.

What has this region given to Europe? I think the question is worded badly: Europe isn’t about giving. They say that there is no unity without integration; in this sense the experience of Central Europe brings something new to Europe’s table. And I don’t only mean that literally: goulash (Hungary), sirloin meatballs (Czech Republic) and solyanka soup (Ukraine). A Europe without István Bibó, without Imre Kertész, Vladimír Mečiar, Zbigniew Herbert, and Andrzej Wajda – not to mention Fryderyk Chopin – is simply worse off for it. This means that this region joining Europe – i.e. the pulling down of the Iron Curtain, the Berlin Wall – made the European project richer, more interesting, and more important.

Our Central European identity is in large part defined by our awareness of being situated between Moscow and Berlin. What can Ukraine find interesting about this conviction? I wouldn’t wish to speak paternally, as if I knew better. Ukrainians themselves are aware which of the meals on the European menu are going to suit their palate. But I feel they are facing a historic decision. The choice between the Eurasian or the European Union is a choice of historic fate, a civilizational choice, and political choice. In this sense, the experiences of Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania can be interesting to the Ukrainian people and their elite.

But you know a thing or two about Ukraine... In fact I’m an avowed Ukrainophile.

... And you understand the dilemmas and discussions that they currently face. If you were a Ukrainian, would you encourage them to integrate with Europe?

I haven’t a shadow of a doubt, just as I encouraged Poles in Poland. I didn’t know what the future held then, either. There were disagreements. There were those who said that joining the European Union would result in losing: independence, national, cultural, and religious identity, because Euroland is Babylon, the worst possible nightmare – a den of sin, drugs, abortion, contraception, and divorce. Who knows how it would have ended if it hadn’t been for the Pope who unambiguously said, “From the Union of Lublin to the European Union.” But Archbishop Michalik abstained from voting and made a big deal about doing so. Different points of view rubbed up against each other. In my opinion, though, in joining the European Union, Poland has seen exclusively positive effects, without a single negative. Not a single one, even though the EU is in recession. So I would obviously urge Ukrainians to join and I’d use two arguments. The first is that the EU is an anchor for democracy. If Hungary were not in the European Union we’d now have a completely authoritarian administration there. And the second is that it’s a civilizational choice of a certain way of life, it’s an integration of Greek democracy with Roman law and the Enlightenment. It’s simply the best that mankind has produced. In that world it’s possible to live with the most dignity and the least amount of problems.

I recall that in the period leading up to 2004, when we joined the European Union, several editors in chief – including you – declared that they would be encouraging the public to vote in favor of European integration. How do you evaluate this now? Something of that sort did indeed take place. OK, we didn’t sign any declaration but it was a de facto coalition of pro-European media, but not only the media. The Democratic Left Alliance [SLD] was also in this “coalition” and the Freedom Union [UW] and Civic Platform [PO] of course; Law and Justice [PiS] and the Church were divided on the issue. Lepper and Giertych were against it. I believe that Poland made a historic choice and that it was a very wise choice, a very wise choice.

That was a time of a coalition. The Visegrad Group was also founded in order to enter the European Union together and on better terms. It started shortly after 1989. Already in 1990, Havel convened the first meeting in Bratislava. This was formed of two groups: one was made up of intellectuals, while the other was mainly politicians. There was the political will to aim for this in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Because what alternative did we have? The Balkans? It’s only now that it all looks rosy – back then it looked more dangerous. Yugoslavia started to break up. Czechoslovakia broke up not long after. In Transylvania there was fierce ethnic conflict along Hungarian-Romanian lines. Let’s not discuss the Caucasus – Sumqayit, Nagorno-Karabakh, and so on. It was no laughing matter.

Not long afterwards you were more skeptical about the Visegrad project and gave voice to this in 1995, possibly even in the “Central European Gazette,” a joint project of several daily newspapers from the region.

No, that wasn’t skepticism, just a certain kind of dissatisfaction, disappointment. I was enthusiastic about the Visegrad idea then. I still am, in fact. It was just difficult to talk about an effective Visegrad when Vladimír Mečiar was in power in Bratislava, Václav Klaus in Prague, and József Antall in Budapest. The Visegrad
It’s possible that the majority of people in Ukraine would say, “What, are we going to get close to those Germans and Poles and goodness knows who? We know the Russians, we know the language, we have a common heritage, a common religion – it’s much better to move closer to Russia.” Then the question needs to be asked: What about Russia? At present, the Eurasian Union project is being pushed through in Moscow. It is in fact an attempt to reconstruct the Soviet Union. We’ll see what becomes of it.

Ukraine is at a very difficult moment historically because it finds itself between Bandera and Stalin. We remember Stalin’s victims, the great famine, but the UPA was after all – for some time – an ally to Hitler. This conflict of remembrance also has an intra-Ukrainian element. I can’t say what will happen, of course, but I have a feeling that it will be difficult to eliminate that problem. The tension between differing interpretations of history will linger on, but it can of course linger even within the European Union or the Visegrad Group. If we look at the Czech Republic and Slovakia, we can see that Vaclav Havel’s political nous project at that time looked like a shirt stitched together by brute force – and with very coarse horse hair.

We were then, though, similar with regard to development and level of modernization. Now things look different. Is Ukraine right to fear that it will be a separate dish on the European menu?
In one sense everyone is alone since the EU is formed by separate states. If Ukraine sees the EU as a large project, then Visegrad could be a smaller one.

Do you believe that Ukrainians could co-operate with us as part of the Visegrad Group, for example due to similar experience or comparable identity?
I don’t think there is one Ukraine – there is Western Ukraine, there’s Kiev, there’s Odessa – they all have a different reality. I think that co-operation of this kind could only strengthen both the European and Visegrad projects. But it’s possible that I’m speaking naively.

Ukraine is at a very difficult moment historically because it finds itself between Bandera and Stalin. We remember Stalin’s victims, the great famine, but the UPA was after all – for some time – an ally to Hitler. This conflict of remembrance also has an intra-Ukrainian element. I can’t say what will happen, of course, but I have a feeling that it will be difficult to eliminate that problem. The tension between differing interpretations of history will linger on, but it can of course linger even within the European Union or the Visegrad Group. If we look at the Czech Republic and Slovakia, we can see that Vaclav Havel’s political nous...
brought about a situation in which the two countries cooperate fairly harmoniously. It’s possible to get along together fairly well in the European Union despite differences of opinion and differences of remembrance, and often despite diverging interests.

As with Hungary and Slovakia?
That’s an even better example.

How do we achieve this cooperation? In our time is there any point to opinion exchanging forums such as the “Central European Gazette”, the supplement to the most important newspapers in the region, published in several languages, since the ’90s?
Everyone then was focused on Paris, London, Berlin, and Washington. Who then in Poland was interested in Hungary or Prague? Not to mention Kiev. This is now gradually changing. It’s important to acknowledge that certain important things have already taken place in the People’s Republic of Poland. Hungarian and Czech texts were printed here. We always cared about that in “Gazeta Wyborcza.” For example, we recently printed a long essay by János Kis. Action taken in cooperation with Ukraine is equally important, such as the publication of Oksana Zabuzhko’s book, the translation of Yuri Andrukhovych, and the enormous valueable publication of Yaroslav Hrytsak. Let’s first identify and later understand where our common interests lie. The key to Ukraine is obviously in Ukraine and not in Poland, not in Brussels, not in Berlin. The Ukrainians themselves must decide which way they want to go. We should be doing everything we can to make the European offer – or the Visegrad offer – attractive. And we above all should find out whom we’re dealing with.

In Poland, for example, the dispute about Volhynia is typical. In my opinion it’s absolutely stupid and harmful. What I mean to say is that we in Poland don’t take into account what effect this has on contemporary Ukrainians, and that’s without referring to the legal consequences – demanding that Ukrainian criminals be handed over would bring the response that those responsible for Operation Vistula should also be handed over. And there is no end to the blame game. This means it’s important to choose our words carefully when we speak about Ukraine to Ukrainians. We can’t use phrases that are understood there as degrading, discriminatory, or offensive. When you say that Ukrainians are a “genocidal nation,” it’s like saying that Poles are an “anti-Semitic nation.” Yes, there are anti-Semites in Poland but it is not an anti-Semitic nation!

Since choice of words is essential, do you think Ukrainians are Europeans?
It can be asked whether the Germans have the right to be called Europeans—we recall Tadeusz Kroński’s famous essay “Fascism and the European Tradition.” It can be asked whether the Poles have the right to be called Europeans, since “what kind of a nation is that?”

Europeanness is determined by three criteria: the criterion of identity, which the Ukrainians themselves will define. The geographical criterion, which clearly shows they are Europeans. And the political criterion, which will be defined by the upcoming decisions made by Kiev. A lot also depends on Brussels, of course. The pro-Ukrainian policy our government is following in Brussels is sound and I would be willing to praise our prime minister, foreign minister, and president for this.

Who is more in the right, Bronislaw Komorowski in meeting Yanukovych, or Merkel, who wasn’t sure if she should be present at all during Euro 2012?
This is a big problem but it has little to do with Ukraine itself. It has more to do with a certain philosophy. I have to admit that it’s one of those issues where I have one opinion in the morning and another in the afternoon. On the one hand, tolerating a government that locks up its critics for fabricated reasons is unacceptable. This calls for a reaction from the European community. I’m speaking about this with the greater conviction of having been a prisoner myself and I know full well what I was put away for. On the other hand, a boycott of Ukraine signifies acceptance that Kiev’s only partner will be Moscow – and this is the same as foregoing every instrument of action in the future.

Would you meet Yanukovych?
From the political point of view I’m a private individual. Otherwise I don’t know. Then again, what should I meet him for? I’ve already met Lukashenko.
Leszek Kołakowski began his three-volume history of Marxism with the observation that Karl Marx was a German philosopher. I don’t think he meant this as a compliment. But, I do mean it as praise when I say that Krzysztof Michalski was a Polish philosopher. He came of age during dark times. And, like most philosophers who live in dark times, he turned his attention to the world. Krzysztof wrote, and wrote beautifully, about abstract thinkers and themes – about Heidegger and Husserl – eternity and time.

But the Institute he founded connected the life of the mind with the world at large – the Cold War and its aftermath, European Integration, Europe and America, religion and public life, democracy and markets, feminism, and human rights. The result was one of the finest institutes for advanced study in the world, a center for first-rate scholarship in philosophy, history, culture, and the social sciences that also managed to elevate the terms of public debate in Europe and even across the Atlantic. Krzysztof was a tolerant man, but he had an unspiring eye for quality and for cant. Often he would ask his academic friends to suggest suitable participants for panels or debates, especially when he was struggling, as he often did, to find an ideological balance. Once, I recommended a Harvard colleague for such an event, and some months later I asked Krzysztof how my colleague had performed. “He was good,” Krzysztof said, “Not very good, but good.”

Krzysztof had sophisticated tastes – in food, in music, and in other domains. But, these high tastes coexisted with humble, even surprising ones. One summer in Cortona, Aleksander Smolar borrowed Krzysztof’s BMW every afternoon to drive a group of us to the swimming pool and various other places. As we drove, Krzysztof’s CD player belted out the greatest hits of a 1940s U.S. singing trio called the Andrews Sisters. We found it very funny that Krzysztof apparently liked this hokey ‘40s harmony. At least, it was funny until we discovered that no one in the car knew how to turn off the CD player. And so, now forevermore, it will be impossible for me to gaze upon the Tuscan countryside without hearing the Andrews Sisters’ “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy” echoing in my head.

One of Krzysztof’s favorite themes was solidarity. No concept has figured more frequently in the Institute’s conferences and public events over the years. But, this raises an interesting question: why solidarity? Why not democracy? Or justice? Or freedom? One possible explanation is personal and historical. The founding of the Institute coincided, more or less, with the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland. Krzysztof’s friend, the philosopher priest, Józef Tischner, preached and wrote about solidarity in the 1980s, and in 1987, Pope John Paul II issued an encyclical “Social Concern” that emphasized solidarity as a Christian virtue with political significance. So, there was this history, but it beg the question: why for this social movement and for these religious thinkers was solidarity...


**CHARITY** – and not democracy or justice or freedom – the most important, the most resonant moral and civic aspiration of the age?

In answering this question, it’s worth noticing how times have changed. The Institute continues to explore the theme of solidarity, but in recent years, solidarity has been in retreat, both in theory and in practice. In fact, today solidarity has an almost quaint, archaic ring. We debate the causes and the implications of the fraying of welfare states. At the level of political theory and moral philosophy, there is what might almost be described as a suspicion of solidarity. One measure of that suspicion is the search, both in theory and in practice, the search for alternative ways of conceiving commonality, alternative ways of holding societies together. The most prominent of those alternative ways are twofold: one is the market – market relations, voluntary exchange, freedom of choice; the second is the idea of markets, but markets constrained by principles of justice that rest on some form of social contract – be it explicit or implicit, be it actual or hypothetical. And much of the debate about the future of welfare states is a debate between partisans of one or the other of these alternative pictures on how to order social relations – the advocates of markets, free markets, and voluntary exchange, debating with those who believe in markets, but believe that markets should be constrained by principles of justice that derive from some social contract or another.

Now, those who hear back to the ideal and the tradition of solidarity are likely to see these two familiar positions in the debate about the welfare state as a form of solidarity “light”. So, why seek these alternatives? What’s wrong with solidarity itself as a moral and civic ideal? Or, to put the question another way: what is the source of the suspicion of solidarity? I think there are two sources: one is a certain view on moral psychology; the other is a view about moral philosophy. The suspicion that is rooted in moral psychology worries that solidarity, as an ethic, as a way of conceiving social relations, is too demanding – morally too demanding. At least, it’s too demanding if the aspiration to solidarity is conceived as a universal aspiration. And if it isn’t conceived as a universal aspiration, if solidarity is unavoidably bound up with particularity, then arises the second suspicion of solidarity – the one rooted in moral philosophy. This is the worry that solidarity, if unavoidably bounded in the particular, is too parochial, is ultimately a kind of prejudice for one’s own.

Now, I would like to explore mainly the second suspicion – the second worry, the worry of moral philosophy, the objection that says that solidarity is limited as an ideal because if it must be situated, if it must be bound up with particularity, then unavoidably it slides into a kind of prejudice for one’s own. But, before turning to that argument, I want to acknowledge that there is, and it’s important, I think, to recognize, that there is a version of the ideal of solidarity that is not particular in this way.

I mentioned the encyclical on social concern by John Paul II in 1987. He defined solidarity this way: [The virtue of solidarity] is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all. And then he gave the political implications of this ideal: Those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods ... should feel responsible for the weaker and be ready to share with them all that they possess ... solidarity helps us to see the “other” – whether a person, a people, or a nation – not just as some kind of instrument ... but as our “neighbor” ... to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God. Hence the importance of reawakening the religious awareness of individuals and peoples.

This is John Paul II on the universal conception of solidarity, although many critics and defenders of solidarity have rejected the idea that it can be universal. They have emphasized instead – this is the argument about moral psychology – that our ability to identify with and take responsibility for our fellow human beings can’t be universal.

Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, offers up a thought experiment reflective of this view, of this skepticism about the universal reach of solidarity. “Let us suppose,” he writes, “that the great empire of China, with all its myriads of inhabitants, was suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake, and let us consider how a man of humanity in Europe, who had no sort of connection with that part of the world, would be affected upon receiving intelligence of this dreadful calamity. He would, I imagine, first of all, express very strongly his sorrow for the misfortune of that unhappy people, he would make many melancholy reflections upon the precariousness of human life ... He would too, perhaps, if he was a man of speculation, enter into many reasonings concerning the effects which this disaster might produce upon the commerce of Europe, and the trade and business of the world in general. And when all this fine philosophy was over, when all these humane sentiments had been once fairly expressed, he would pursue his business or his pleasure, take his repose or his diversion, with the same easy and tranquility, as if no such accident had happened. The most frivolous disaster which could befall himself would occasion a more real disturbance. If he was to lose his little finger tomorrow, he would not sleep tonight; but, provided he never saw them, he will snore with the most profound security over the ruin of a hundred millions of his brethren, and the destruction of that immense multitude seems plainly an object less interesting to him, than this paltry misfortune of his own.”

This is Adam Smith suggesting there are certain limits to the reach of moral sentiments, and that these limits are more or less fixed – a fixed feature of the human condition, of the reach of human sympathy. This is the argument of moral psychology that underlies, I think, the suspicion of solidarity.

Jean Jacques Rousseau expresses a similar view about the limited reach of human sympathy, but he sees a solution. Rousseau writes in *Discourse on Political Economy*:

It appears that the feeling of humanity evaporates and grows feeble in embracing all mankind, and that we cannot be affected by the
calamities of Tartary or Japan, in the same manner as we are by those of European nations. It is necessary in some degree to confine and limit our interest and compassion in order to make it active. Now, as this sentiment can be useful only to those with whom we have to live, it is proper that our humanity should confine itself to our fellow-citizens, and should receive a new force because we are in the habit of seeing them, and by reason of the common interest which unites them. 3

And so, he sees patriotism, nations that concentrate and bind human sympathy, as the solution.

Do we wish men to be virtuous? Then let us begin by making them love their country: but how can they love it, if their country be nothing more to them than to strangers, and afford them nothing but what it can refuse nobody? 4

So Rousseau accepts the idea that solidarity can’t be universal, but he sees this as an argument, precisely, for organizing, articulating, and concentrating fellow feeling within the bounds of a patriotic, political community.

This is one question, the question of moral psychology: is the reach of human sympathy fixed such that the universal aspiration to solidarity is hopelessly unrealistic?

But, the second ground of suspicion of solidarity, I think, is the more far-reaching and the more influential, and it sheds a more powerful light both on solidarity’s hard times these days, and on the appeal of solidarity as a moral and civic ideal in the 1980s to the group of civic and religious thinkers who were part of the intellectual background to the formation of the Institute and its mission and its purpose.

The argument of moral philosophy that leads to a suspicion of solidarity worries that any particular bounded expression of solidarity is cut off from universal moral concerns and lapses into parochialism and prejudice for one’s own kind.

To illustrate the worry that once solidarity is bounded, there is an inevitable tension between the claims of solidarity and the claims of universal human justice or human dignity, consider two cases – moral tales about loyalty and solidarity. 5

Solidarity often draws its most potent, most available, most intuitively powerful illustrations from family relations. In Massachusetts, there are two famous brothers. Maybe you’ve read about them. They are the Bulger brothers, William and James Bulger. James was actually better known as “Whitey Bulger.” Bill and Whitey Bulger grew up in a family of nine in a South Boston housing project. William Bulger was a conscientious student. He studied the Classics. He went into politics. He became president of the Massachusetts Senate. He served for seven years as the president of the University of Massachusetts. That was Billy Bulger.

Whitey Bulger, his brother, had ambitions of a different kind. He rose to become the leader of a ruthless mob gang – an organized crime group that controlled extortion, drug deals, and other illegal activities. He was charged with nineteen murders and fled to avoid arrest. For years, he was on the FBI’s “Ten Most Wanted” list. Now, while he had taken flight, he spoke by phone with his brother Billy, the respectable one, although Billy claimed not to know his whereabouts. William Bulger was called before the Grand Jury. A federal prosecutor pressed him for information on the whereabouts of his fugitive brother, but he refused to help. He claimed he didn’t know.

The prosecutor said this: “So, just to be clear, you felt more loyalty to your brother then you do to the people of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts?” Billy Bulger replied: “I never thought about it that way. But I do have an honest loyalty to my brother, and I care about him ... It’s my hope that I’m never helpful to anyone against him ... I don’t have an obligation to help everyone catch him.”

Now, in the taverns of South Boston, they expressed admiration for Bulger’s loyalty. “Brothers are brothers,” one resident told the Boston Globe. “Are you going to squeal on your family?” Editorial boards, though, were more critical. “Instead of taking the righteous road,” one columnist wrote, “he chose the code of the street.”

Because of the public pressure for this refusal to assist in the search for his brother, William Bulger was forced to resign as president of the University of Massachusetts, though he was never actually charged with obstructing the investigation.

Now, what do we think of this case? Under most circumstances, the right thing to do is to help bring a murder suspect to justice. But, can or should family loyalty override this duty? For those who are suspicious of an ethic of solidarity in loyalty, the story of the Bulger brothers could be a case in point.

There were two other brothers with a similar dilemma. Do you remember reading some years ago about a domestic terrorist in the United States who was dubbed the “Unabomber”? He sent bombs through the mail targeting scientists and other academics, so he came to be called the Unabomber, as in, the “university bomber.” And he published an anti-technology manifesto on the Internet and it was even published by the New York Times and Washington Post because he said if they printed it, he would stop killing.

A forty-six year old social worker living in New York read this manifesto and found it eerily familiar, and realized that this was probably written by his estranged brother, Ted Kaczynski. And so, after much anguish, David, the brother, informed the FBI and led them to his brother, and they arrested the Unabomber. Although David had been given to understand the prosecutors would not seek the death penalty, they did. The prospect of bringing about the death of his brother was an agonizing thought, but in the end, the prosecutors allowed the Unabomber to plead guilty in exchange for a sentence of life in prison without parole.

Still, the act of turning in his brother hung over David Kaczynski for the rest of his life. There was actually a reward for information leading to the arrest of this wanted figure. The brother accepted the one million dollar award, but gave most of it to the families of those killed and injured by his brother, and he apologized on behalf of his family for his brother’s crimes.

Here are two different stories about brothers and about the moral weight of loyalty in solidarity. For Billy Bulger, family loyalty outweighed the duty to bring the criminal to justice. For David Kaczynski, the reverse was true. However you judge the choices they made, it’s hard to read their stories without coming to this conclusion: the dilemmas they faced make sense as moral dilemmas only if you acknowledge that the claims of loyalty in solidarity can weigh in the balance against other moral claims, including even the duty to bring criminals to justice.

Now, what’s the philosophical upshot of this? You might say it bears out the
suspicion of solidarity because it shows that sometimes even standing with one’s brother requires one to violate a universal principle of justice. But, you might also notice that conceiving their dilemmas as moral dilemmas acknowledges, at least, that solidarity has some independent weight – some weight that is independent of the duty to do justice. It’s clear in any case that dilemmas such as these bear out the worry that solidarity is a kind of root- ing for our own side – sticking with our own people, with our own family, even sometimes in the face of acquiescing in injustice. This worry is part of the suspicion of solidarity as a moral ideal.

It’s not necessarily the case, however, that obligations of solidarity point inward. Sometimes, they point outward and give rise to obligations not toward our own people, but toward members of other communities with which our people have a morally burdened history. We can see this if we look around the world and notice the debates, often morally fraught debates, about whether nations should apologize for historic wrongs. Should this generation of Americans, let’s say, publicly apologize; perhaps pay reparations, for the sins committed by its great-grandparents’ generation in the legacy of slavery and segregation? Or, should this generation of Germans continue to feel morally responsible, especially morally responsible in virtue of being Germans, for the crimes perpetrated by their great-grandparents’ and great-grandparents’ genera-tion during the Holocaust?

In Australia, there was a debate about whether to make an official apolo-gy to the aboriginal peoples. John Howard, the Australian prime minister at the time (this was some years ago) rejected an official apology on the following grounds: “I do not believe that the current generation of Australians should formally apologize and accept responsibility for the deeds of an earlier generation.”

A similar argument was made in the U.S. Congress during the debate over reparations for slavery. There was a repub-lican congressman named Henry Hyde who criticized the idea of reparations on these grounds: “I never owned a slave,” he said, “I never oppressed anybody. I don’t know that I should have to pay for someone who did [own slaves] generations before I was born.” What does this have to do with me? They did it! They did it back then generations ago, John Howard and Henry Hyde argued. Underlying this argument is a principle objection to official apologies that is not easy to dismiss. The principle objection rests on the idea that we are responsible only for what we ourselves do, not for the actions of other people or for events beyond our control. According to this view, we aren’t, I am not, answerable for the sins of my parents or my grandparents, or, for that matter, my compatriots. What matters morally is what I have done, what I have willed, what I have chosen.

But, this puts the matter negatively. The principle objection to official apologies carries weight and has a certain moral plausibility because it draws on a powerful and attractive moral idea. We might call this idea the idea of “moral individualism.” It is the idea that this doctrine doesn’t assume that people are selfish. It’s rather a claim about what it means to be free. For the moral indi-vidualist, to be free is to be subject only to obligations that I voluntarily incur. Whatever I owe others, I owe by virtue of some act of consent – a choice or a promise or an agreement, be it tacit or explicit – or in virtue of some principles of justice that I agree to or would have agreed to under some special hypotheti-cal circumstances. You might call this the “voluntarist conception” of moral obligation. All moral obligation is rooted one way or another in an act of will. Whether an individual, actual will, an act of con- sent, or a hypothetical agreement under certain ideal circumstances – and we see this in the social contract tradition running from, in different versions, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Rawls, Habermas … All are part of what I’ve called a vol-untarist picture, a voluntarist account of how moral obligations arise.

This voluntarist picture says that my responsibilities are limited to the ones I take upon myself. This is a liberating, attractive picture. It’s attractive because it assumes that we are, as moral agents, free and independent selves unbound by moral ties, antecedent to choice – not custom or tradition or inherited status, but the free choice of each individual is the source of the only moral obligations that constrain us.

Now, you can see how this vision of freedom leaves little room for collective responsibility or for a duty to bear the moral burden of historic injustices perpe-trated by our predecessors. If I promised my grandfather, let’s say, to pay his debts or to apologize for his sins, that would be one thing. But my duty to carry out the recompense, in this case, would be an ob-ligation founded on consent – I agreed. It would not be an obligation arising from a collective identity extending across genera-tions, which is what makes it a volun-tarist, not a solidaristic, obligation.

Absent some such promise, the moral individualist – or maybe the better term is voluntarist – can make no sense of any responsibility to atone for the sins of my predecessors. Those sins, after all, were theirs, not mine.

So, in order to decide whether the principle objection to collective responsi-bility or to public apologies and reparations for historic injustices has force, we have to choose between the voluntarist account of moral and civic obligation and the solidarist one. And by solidaristic picture, I mean simply the idea that certain obligations may claim us for rea-sons unrelated to a choice or an act of will on our part. That really is what’s at stake philosophically in the suspicion of preju-dice as a matter of moral philosophy, as a moral ideal.

From the standpoint of the solidar-istic picture, the voluntarist account of obligation is too thin. It leaves too much out of account. It can make no sense of the special responsibility we have to one another as fellow citizens. It fails to capture those loyalties and responsibili-ties whose moral force consists partly in the fact that living by them is insepara-ble from understanding ourselves as the particular persons we are, as members of this family or nation or people, as bear-ers of that history. On the solidaristic account, these identities are not just con-tingencies that we should set aside or rise above when deliberating about morality and justice. Instead, they are part of who we are, and so rightly bear on our moral responsibilities.

Now, a great many questions in contemporary politics depend on which of these two pictures, which of these two ethics – the voluntarist or the soli-darist – one finds the most compelling. Debates about the welfare state are one obvious example, so are debates about immigration. Is there a case for limiting immigration or, morally speaking, should people be free to move across national boundaries? The best argument, morally, for limiting immigration is a communal one. As Michael Walzer writes, the ability to regulate the conditions of membership, to set the terms of admission and
exclusion, is “at the core of communal independence.” Otherwise, “there could not be communities of character, historically stable, ongoing associations of men and women with ... some special sense of their common life.”

Now that’s one high-minded argument for limitations on immigration. But, for affluent countries, restrictive immigration policies typically serve to protect privilege. Many citizens of wealthy nations fear that allowing large numbers of immigrants to come would impose a burden on social services and reduce the economic well-being of existing citizens. There’s much debate about whether that’s actually true, whether that effect follows more generous immigrations policies, but that’s a worry.

A stronger argument for limiting immigration that’s often made is to protect the jobs and wage levels of low-skilled workers – those most vulnerable to displacement by an influx of immigrants willing to work for less. But is this an adequate argument? We can’t answer that question without taking a view about the voluntarist against the solidarist ethic. Why should we protect our own most vulnerable workers if it means denying job opportunities to even poorer people from elsewhere?

From the standpoint of helping the least advantaged members of the world community, a case could be made for open immigration, and yet, even people with egalitarian sympathies hesitate to endorse it. Is there a moral basis for this reluctance? Perhaps, but only if you accept that we have a special obligation for the welfare of our fellow citizens by virtue of the common life in history we share. As Walzer writes: “It is only if patriotic sentiment has some moral basis, only if communal cohesion makes for obligations and shared meanings, only if there are members as well as strangers, that state officials would have any reason to worry especially about the welfare of their own people.”

The general point is this: the suspicion of solidarity that flows from an argument of moral philosophy rests on the idea that all obligations that count morally and civically must spring from an act of will of one kind or another. If it is true that obligations of solidarity can point outward as well as inward, then the real objection is not that solidarity is merely prejudice for one’s own. The deeper objection is that solidarity is a violation of freedom – the kind of freedom that underpins the voluntarist account of moral and civic obligation.

The reason, it seems to me, that solidarity is in retreat in the world, the reason that welfare states and the moral legitimacy of the sharing that defines welfare states, is in question, goes to the prominence of the voluntarist picture in the moral and civic culture of our time.

Now, I suggested at the start that trying to identify the source – the moral source – of the suspicion of solidarity would not only enable us to make sense of why solidarity is now in retreat, is on the defensive, as a moral ideal, and also in the world. But, that it also might provide a clue to why solidarity, and not democracy or justice or freedom, was in a way the constitutive question for Krzysztof Michalski, and for the figures in the 1980s, the moral and religious thinkers – Józef Tischner, John Paul II – for whom solidarity was the highest, the most resonant aspiration.

I think what drew them, and this is just a hunch, what drew them to solidarity as an organizing principle, an ideal for moral and civic life, was precisely what makes many of us today suspicious about that ideal – that solidarity, the ethic of solidarity, insists on the possibility that not everything that matters in moral and civic life can be traced to an act of will. That, I think, is why solidarity had a kind of spiritual resonance for these figures – a claim on their moral and civic imagination. Even as the same feature of an ethic of solidarity is a ground of unease and suspicion in a world where increasingly, I think, we hesitate to organize social life on an idea that seems to be in tension with the voluntarist conception of freedom, and that seems to rest on and resonate with the spiritual sensibilities and sources that say that not all our moral and civic ties are the product of our will.

I think, though I can’t say I ever heard him say this, that’s what attracted Krzysztof to these thinkers, his philosophical friends, and what attracted them to solidarity – not democracy, not justice, not freedom – as an organizing ideal. And, I would simply conclude by suggesting that they may have been right.

The text is based on the transcription of Michael Sandel’s lecture on Solidarity, given at the Commemoration Ceremony for Krzysztof Michalski, April 5, 2013, at the Museum of Applied Arts (MAK), Vienna, Austria. Michalski was the founder and Rector of the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna. In May 2013, Michael Sandel has formally been appointed IWM’s new Acting Rector – together with Cornelia Klinger.

We thank IWM and particularly Klaus Nellen for offering this publication to the Visegrad Insight and Res Publica Nowa.

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You are one of Ukraine’s advocates. Why?
Simply because I consider Ukraine a key country in Europe, I know Ukraine’s somewhat unhappy history and think it crucial that the country be given every opportunity at European development.

Do you expect the Association Agreement to be signed?
I am all for it and hope that it will be confirmed at the Vilnius summit.

In your opinion, is Ukraine – with its history, culture, and contemporary politics – part of Central Europe?
No, I don’t think it is. Or maybe the westernmost parts of western Ukraine are part of Central Europe, but certainly not the whole country. Ukraine belongs to Eastern Europe. The difference between Central and Eastern Europe is in their development, which goes back as many as a thousand years. The core issue lies in the development of religions, and whether they stemmed from Constantinople or from Rome. And Ukraine, as well as Russia, was torn from Europe during the Tatar Raid. The Kievan principality had contact with other European nations before the raid but these were severed under Mongol domination. Kiev lost its primacy and the Grand Duke of Moscow was appointed by the Mongols as their sovereign in the region. This completely changed history. Moscow replaced Kiev as the center of Eastern Europe. Ukraine, moreover, did not participate in the Reformation, Renaissance, or the Enlightenment. The revolutions of the 19th century also bypassed Ukraine. For these reasons I would maintain that Ukraine belongs to Eastern Europe – which is not a matter of shame but a result of historical development. Only the westernmost part of Ukraine belongs to Central Europe – those regions that used to be part of Poland and therefore shared Poland’s – and Central Europe’s – fate.

How far does the EU’s transformative power reach? Can it only “cover” the western part of the country or does it reach the east as well?
Transformative power is a different matter. That’s why we initiated the Eastern Partnership project in Prague, to give Eastern European countries the chance to become closer. But this does not mean we should ignore history.

How closely is the Ukrainian experience linked with the Czech or Austrian?
Apart from its shared suffering under the nasty regimes of the 20th century, we had separate histories until the 20th century. With the exception western Ukraine which had been part of Austro-Hungarian Empire...

How many times have you visited Ukraine?
I visited Ukraine several times and would like to get to know the whole country. I know Kiev, and I’ve visited Lviv and Crimea, but that’s not enough to know the country. It is a very interesting, beautiful country with very rich agriculture, but with an unhappy history ... I am simply very interested in Ukraine.

The Visegrad countries will have been in the EU for a decade in 2014. How important was this experience for all of us in Central Europe?
It is certainly very interesting for all of us – and also for Eastern Europe – because our experience shows that countries benefit from taking over the accession values, regulations, and standards. We have had a chance to experience this ourselves.

Do you think President Yanukovich’s policy is directed toward Europe?
I certainly hope so. Some of his steps suggest it, but of course other steps suggest otherwise. One also has to look at the reforms and the process of Yulia Tymoshenko. If the main political opponent is in jail, the situation does not resemble the European order ... If I understand it correctly, she is blamed for certain discrepancies in the natural gas contract. This blame may be legitimate or not, but it certainly is not customary in Europe to incarcerate the main opposition leader.

What is your opinion of the current Ukrainian opposition and its unification attempts?
They must prove themselves capable. The situation is not easy. The whole state apparatus is against them and they have also been fighting with each other for many years, which is unfortunate. But I see several hopeful faces there, so let’s see.

Is the Svoboda Party nationalistic in your view? Or how would you characterize it?
It is nationalistic up to a point, but our nations have all witnessed nationalist parties in state-forming positions in their development. And Ukraine has not yet managed to shake its past ... But time will tell what it can achieve. Nationalism often leads to empty phrases rather
than significant action. And one can only judge political parties by their actions.

**Which features of Central Europe helped the V4 countries make progress and which held us back?**

That’s hard to generalize since Central Europe consists of very different countries. The Czech Republic clearly benefited from a long-term industrial tradition. We have industrial culture – be it the manual workers, foremen, or engineers, they all have a solid base here. Industrial production was therefore restored after 1989; companies could focus on new markets and prove themselves strong. The state administration was in relatively good shape and had at least some experience with democracy from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the first Czechoslovak Republic. Democracy was therefore a matter of course for us because we experienced it in the interwar period. And last but not least, geographical position has a great influence, too. Those who are closer to the so-called Golden Triangle of Europe – formed by Milan, Munich, and Rotterdam – are better off.

**Advocacy for human rights and a unique historical experience have heavily shaped regional identity. How do you view this trend vis-à-vis contemporary economic diplomacy?**

“Economic diplomacy” is a stupid term. It means something different in every country of the world. Economic diplomacy is what it’s called when the Russian Federation supplies oil and gas to different countries at different prices. And it’s economic diplomacy when the U.S. declares an embargo. These are not the means...
that we were given. Our diplomacy must of course care for our economic growth and export potential, but the recent debate on economic diplomacy has become really stupid. Our diplomacy has always had an economic dimension, especially in recent years.

So human rights and business are not in opposition?
Not at all. We have always fiercely advocated for human rights. It became a wonderful tradition that Czech diplomacy has had since 1990, when Jiří Dienstbier was the foreign minister and Václav Havel the president. It’s been our most honorable tradition and that is very important. We should not underestimate it.

Isn’t this changing now?
I don’t think so. I think we have managed to connect the two. But I have never made compromises – I have always tried to defend human rights. At the same time, in looking at our economic results, it is very interesting to see flourishing exports, especially to countries that have objected to our human rights approach, such as China and the Russian Federation. Consistency is key here; one cannot change policy every now and then. Once the world powers learn that such-and-such is the foreign policy of a given country, i.e., to specialize in human rights, they respect it. Switzerland’s neutrality is respected and so is Norway’s focus on mediation. And Czech diplomacy has distinguished itself in its pursuit of human rights. Some may grumble a bit but they respect it.

Hasn’t the consistency of the Czech Republic’s foreign policy been disrupted by Miloš Zeman as the new president?
No, I hope not. Some say that will indeed happen but nothing dramatic has happened yet. So far, our diplomacy has maintained its course. If this were to change it would be a very serious matter.

You are and have always been an affluent man. What brought you to politics?
When you are raised into politics from your childhood, when politics touches you from early on, when you become its object, and when you grow up in such exciting times under the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, when you experience the end of the war and the communist takeover in February 1948 – and when you reflect on all of this, the interest in politics stays with you.

What inspires you in politics today?
Many things. But my life experience probably the most, my childhood – when patriotism was probably the strongest. Then my childhood in the Protectorate, then we had to leave in 1948 and I spent 41 years in exile. Exile paradoxically produces a strong link to one’s homeland. I was also raised by my parents to serve. One’s name and property should not be wasted; they should be used precisely to serve one’s country. I feel obligated to serve my country to this day. And to be very honest, I very much enjoy fighting with certain people in Czech politics.

This means you intend to continue…
But, of course!

You took part in the recent presidential campaign. Is there anything you would like to recommend to Ukrainian politicians who have ambitions to run for president?
No, I wouldn’t recommend anything. You must know your country very well to be a successful politician. When I returned in 1989, I worked for Havel in his presidential office. But I was there merely as a “bureaucrat.” When I left the office I took a vow of silence and did not interfere with politics at all because once you are in exile you lose the feel for what actually goes on in the country. I noticed this among other émigrés, as well. English has a nice phrase for it – to know how the country ticks – something that is hard to define. Only much later, once I felt I could understand the country again, did I enter politics.

And do you think politicians can lose this sense even if they live in a given country but completely lose touch with society?
Well, I have seen many people whose power went to their heads. Power is a very strong drink, way stronger than the wonderful Ukrainian vodka “pertsovka.” It goes to one’s head much more quickly and changes one’s character.

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What came first, understanding or loss?
Roger Scruton, England: An Elegy


And where was this Europe? Where was it located?
Africa extends as far as Naples, Asia to Moscow.
Are the Balkans purely Balkan?
The residue is slowly being taken over by the USA. With the exception of Turulstan
No pasarán?
(Europe would be God’s baseball cap, in which case Hungary would be the... What, indeed? A little extra detail?)

When did Europe finally become so dislocated?
In the previous question?
Or is Europe a zombie?

**About the shallows**

Is it somewhat easier for me (“Me, Me, Me.”) to answer what Europe means?

When I was a child the word truly did mean West Europe. Europe in a geographical sense was the Empire that was protected by barbed wire from a kind of perestroika. As if we were living in a quarantined, infected territory. Suspected carriers of a virus from whom it was best to steer clear. But then again it was us, not them, who threw up the barbed wire. We were being protected from what was on their side. From the virus of freedom, we thought at the time.

The name “Western Europe” seemed rather inaccurate, as it included, for instance, Kefalos in Greece just as it did Elkskilstuna in Sweden. In contrast to that what was left for us from the former Europe was sometimes called Eastern Europe, sometimes Central Europe, even Central and Eastern Europe – a source of amusement for fussy philosophers of history, politicians, and other people with time to waste.

True, we preserved a faint memory of a time when the bit of land on which we lived counted as a borderland of the Empire, though opinions were divided on precisely how long that idyllic state lasted. In any event, each time we went up the Danube to Aquincum, just north of Budapest, I had the feeling that I was on a ship that had run aground and had, for some reason, been left behind, forgotten, for the Hungarians.

I read The Iliad, breathlessly, for the first time when I was twelve, in a wonderfully complex translation by József Kemenes (Kempf), the 1902 edition published by Lampel Co. (F. Wodianer & Sons) Ltd (in the Classic Authors Picture Library series. Raging-mad, purple eyes, and gold-embossed garlands on the cover.

Dignity oozed from every line:
“Who art thou among the mortal male inhabitants, thou worthy?
I have not seen thee hitherto in combat,
Yet now ye outstrip everyone with thy bravery,
Valiantly waiting my long-shadowed spear.”

An Achaean addresses a Trojan thus:
“Menelaus, the son of Atreus, killed Scamandrius
the son of Strophius, a mighty huntsman
and keen lover of the chase.
Artemis herself had taught him how to kill
every kind of wild creature bred in mountain forests.
But neither she nor his famed skill in archery could now save him,
for the spear of Menelaus struck him in the back as he
as fleeing.
It struck him between the shoulders and went right
through his chest.”

**Thus Homer on a slain enemy**

The Kempf translation seems to have vanished into thin air; it is nowhere to be found. I had to quote from Gábor Devecseri’s translation instead.

On the one hand, a detailed description of the dreadful labor of slaughter, on the other, unconditional respect for the dignity of the dead – which is to say, of man. That unconditionality was pooh-poohed by Achilles, and that is why he had to die, not because he was held by the heels when dipped in the Styx, the river of the Underworld. If Europe is that unconditionality, then we lost a very long time ago.

**(sensual illuminati)**

Only my Dad was able to leave our “living socialism” and visit the real Europe beyond, moreover, he was in fact duty-bound to do so. From time to time he was able to sit in some European grandstand and watch a football match so as to be able to write about it for the next day’s edition of People’s Sport. The trips rarely lasted more than two or three days. Europe, from the viewpoint of a four-year-old child, began at Ferihegy airport. And also ended there. What did you bring me? Supposedly that was always my first question. No kiss, not even a hug. He would come out of passport control, arms open wide, face beaming, but what does this mean? He later told me how badly he had taken that. He thought that I wasn’t glad to see him, but only the presents. Though I had no wish to possess any of the things he had brought with him, I simply wanted to see and touch them. I was curious about secret instructions from the fabled Far West; I wanted to see a bit of the unseeable. Touch a relic. Stick a finger in Christ’s wound.

Sometimes we got our hands on a piece of Europe in other ways, as arranged by the unreliable logic of world trade. That translucent, film-thin, handkerchief-sized wrapping in which the finest citrus fruits arrived at the greengrocer’s in

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the Sixties likewise represented Europe. A few select items in every crate were picked out that way. The idylls of Spanish orange harvests and Greek lemon groves were stamped on the paper. Esoteric, gentle handbills. As if they wanted to incite with the whole thing in which we lived.

With some straining of the imagination Eurovision could also be seen as a picture of Europe on our Munkácsy black-and-white TV set. It used to be shown for minutes on end while we waited to switch over to the European Figure Skating Championships. It was like a remote, ever-unapproachable Milky Way; there may have been space ships in the playground but they disguised themselves as climbing frames. Genuine ones were only sent from Baikonur, as I was able to see on grainy shots. I watched as people boarded with a tremble, as if they were scared something would fall to pieces at any moment. (The first and last Hungarian cosmonaut, when he returned from his fantastic voyage – according to one of my friends: “they went up, for fuck’s sake, and they soldered two bits of metal together” – and he was asked what it was like up on high. He replied that it was “a sensual illuminatya.” So much for those of us who were stuck back here on Earth.)

(examined pieces for Budapest’s University of Theatre and Film Arts are produced within the framework of a voluntary scheme under which the actors come free and even the teachers will leap at the chance of smaller roles.

I am playing the part of an aesthete in the pilot for a sitcom, and it so happens that I am choosing wine in a 24-hour grocery store. The role requires me to be self-satisfied, a snob and semi-educated, so it’s well within my grasp.

I am taken to be of no account, my money is lost.

You call this Europe, I squawk, and I ask for the complaints book.

I am humiliated and bundled out of the place.

I tinker around a bit with the dialogue.

Pure Balkans, I fume, as I am kicked out the door.

For our crappier moments just one truly appropriate word has been coined for the grey swamp in which we are obliged to wade.

We called it the Balkans.

Everything non-“European” was (and has remained) “Balkan.” Filthy lavatories, crummy eating joints, ghastly hospital corridors, rude taxi drivers, preposterous ready-to-wear suits, buildings jerry-rigged from shoddy materials, only partially implemented plans, the yelling at railway stations, cigarette butts dropped on the sidewalk. “Balkan” was a magic word by means of which we demarcated ourselves from it, for after all if we had called everything the Balkans that was nonetheless identical with us, then – it is not too hard to analyze – we can declare that it truly has nothing to do with us. We were hostages to a passing moment. That is what we asserted when we called our own reality Balkan.

The Balkans are Europe’s subconscious. At least for people who live elsewhere. The Balkans are everything that Europe is ashamed of and suppresses in itself, all its private, mucky thoughts, its barbaric intentions, its bestiality, its dirty tricks, every evil banality that it has ever committed, is committing, and has yet to commit. That is why Serbia has to be kept apart from the EU as long as possible. Because it is the remnant of the Balkans that is not further divisible, Montenegro is the beach for Russian billionaires. (Thermal baths are to be found in former Karlsbad.) It is still possible to believe that Croatia can be de-Balkanized. Perhaps Albania as well – but never Serbia: it is the very Balkans themselves.

And Europe needs this black sheep.

(as it could be)

A good few years ago several colleagues and I reported on the Frankfurt Book Fair for Hungarian Radio.

It takes hours for one to get out of the “aerodrome,” as it was called.

I may already have started feeling the cold before I left it.

Frankfurt was in practice built from money; you walk on solid money, you are enveloped in soft notes, even the air that you breathe may be made of it. A city where everything is in order, the villas, the hotels, mass transport, communications, the dinners, and the wines. Money is the passport to that order. You get exactly as much as you pay for.

It was a marvelous autumn, the sun was sparkling; I disguised myself as a European on the terrace of the Tower Coffee Bar at the foot of the Eschenheimer Turm. Wearing a brand-new Danish woolen jacket, a soft scarf from Scotland with my feet in a pair of Spanish shoes, I ordered a caffè corretto; it was aromatic, strong, and the Germans really had put a shot of grappa in it.

Despite which God’s own cold nearly chilled me to the bone.

I felt cold throughout the entire trip, excepting maybe twenty minutes.

One night, finding myself unable to sleep, I went on my own for a stroll in the streets. I strolled and felt cold and eventually peckish. There was nothing anywhere until I finally found a small Turkish buffet. I entered. There were two lads busying themselves behind the counter; they looked so alike they might have been twins; they happened to laughing about something. They were watching Arash sing Boro-Boro on a TV monitor fixed to the ceiling. I asked for a doner kebab and a beer. The beer was German and cold, the doner steaming hot and spicy, just as Turkish as it could be in Frankfurt. It was as warm as in Grandma’s kitchen. I looked at the vulgar, garishly colored poster of the Hagia Sophia. I ate the doner sipping the grappa in it.

I tried to square up to the sensation that at last I felt at home alongside that, listening to the laughter of the two lads.

I tried to square up to the sensation that at last I felt at home.
It has been fifty years since Sociology regained its place among the scientific disciplines in Central Europe. It was in 1963 that the Institution of Sociology was established in Hungary. At that time, Societies of Sociology were re-established; research work, publications, and scientific journals were once again initiated in Poland a few years earlier and around that time in Czechoslovakia. No doubt, it was Polish sociology that was the first to be brought back to scientific life after 1953, always remaining a constant driving force in the region. The Czechs, together with their Slovak colleagues, soon witnessed a “sociological explosion,” which drew to a sudden close in 1968. Last but not least, in the context of severe repressions introduced after 1968, their peers in Hungary were eager to catch up with their neighbors.
Even if equally influenced by the suffocating presence of a superpower, i.e. the Soviet Union, which furnished the whole region with a rather tight and uniform schedule, each country still had its own distinctive political, social, and scientific life. All local traditions, ideological debates, and not least personality insights to be decisive factors in their stories, so close and yet so far from each other. As distant as it might have seemed at that time to the older generations, the parallel may still seem fitting to that period of time. This is partly so because sociology, under the tutelage of party-state control and Marxist ideology, was among the ideologically and politically most sensitive disciplines. Moreover, for a decisive period of time, it was not regarded as a tolerable discipline at all.

FROM POTENTIAL MODUS VIVENDI TO ACTUAL MODUS OPERANDI (1945-1951)

In what follows, which is an attempt to reflect on the history of sociology, it is important to note that in the post-war period, particularly after 1948, the ensuing tabula rasa gave the young, the formerly neglected, and marginalized intellectuals with scientific or political ambitions an opportunity to enter the public scene. With primarily left-party dominance in the public arena, many of the intellectuals nurtured serious hopes for a new order – in which sociology, with its expertise in methodology and teaching, and potential for social management, could play a leading role. However, their optimism for a "new beginning" was soon confronted with the rigid policies of the Communist Parties that took over full control of their countries' governments (1947-1948). Following a brief period of restricted democracy and freedom, all the Communist Parties gave up their "tolerant" attitude to any alternative political, social, or intellectual movements. Similarly in each country, the extreme centralization of all powers, accompanied by growing political and ideological control, usually described as the hegemony of Stalinism, must be stressed in describing the history of sociology from institutional and personal perspectives.

Still, in a somewhat alternate interpretation, by challenging grand narratives based on ideological pressure and focusing on the restrictions imposed on intellectuals under the ensuing totalitarian rule, Michael Vorisek argues that the young generation enjoyed a unique moment of extraordinary opportunities. In the so-called Soviet bloc countries, representatives of the young generation, an age cohort born between 1920 and 1930, assumed greater responsibilities (i.e., positions) in various scientific fields, but even more so in the social sciences, philosophy and philology, compared to their peers in Western countries. A new generation suddenly gained access to the academic centers. To be sure, their hopes and ambitions were restricted to forms of institutional careers within a Stalinist framework, especially after 1947-1948, but nonetheless fueled by unique opportunities to rise to top positions. It is noteworthy that the reason was simple: basically no alternative remains open in any of these countries.

According to this analysis, this generation was formed by its shared experience prior to, and still decisive to, the "socio-explosion in the 1960s," which can be characterized as follows. On closer inspection, the specific trait of exclusivity can be detected both in practical and ideological terms. All the institutional and ideological alternatives were erased with the assistance of the new intellectual elite, against ambitions expressed by the older generation to find a modus vivendi in ideological and practical – i.e., institutional – terms. All these changes affected strongly the possibilities and activities of the older generations, continuously stigmatized as "part and parcel of a bourgeois past." Thus, following a bitter defensive struggle and the expulsion of those reluctant to accept the new order, a young elite gained access to ruling positions. As it was said in Poland at the peak of the Stalinist purges, Sociologists should not focus on "the ideological background" of their discipline, as it was only a choice in a box of chocolate.

Marxist social science in the Stalinist interpretation, called histmat, offered the only key to history, universal and exclusivist such as it was. In discussing the relevant literature, Vorisek points to the fact that the unprecedented character of their new science had to be understood in a given political perspective, as a modus operandi. In short, science should rely on its action potential in mobilizing social resources under the hegemony of state-party control. In this sense, it was not only loyalty that was expected from the new ruling elite, but active participation in mobilizing social forces and the youth in particular – first and foremost, against the representatives of the old regime.

Further, in this narrative, the young generation had a common experience soon to be loaded with bad consciousness. The dilemmas in Kwasniewicz, with special emphasis on sociology (as a science closer to social reality than philosophy), are described as the moral dilemma of scientific research and publication. Along with the adaptive strategies by which researchers tried to accommodate themselves to the given conditions they maintained their scientific autonomy even if running counter to the official visions, thus suffering restrictions or an explicit ban on lecturing or publication from authorities.

However, this trait of bad consciousness and the will to correct mistakes would in fact strengthen their "élan vital" in the debates to combat Stalinism after 1956 and the quest for democratization in the early 1960s – all that could not be explained by purely scientific ambitions. On the other hand, it may also explain the sudden extinction of sociology after the invasion of the Soviets and the allies in August 1968. Sociology was simply too closely linked to the generation that started its studies and scientific career shortly before, and especially after the revolution in February 1948.

As a consequence, this generation acquired a special identity by regarding itself as a missionary group for society, with an exclusive position and role in understanding and planning the modernization of its respective societies. Thus, intellectuals were ready to assign themselves an exclusive position over the society with 1960s missionary zeal; paradoxically enough, still preserving features from their positions in the Marxist, or even Stalinist, intelligentsia.

ATTILA PATÓ

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SOCIOLOGY AS “BOURGEOIS PSEUDO-SCIENCE”: REALITY OR MISUNDERSTANDING? (1951-1955)

The Stalinist order and the elite’s isolation were broken down in a brilliant and intensive – though historically short-lived – excursion of intellectual life gradually speeding up after 1956, reaching its peak in the mid-1960s. Both before and after, withdrawn from the normal course of society, they were left alone in their struggle to survive in an academic setting that required them to pursue research, teach, and publish their results, confined by strict limits and a nonsensical language. As for sociology, none of these activities was made possible, especially between 1950 and 1955, as an acknowledged scientific branch. Throughout these countries, in a very short period of time, between 1949 and 1951, Institutions of Sociology were closed or transformed into Marxist-Leninist organizations; with staff members and teachers often dismissed, education gradually ceased and professional societies dissolved.

The reform generation had a privileged position. Although compromised by its participation in the Stalinist era, later it was precisely its eagerness to combat Stalinism that played a formative role in its struggles to establish new institutions. The fight against Stalinism meant redemption of the “original sin” of the young generations. According to Vorisek, this is the main reason that the commonly accepted misunderstanding, that sociology was regarded as a “bourgeois semi-science” under Stalinism – could take hold.

SOCIOLOGY AND THE COMMUNIST PARTIES IN SEARCH OF LEGITIMACY: REFORMS AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES (1955-1963)

The Communist elites, restricted by close dependence on the ruling elites in Moscow, were entrusted to introduce Soviet hegemony after 1945. Later on, in the context of the Khrushchev reforms, a modified strategy came to the fore. Large-scale repressions and imprisonments were no longer enough to secure stability in Central Europe. In the context of changing strategies to precipitate variegated competition with the West, Communist Parties attempted to find international connections. It was therefore also important that some of the marginalized (or non-Marxists (Král, Ossowski) and pre-war Marxists prosecuted under Stalinism (Adamec, Sándor Szalai), all with international connections, acquired rehabilitation. In the case of sociology, the International Sociological Association provided an excellent opportunity to combine scientists’ expectations with the need for the Communist Parties to seek ground for legitimacy by establishing international relations.

In this period of time, Polish sociology seemed to have three major advantages over its peers in Central Europe. First, excellent sociologists from the pre-war generation were very energetic. On the one hand, while restrictions were implemented by Stalinism and sociologists lost their institutional positions, some of its representatives had not been entirely outlawed prior to 1953. Ossowsky was banned from publication for a few years, but some disciples of Znaniecki remained active – such as Jozef Chalasinski, who was a rector at Lodz University, to be followed by Jan Szczepanski (after a period of restrictions).

Second, a new generation was ready to set off, with all its missionary zeal, soon to join the core of Polish sociology, and be first in criticism after 1953. Zygmunt Bauman and Jerzy Wiatr were the first to overcome obstacles in expressing their opinions against Stalinist manners. Bauman and Hochfeld are typical in the sense of Vorisek’s description: the reform generation came to the 1960s with its shared experience within Stalinist institutions. In this sense, Chalasinski was not a real exception either. We may also recall Adam Schaff, whose talent in system-building seemed unquestionable – although he was more reluctant in advocating the reform process.

Third, the international reputation of sociology (based on its pre-war institutions and scientific achievements) made possible that Ossowski gain access to the International Sociological Association, being present at its Constituent Congress held in September 1949, and elected as its Member of Executive Committee (re-elected in 1952 and 1956). His connections and activities made possible not only the revival of sociology in Poland, but assisted the formation of sociology in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, too.

Although two representatives of pre-war sociology in Czechoslovakia, Bláha and Chalupny, were forced into retirement and deceased by 1960, Josef Král and Ludvik Fischer played a relevant role, symbolically and through their connections and advice in editorial and organizational matters, throughout the 1960s. Andrej Sirácky in Bratislava also played a key role in revitalizing sociology in Slovakia, as well as integrating the discipline into Czechoslovak scientific life.

Still, the pre-war tradition did not offer a path that was continued after 1945; it was all but forgotten by the 1960s.

THE BOX OF CHOCOLATE REVISED

The conditions whereby sociology regained its status were also affected by the fact that sociologists played their role on the ideological battlefield, either at the introduction or during the period of overcoming “mistaken” views. To be sure, ways of identifying alternatives, while at the same time legitimizing research in its own scientific right and provoking conflict with authorities, were only made possible during periods of “liberalization.” In practice, this meant that the more possibilities guaranteed and the less punishment meted out, with restrictions and bans imposed to carry out efficient work of any kind, the more “liberal” the officials were deemed.

There seems to be a paradox here: the very places of ideological discourse were exactly the Institutes of Philosophy in each country, which otherwise hosted the most rigid institutional centers of ideological production. To be sure, philosophical articles ab ovo in Stalinism were confined in an ideological straitjacket, but argumentation was simply a matter of profession. In the process of legitimizing sociology as a discipline, sociologists were ready to launch into ideological discourse in defining the precise position of sociology in the perspective of the official Marxist interpretations, often countering each other in fierce debates.

In fact, it was left to practice to decide on the question of legitimacy, while all discourse was abandoned as purely a means for more practical goals. As soon as sociologists succeeded in their goal – namely bringing sociology to academic institutions – all ideological interpretations were basically replaced by debates on theoretical and methodology issues, and debates on relevant social policies, etc. All the ideological discourse was...
This bibliography contains one item by each author active in his or her native land in
the post-war period, before 1968 – possibly the most significant works in sociology.
Hungary is an exception, since the listed authors were already active in the 1960s,
although their relevant works were published a bit later in Hungary.

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countries involved, but it was once again that (post)totalitarian generation that came to realize the very limits of its modernization by reforms. With the crisis of democratization and modernization, the reform generation was to suffer the logical consequences of that inability. Their efforts and contribution to the revitalization of social sciences in Central Europe nonetheless provide ground for the meaningful interpretation of our own past still today.

The history of sociology offers an extremely complex story, interrelated with political and social conditions, not least trapped by the bewildering language of the Stalinist era. Still, it is a story of human effort, of success and failure, and apparently not without lessons concerning our past and present. Let the story of sociology in Central Europe be part of our common history, one that is worth analyzing and remembering.

Here I would like to express my grateful thanks to UP Iván Balog (Dep. of Sociology, University of Szeged), as well to Attila Jankó for their professional consultancy.

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READ MORE ON THIS SUBJECT———

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2. See „The 1960s Czechoslovak sociology as a generational project.” Vorisek (2012), Summary on p.294-299. The specific features of Czech intellectuals, in a comparative reading, can be regarded as partially, still in a relevant sense valid in the other countries involved, too.
Corruption is one of many causes of frustration in Central Europe. It is, however, an unusual experience. It is unambiguously condemned in the West and tolerated in the East. But here it is condemned and thriving, hunted down and explained away, stigmatized and tempting. It is characteristic that, although corruption is generally viewed as being negative, it is often possible to justify the reasons for its existence. The Slovak writer Anton Hykisch defended the persistence of corruption during communism as a form of self-defence in a world with no products or services. I personally have heard arguments against corruption as ethically indefensible – though no attempt is made to rehabilitate corruption; it can be seen as a necessary evil when battling an even worse system. It can be a means to counteract the indifference of the civil service, the callousness of the medical profession and the pedantry of the police. It also provides hope in overcoming bureaucratic barriers, a flawed legal system, and overzealous inspections. It provides the prospect of well-being at a time of general non-being, it can be a source of self-appreciation in a system that holds human dignity in disdain, and it can of course serve as proof of power over the rest. These arguments explain the situation well.

Central Europe is different. Although I dislike the term “bridge,” I cannot shake the feeling that it is only in Central Europe that such an interlacing of values is visible. Furthermore, it provides interesting examples of how society mobilizes itself against this particularly potent form of social cancer. In a situation of difficult therapy, the examples are not invariably effective but they attempt to resist what runs against the system in which people would like to live. And this is not only about those in power but concerns all human interaction. Here are a few of them:

Czech Enterprise

In 2011, the Czech financier Karel Janeček established the Nadační fond Proti korupci (the National Endowment against Corruption). It would seem that it is nothing more than the latest initiative riding the wave of social discontent regarding corruption aimed at the self-promotion of a wealthy person. Although the endowment observes the same principle as all respectable NGOs of not accepting funding from any kind of government agency, there is something exceptional in this initiative. It is a response to someone’s observation that corruption, like a weed, can flourish in any soil and that the Czech Republic’s political life over the last twenty years has brought forth a critical mass of arguments for the need to put a social muzzle on its citizens.

Janeček has joined forces with Karel Randák, a former counter-intelligence agent who specialized in the fight against organized crime. One of the reasons behind Randák’s celebrity was his exposure of politics’ seedier side by revealing Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek’s links to lobbies. The aim of this partnership is to support whistleblowers convinced of the legitimacy of the fight against corruption. The entire initiative is based on the motto, “Don’t be afraid and don’t steal, and don’t steal and don’t be afraid.” This, in its own way, is a social summary of the current role of an everyday politician in Central Europe – a base opportunist who abuses the power bestowed upon him by the nation in every possible way.
In pursuit of the goal of protecting entrepreneurs from the government and politicians, Janeček has chosen to provide financial support to people who take a stand and reveal examples of corrupt practices. He has also stated he would provide them with legal assistance if necessary. In a sense, this is fighting fire with fire. It is, nevertheless, a new, more assertive approach to corruption. The possibility of receiving a million koruna (approximately 166,000 PLN) for revealing a serious example of corruption is of particular interest.

Although the endowment aims to combat bad laws and to promote ethical behavior in society, the focus remains on gathering data on examples of corruption. The current emphasis is placed on issues concerning healthcare and the energy industry. The initiative has no intention of replacing the justice system or the organs responsible for combating corruption. Its aim is to publicize the problems and to ensure that there are adequate resources for those who are willing to stand up to the system. This leads to politicians being made aware that exercising power cannot be a way of life, but must be a public service. As Janeček himself puts it, it is a response to the boundless possibilities that opened up to those in power following the political transformation. In a nutshell, the whole issue amounts to the application of significant fines for giving bribes – the bigger the fish, the better. And although Janeček is under no illusions that the courts and police perform optimally, his philosophy is based on the predictability and responsibility of the state institutions that have legitimacy in a democratic state of law.

POLISH SUPPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE
The fall of the previous system paved the way for necessary social changes. At the same time, corruption quickly found its footing in the new reality and began to dynamically take control of all the commercializing areas of life. It is true that Poland has achieved tangible results in its fight with the scourge of corruption, such as enacting and effectively launching a legal framework, tracking down and punishing the guilty, and the creation of appropriate institutions. Nevertheless, social awareness also played a considerable role in combating the corrosive effects of corruption. Social awareness of corruption’s negative effects grows in line with life experience. However, experience comes at the price of the time it takes to make the destructive influence of corruption apparent in the wider perspective. In the context of this challenge, Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej (the Center for Citizen Education) made a change to its KOSS program (Kształcenie Obywatelskie dla Szkół Samorządowych – Citizen Education in Municipal Schools), which has been in operation since 1995 to introduce lessons for gimnazjum students (age 13-16) geared towards the concept of civil society and ethics in public life. The name of the program itself points to the concept of decentralization and how young people may identify themselves with their immediate surroundings – this is a step that simultaneously limits the role of the government and fortifies the conviction that an impact can be had on the surrounding reality.

Furthermore, the section called “Young people against corruption” supplements knowledge of the role of public institutions, the law, and the principles of operation of the state. This leads to clear engagement in civic activity, to responsibility, and, above all, to social sensitivity. As the authors of the program have themselves observed, “It is not possible to eliminate the breach of the ethics of public life, including corruption, from Polish public life overnight; it is only possible to gradually weaken their impact.” According to data from CEO, in the 2012/2013 school year over a third of schools in Poland taught the subject “Knowledge about Society” on the basis of KOSS, i.e. on the basis of a program developed by the NGO.

HUNGARIAN KNOWLEDGE
Transparent.hu, aka Átlátszó.hu (www.atlatszo.hu) is a Hungarian NGO focusing on investigative journalism. Its role, however, is not concentrated on revealing the hypocrisy of power, but on the active thorn in the flesh of the state and institutions. The initiative has used litigation in the defense of the state and institutions. The act of Átlátszó.hu have noted that the act itself leads to clear engagement in civic activity, to responsibility, and, above all, to social sensitivity. As the authors of the program have themselves observed, “It is not possible to eliminate the breach of the ethics of public life, including corruption, from Polish public life overnight; it is only possible to gradually weaken their impact.” According to data from CEO, in the 2012/2013 school year over a third of schools in Poland taught the subject “Knowledge about Society” on the basis of KOSS, i.e. on the basis of a program developed by the NGO.

KAREL JANEČEK: Don’t be afraid and don’t steal, and don’t steal and don’t be afraid.
closure of public documents to find a way to shed light on the practices that are predominant in government. In practice, Átlátszó.hu has been effective enough to lead the government to launch amendments to the Act on Public Information. The media has called this Lex Átlátszó.

Átlátszó.hu’s success lies in its simplicity. The entire system is in practice based on the co-ordination of appropriate measures with the help of social media and on borrowing instruments that already exist around the world. Social media allow people to be informed and mobilized as to the possibilities of asserting their rights and gaining information, which enables them to understand how the government behaves. Átlátszó.hu protects anonymity and creates a level playing field for the person on the street against the government. The organization uses an inquiry generator (Alavateli) in conjunction with the Access to Information Act to allow the chronological development of correspondence between an institution and an individual in public affairs to be gathered and tracked. At present, the web-page http://kimittud.atlatszo.hu/ was launched on the basis of experiences from other parts of the world. Its aim is to generate inquiries and it is becoming increasingly popular among journalists and politicians.

It is interesting that the social need for such a mechanism is revealed in the ways the actions of Átlátszó.hu are supported. Global Voices online is a large international network for volunteers, and seeks to internationalize information on important social issues that fail to break through into the media due to national languages. In pursuit of this aim, Global Voices online creates a digital community that enables volunteer translators to translate texts together. Using joint writing programs such as PiratePad, it is possible to translate a text quickly with only a small effort for one individual. This in turn helps Átlátszó.hu’s particular issues to be internationalized quickly. In this way the effects of Átlátszó.hu in its fight against corruption are publicized and magnified, but of equal importance is the fact that the translators themselves become part of the movement, since their work draws them in to social problems. The founder of the initiative medium.com, Marietta Le, wrote on the portal, “...what I’m trying to do here is to show people that even one word blinking on the screen, one word that they wrote, can make a difference and it means a lot to atlatszo.hu, and it means a lot to everybody who is fighting corruption in our country.”

SLOVAK PATIENCE

The patience of Slovaks with regard to political corruption was tested when Tom Nicholson revealed the Gorilla scandal connected to the influence that a Czech financial group had on the decision-making process of the Slovak government in 2002-2006, and the subsequent cheating by institutions responsible for state security. This was more the case since leading Slovak politicians were directly implicated in the issue. By defining the scandal as a process of “state takeover,” Nicholson laid bare the mechanisms of the functioning of the state and presented facts to support what people had felt. It was not necessary to wait long for a reaction. Thousands took to the streets to demand the lifting of political immunity for legal liability, a change in the electoral system, and an explanation for what had happened.

Although the prospect of a gray man standing up to the system is not attractive, there have nevertheless been examples of people prepared to take on the task of resisting clear abuse of power. In 2009, Erika Lakatosova, an accountant in the small Ruska municipality near the border with Ukraine, noticed that the mayor, László Lakatos, was making payments with his municipal card that were difficult to justify. An audit launched after a lawsuit was filed for the embezzlement of public funds did indeed reveal the misuse of funds. A statement from the mayor was enough to close the case, however. In February 2010, Ms. Lakatosova was dismissed for “purposefully conducting accounts against his person.” Although the declaration of embezzlement was supported by four councillors, it was only Ms. Lakatosova who was given fifteen minutes to clear her desk. In a moment, she had fallen victim to her own integrity and had to stand alone in her confrontation with a mayor who was re-elected in November 2010. However, the Slovak NGO Fair-Play Alliance has a yearly award called the White Crow (Biela Vrana) for those unique, rare, and special people such as Erika Lakatosova, who tried to fight for honesty and bore the brunt of ungratefulness. In February of last year, the court in Michalovce ruled that Erika Lakatosova’s dismissal was unjust.

The politikaopen.sk project is the next challenge of the Fair-Play Alliance. Its aim is to establish higher standards of transparency and public responsibility among politicians than those laid out in Slovak legislation. The idea is based solely on the soft power of social morality and represents an opportunity to adopt honest and open relations between politicians and citizens by a detailed disclosure of assets, links, and the financial ties of individual politicians. What is crucial is that the people joining the project are registering themselves voluntarily and are themselves responsible for keeping data up-to-date and trustworthy. According to statistics on the project’s page, in the last three terms of Slovakia’s parliament, the majority of politicians have ignored the initiative. Nevertheless, it is possible to observe that the proportion of those registering is growing. In 2010–2012, over 21% of MPs were registered, although this figure currently stands at 16%. If we take into account the fact that this term ends in 2016, it is possible that the result will improve. Only 4% were registered in 2006–2010, so we can see that there is an upward trend. With this project the rules of play are significant and are dependent on the politicians themselves. The founders of the project are honest enough to stress that at best it is only one aspect that people should take into consideration when voting. It is, however, worth noting that by simply being involved in the project, politicians see a red light that constantly makes it clear to them that they should be working for the common good.

When civil society can develop freely, the possibility is created for social sentiment, sensitivity, and the evaluation of reality. Although politicians believe they are able to create reality, the shrewder among them know that they need to track what normal people think and feel. When the government neglects its duty and vocation, people will effortlessly find examples of abuse of power. In a free society, however, normal citizens are able to play the role of counterbalance to the temptations of the trappings of power.

Central Europe is different. A post-communist country needs help in becoming democratic in the same way that a criminal needs to be reformed to re-enter society. An active, critical and constructive social stance may not immediately solve the problem of corruption, but it certainly bolsters the common effort to bring about the common good. /

Translated by Nicholas Furnival

The author is a lecturer of politics and international relations at the Lazarski University in Warsaw.
Abracadabra of Democracy Promotion

Maciej Kuziemski
concluding with Poland at a tiny .08% of GNI. Although the 33% target of 2015 trimmed specifically for new EU members is still in place, it is considered almost impossible to achieve.

In 2011, the combined ODA of Visegrad countries amounted to 900 million US dollars, falling under less than 1/6 of what has been spent by Sweden.² Visegrad countries spend ca. 14 USD per capita on ODA compared to ca. 589 USD expended by Sweden in the same period. One would argue that even nowadays the V4 is not that developed either – think of the rolling back of Hungarian media freedoms or the terrible road infrastructure in Poland. Add the recent financial crisis and the question arises:

THERE’S SO MUCH TO DO IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD?

Depending on who is asked, we would probably hear different answers. Just as our economies and social structures differ, so do the approaches to democracy assistance.³ A veteran diplomat or seasoned politician would reply that it is our moral duty to help – that phrase is echoed in many speeches. Although generosity rarely is the sole driver of political activities, after it is stripped of its grandiloquence, moral duty may mean something ordinary like: “We were helped in the 55th anniversary of a proposal by the World Council of Churches to raise official development assistance (ODA) spending to 1% of donors’ national income. That never happened, although a majority of the members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of OECD generally accepted the challenge. The value has been subsequently lowered and currently the best known target – established by the United Nations – is set at .7% of GNI.¹ As part of the so-called Monterrey Consensus, the European Union – provider of more than half the development assistance worldwide – has agreed to meet the target by 2015. Meanwhile, separate intermediary goals have been adopted and none of the V4 countries has reached them.

Out of .17% GNI projected to be met in 2010, the Czech Republic has been the closest with .13%, followed by Hungary and Slovakia ex aequo at .09%, concluding with Poland at a tiny .08% of GNI. Although the 33% target of 2015 trimmed specifically for new EU members is still in place, it is considered almost impossible to achieve.

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fighting hunger. Remarkably, the Czech Republic reaches the highest level in EU27 in terms of importance of gender equality, while only 15% of Hungarians consider human rights worth focusing on.7

Diverse, as it may seem, the Visegrad Group shares certain qualities that make it a unique entity in the donor landscape. First and foremost, we have recent transition experience and quite a fresh memory of what it means to live in a non-free society. The world has changed much in the last three decades and so did the means of struggle against oppressive regimes, which makes some of our experiences applicable at a level of mindset and empathy rather than practicalities.

Subsequently, as we have switched to being a donor only recently, we understand what it means to be in the position of aid recipient and all that it entails. The intricacies of grant writing are not a secret anymore and some of the V4 countries have a remarkable record in fund absorption and project management. On the other hand, we can easily identify the downsides and shortcomings, like donor-driven aid not suited to local circumstances, incomprehensive grant guidelines, or a lack of long-term planning.

Growing from recent experiences, the V4 thinks that economic growth should be fostered at all times and that trade and finance have a grave impact on developing countries. In this sense, a pragmatic approach can only turn to our competitive advantage.

What unites us most – however – is the hardly measurable trait of boldness and confidence. We know that democracy promotion is political and we are not afraid to admit it. Be it because of lack of business ties with developing countries or the relatively short record of donor practice, we have the guts to call a spade a spade. That could easily become a trademark of Visegrad countries foreign aid – linking development aid to democratic progress, straightforwardness in terms of grant making, or leveraging private sector resources.

Practice turns out not to be a fairy tale though – at the level of declarations, all stakeholders agree on the need for cooperation; yet when it comes to practice, no substantial progress can be noticed and joint efforts in the field of aid are hindered by colliding interests in other areas. Senior donors tackle their own problems with a flagship sense of development aid itself. And there’s a lot to be dubious about after discovering that the link between aid and GNP growth of developing countries cannot be proven.8

Indeed, to deny the sense of aid would mean to question half a century of foreign policy in Western countries. For this reason, an ongoing, never-ending discussion comes under a mild name: aid effectiveness. This magical phrase in the realm of development aid places the user on the side of modernizers who really care in what manner colossal funds are being spent. Recalling the shared V4 viewpoint that it is the most important at this point to strengthen the relations that have already been established, it is a good moment to reflect on and verbalize our own game-changing ideas. /

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*Forum2000 tweets on democracy assistance, Prague, Sept. 15-17th, 2013

### WHILE A ONE-FITS-ALL SOLUTION DOES NOT EXIST, FOUR COMMANDMENTS OF V4 MIGHT COME IN HANDY

1. **TOO SMALL TO FAIL.**
   Get realistic. No matter what happens, the V4 will remain a modest donor. The situation necessitates strategic planning, transparency, and über-efficiency.

2. **DO NOT REINVENT THE WHEEL.**
   Use existing mechanisms and platforms to transmit your message. Don’t duplicate bad habits.

3. **SHARE THE PIE.**
   Discover what you’re good at and focus on it. Search for synergy where possible. Speak out loud on what is important.

4. **CREATE AMBIENCE.**
   Know the context. Be a flexible, early-stage door opener. Pave the way for larger donors.

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3. Cf.: http://www.globalisationanddevelopment.com/2013/03/the-visegrad-4-emerging-development.html
I'm heading HUN-IDA, one of the leading Hungarian NGOs that was contracted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs between 2003-2005 and 2006-2009 as an implementing agency of part of Hungary's bilateral aid. However, HUN-IDA has never been responsible for policy or strategy issues; these are the tasks of our MFA, represented at the operational level by the Department for International Development Cooperation.

Due to our experiences since 2003, the Hungarian ODA is still seeking the best institutional model, the optimal number of partner countries, and the thematic field of cooperation to provide added value for the beneficiary partner.

The extremely limited governmental resources for ODA has pushed the Hungarian government to use all other channels for foreign assistance, such as twinning, TAIEX, and the European Democracy Fund, as well as by providing modest contributions to several international UN agencies and other funds and by supporting NGO initiatives.

In recent years, I can see progress made in the field of formulating ODA law – Members of Parliament have been more and more supportive in this regard. It seems realistic to approve an ODA law in the next few years; however, no fundamental change in the volume of aid is expected. Despite the support of Hungarian society for development aid, there are existing challenges backed by large groups of citizens to be handled beforehand. For these combined reasons, HUN-IDA is less involved in governmental development activities at present, and is instead dealing with training programs arising from direct contacts from abroad.

Due to a possible conflict of interest we have never belonged to any Hungarian NGO platform. Twice since our inception we have supported the MFA in the evaluation process of project proposals. Understandably, such support excludes our participation respective to calls for proposals, yet we consider even membership in a NGO platform as potentially leading to conflict situations. Therefore, we have insisted on entire transparency throughout our time as an MFA contractor. I strongly believe that it was the right decision. During the course of our work, we have never cooperated with other NGOs from Visegrad countries, for reasons more financial than professional.

Legally speaking, under Hungarian law, HUN-IDA is considered a “public benefit nonprofit company” like a majority of Hungarian development NGO’s, however the ruling law for non-profits is Company Law, in which non-profits represent one of the categories and there is no separate classification for civil organizations. Civil Law is present in Hungary and refers to foundations and unions. Such legal entities count as “civil organizations” and can apply for core financing. While the European terminology is similar, the practice is quite different.

I believe that each of the Visegrad countries represents certain qualities that are worth replicating. It is evident that our recent history, which we share largely with the other V4 countries, combined with the wealth of individual solutions, offers a very broad portfolio for knowledge-sharing. For instance, the Hungarian transition to democracy has been marked by success in terms of a multi-party system and elections, dealing with minority issues and church-state relations, as well as the strong exceptional role of the institution of ombudsman. Our incentives are and should be focused on these areas, but my personal opinion is that all Visegrad countries would strongly benefit from strengthening internal cooperation in terms of our trade and business. The revenue would enhance common initiatives and foster creativity. Generosity and responsibility for developing countries will naturally follow.

Ibolya Bárány is a Managing Director of HUN-IDA.

Ibolya Bárány is a Managing Director of HUN-IDA.

Forum 2000 was founded in 1996 as a joint initiative of the late Czech President Václav Havel, Japanese philanthropist Yohei Sasakawa, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel.

Since 1997, Forum 2000 has organized sixteen annual conferences in Prague, Czech Republic. They have attracted a number of prominent thought leaders, Nobel laureates, former and acting politicians, business leaders and other individuals, whose common denominator is experience with bearing responsibility.

Visegrad Insight was a media partner of 17th Forum 2000 conference, held on September 15-17, 2013 in Prague.
I have been involved for years with People in Need (PIN) by combining under one umbrella emergency humanitarian aid in crisis spots, more classical development aid, human rights and democracy promotion, social field work in the Czech Republic, a human rights film festival, and a strong educational department working with schools in the Czech Republic. PIN is an important and characteristic feature of the Czech non-governmental sector in the field of development and democratic assistance and is in many ways unique. The organization has particular strengths: a highly professional organizational and managerial structure; a very good, and often innovative, communication and marketing strategy; and a highly diversified funding base with significant capacity to raise funds from the general public. This has all given PIN a high level of independence, and in a certain way, a strong mandate based on broad support from individual Czech citizens.

In speaking of the Czech Republic and the development aid sector as a whole, I would say that the strength of our foreign assistance programs (ODA) is genuine partnership and strong cooperation between the state and non-state actors. The Czech Foreign Ministry has not treated NGOs with the heavy-handed, superior approach of a donor, but has treated NGOs as real partners with whom they can cooperate on an equal basis. I have found that relationship of mutual trust, regular exchange, and close cooperation beneficial to both sides.

I also consider it positive that the Czech Republic’s official foreign assistance policy has a specific human rights and democracy assistance program line. Central European countries have a history of living under authoritarian governments, a history of domestic struggle for freedom, and a history of transition to democracy (with all the successes and mistakes that occurred along the way). Because of all this, it is appropriate that we purposively, and efficiently engage in the support of democratic forces and human rights defenders in countries where people are still struggling to achieve freedoms and respect for basic human rights.

For years, Czech foreign assistance has been strengthened by the extraordinary role of President Havel. He was always highly supportive of civil society organizations and ready to use his global and domestic reputation to increase the impact of projects run by Czech NGOs. I do not believe that the Czech or Polish transition experience alone has any extraordinary “export value.” We are living today in a world very different from the world in which Solidarnosc or Charta 77 dissidents operated. At any moment when we are sharing our Central European transition-to-democracy experiences, we should be fully aware of this profound difference. Our own experience must therefore be enriched by the serious comparative study of transitional experiences in other countries and should be shared, but we must at the same moment carefully study the history and political dynamic of recipient countries. After twenty years in the field of international assistance I have become very skeptical of “parachuted experts,” who come to share their know-how without doing the basic homework of studying and understanding the countries in which they share their knowledge.

Our “trademark,” however, is the fact that we lived for decades under an authoritarian system; we still have in our collective memory and in our genes the specific sensibility and understanding of what it means to live in a non-free society. Due to that I believe we should primarily focus on and specialize in pro-freedom, pro-democracy, and rights-based foreign assistance.

In looking at certain disadvantages, it must be noted that the volume of cooperation within V4 countries in the field of development and democracy promotion is merely satisfactory. At the level of civil society it is neither systematic nor strategic, it is relatively ad hoc, and partly dependent on personal contact between individuals or more regular cooperation between a few organizations. This is certainly true of cooperation between Czech, Slovak, and Polish organizations working in this field. The intensity of cooperation with Hungarian organizations has always been at a much lower level.
Let me just mention a few examples from events I have been involved in. The Czech, Polish, and Slovakian organizations working in Belarus, Ukraine, and Cuba are in contact. Already in early 1990s, during the war in Bosnia, People in Need and Polish Humanitarian Action were in contact. It was not systematic cooperation, and it was even not needed, but it was a genuine friendship. When we initiated the nomination of Liu Xiaobo for the Nobel Peace Prize from Prague, colleagues from Slovakia joined us by organizing the nomination with their members of parliament. Later on, Polish, Czech, and Slovak NGOs joined forces to nominate Ales Bialiatski for the Nobel Peace Prize. The Czech People in Need and Slovak People in Peril have worked together in many places. The Czech platform of development organizations is in contact with a similar Polish platform. There is a genuine and long-lasting partnership of human rights festivals from Prague, Bratislava, Warsaw, and Budapest.

It seems to me that there has been far less coordination and cooperation among the foreign ministries of the V4 countries when it comes to development and democracy assistance. We should probably be realistic. There are objective reasons for the lack of cooperation. Each country has defined its own foreign policy priorities slightly differently. Often, official foreign assistance programs of the V4 countries cannot fully match each other and work in sync because we have a more left-leaning government in, for example, Slovakia, and a bit more right-leaning in the Czech Republic. In addition to this objective incompatibility, I have also noticed from time to time elements of small rivalries and jealousies among foreign ministry civil servants. In a way, they all are rhetorically in favor of cooperation, but somehow cooperation never fully materializes because there is always the tendency for someone to dominate. Cooperation is about finding genuine common ground, not just looking for others to join and support my initiatives.

To conclude, what is lacking primarily is genuine and systematic cooperation between V4 foreign ministries in the field of development and democracy assistance. As a consequence, space for cooperation among V4 NGOs working in the same areas is negatively influenced, as well. Polish, Czech, Slovakian, and Hungarian NGOs are partly dependent on the assistance priorities of their foreign ministries because they get partial funding from their respective MFA. But it seems to me that even among V4 civil society organizations, there has never been enough of a strong feeling that there is a need for strategic cooperation. I would personally like to see more cooperation, especially if it is undertaken based on strategic planning and systematic cooperation.

A practical idea? For example, I have always been frustrated by how low the level of influence that NGOs from Central Europe and Baltic states have in Brussels is compared to other international or western European-based organizations with lobby offices in the EU capital. I believe that we need to join forces and develop the modus operandi to increase our presence, to hook us into information channels, and to enter the circle of organizations that are consulted by EU institutions.

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**TOMICAH TILLEMAN**

Senior Advisor for Civil Society and Emerging Democracies, U.S. Department of State

**What may be expected from emerging donors by already established donors?**

We think that the trend of emerging donors represents one of the most important developments in the entire field of democracy support, and it has potential in terms of the expertise that these countries bring to the table to really transform our democracy support programs. We’ve been trying to facilitate this trend through the number of different mechanisms – we’ve created the Emerging Donors Challenge Fund and we’ve seen a number of very successful projects emerged from that framework. The U.S. and Poland – within the context of the Community of Democracies – co-chaired the Moldova Task Force, which has led to a variety of very important projects. Poland has taken a critical leadership role in issues of local governance, an area in which it has significant expertise, and most recently we’ve announced our intentions to create new co-financing mechanism within CoD, which will allow us to carry out projects on a co-funded basis with other partners in the Governing Council. The key countries, such as the V4, most of whom are on the Governing Council, some of whom are not, and operate on a global basis within the context of CoD working groups and task forces. Again, with this trend, we think it’s very significant, we embrace it, and we’re doing what we can to support its development period.

**Where is the V4 community lacking in ability and what can we do better?**

I think it would be very useful for the countries within V4 to examine their own experiences, their own transitions,
and determine their individual areas of comparative advantage. For example, as I mentioned, Poland has deep experience in local governance – this was an aspect of Poland’s transition that was very well executed and has born long term benefits. There are many countries interested in emulating that model and frankly not many other countries with the expertise in the topic. Similarly, both Poland and the Czech Republic have very significant experience when it comes to the topic of civil society development. There’s a strong tradition in both of those nations, some civil society organizations that are very active in regional democracy support, and the opportunity to tap into the very important reservoir of knowledge and expertise. There are other nations that have experience and expertise in other areas, we’re working very closely with Slovakia on migration issues; Slovakia is playing a key role in migration on the Moldova Task Force. So these are just a few different examples that we can point to, but I think that process of specialization is going to be crucial to the long term success of the democracy support efforts within these countries.

How can we trigger private involvement or public-private partnerships in the V4? We are engaged in a global effort to facilitate the development of domestic philanthropy. At the State Department, we recently launched what we call a Global Philanthropy Working Group, which is a consortium of leading foundations from the U.S. who come together with us to address key regulatory issues related to philanthropy in different contexts around the world. There are many countries that have strong traditions of private engagement and partnership on these issues and others in which we need to build infrastructure before that point can reached.

It has to do with whether the tax code is conducive to contributions to efforts such as these, and part of it is having to ensure that there are other mechanisms in place to encourage giving. We consider it a very important ecosystem to develop in order to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of civil society organizations that engage in these spaces. Ultimately it’s neither desirable nor sustainable to have the international community and long-time democracies’ funders doing all the work; we have to develop indigenous sources of support.

I think that all the countries in the V4 have a certain opportunity and responsibility when it comes to democracy support. The opportunity is that you know things that U.S. and Western democracies do not know, because you’ve lived through this process and in many instances you will be much more credible messengers and provide a more relevant perspective than countries that have been democracies for many generations. The flip side of that is that particularly because of the size of most V4 countries, assistance needs to be very well coordinated, and needs to be well thought out and needs to take advantage of the newest tools and technologies if it wants to have a serious impact. Because the danger is that if you’re just doing very small projects that are not coordinated and are not taking place within the context of the broader multilateral effort like the CoD, you are never going to have real traction and you’ll end up spending money, but you won’t get any serious results.

I think, quite frankly, there are examples of this that we’ve witnessed already. It’s crucial that this process evolves to ensure that it is situated within the context of a comprehensive effort that won’t have just individual countries simply going off on their own, but encourages them to work together to pursue an area of comparative advantage and to develop a comprehensive program of assistance that is complementary to – rather than competitive with – the efforts of their neighbors.

Who should coordinate that?
There are many different alternatives and not every option would be right in every situation. We’ve worked a great deal with CoD to develop a series of platforms for multilateral expertise sharing in particular. CoD is not and never will be an account for large-scale development aid, but it is a very important framework for the sharing of expertise, which I would highlight. Obviously, the EU will be able to do some of this, as will the UNDP.

It’s going to be critical not to pursue projects in isolation from those mechanisms and to the extent there’s a democracy work that is divorced from rather multilateral efforts, I think it’s likely that there will be a ceiling on its effectiveness.

What is the next big thing?
Again, for the last two years we have seen CoD emerging as a groundbreaking mechanism or using the CoD as a framework for mechanisms like LEND network, but those are the types of tools that fuse technology, civil society, multilateral support and the experience of countries that have been through transitions that have the potential to really recapture the landscape of democracy assistance, and we want to see more of them.

REFERENCES
1. Hungary and Poland are in GC of CoD
2. Leaders Engaged in New Democracies Initiative by United States and Estonia to support a groundbreaking new effort to support leaders in emerging democracies
The truly unifying experience of the Visegrad Group is the democratic transition period. This is also how the V4 is perceived in the world. How do you see that?

Visegrad countries share a common history and common experience, especially the most recent experience of communism, and more than half a century of a foreign yoke in the twentieth century. I think today they also have common values, which is what they have in common the most. Surely these values are based on the way that they each passed through the last twenty years. It is a common experience of the collapse of communism, the common experience of building democratic institutions, free markets and a return to Europe, to European institutions. Not surprisingly, the Visegrad countries are also trying to cooperate in sharing this experience with other partners. Each of the Visegrad countries separately, as part of its development assistance, is supporting such democratization or transformational projects. Recently, attempts to coordinate this cooperation have become more visible and vocal. The fact that the Solidarity Fund PL consult their actions, or meet with the Visegrad Fund, that we meet with Czech partners – unfortunately we do not have such contacts with Hungarian partners yet, but I hope that we will soon – proves this. I am glad that some of the projects supported by our foundation are also supported by the Visegrad Fund. In addition, the exchange of information, consultations, and recommendations – I think this is just the beginning of such cooperation, which should be developed further.

And what about the Visegrad countries, about these emerging donors, is different from our experienced partners from Western countries?

Surely there are external attributes – we have less money, especially for these democratizing-transitional activities. Our budgets are still not comparable to the budgets of the U.S., or even some European countries. On the other hand, we do not have problems openly characterizing democratizing activities as such. We do not hide it under the euphemism of “empowering people” or “good governance,” we just say outright that it is democracy itself, that we want to share the experience. I think that especially for partners in non-democratic countries, for whom these values are important, it is very important to be open about it.

The third thing – our experience of transformation is quite fresh. We have a good memory of what happened in the 1990s in Poland. I think that thanks to this we are more credible on certain issues, because we can honestly say not only what we did, but also what we did wrong. Or just indicate the moments, places, or areas are the most risky, where you need to be careful. We are not theorists of democracy, or the construction of the free market – we are practitioners who have almost finished their work at it. I think in some respects we are still improving our system – because this transformation process is not closed; it is a process that takes decades, generations. We are somewhere in the crucial stage, but we are still on the road.

And what are Poles good at? What can be our trademark in democratization activities?

We certainly proved at the start of the nineties that despite the “brands” of romantics, rebels, anarchists, we are able to carry out one of the best-negotiated transitions, I think, in the world. Without bloodshed, in which both sides kept their word and in a sense became the beneficiaries of this process, but in a good way. I think this is surprising for many of our partners, because we were far more obviously known in Europe as the great soldiers of a lost cause, rather than those who are able to think and act pragmatically, reasonably, and coolly.

Another thing that is evident in contact with our partners in Tunisia and other North African countries – it is not just the experience of building democratic institutions and economic reform that is important, but how we went through a period of historic reckoning, something called the “justice of the transformation,” or “transition period.” I also think that there are few countries in the world that can share this experience and surely Poland is one of them. I’m not saying that everything we did in this area was done
with business is often considered, and activities in new media. What else?

These are actually the new trends. When it comes to working with business, in Poland – at least in our actions – this is still in its infancy. When it comes to new media, then yes – we are involved in it, and here it is not just about social media for communication, but also all kinds of electronic tools, such as e-learning platforms, and projects that involve contact with ordinary citizens through the Internet. We have the project Fix Kairouan in Tunisia, which is based on residents of a relatively small town being given an online tool to alert local authorities of necessary town repairs and improvements. This tool paradoxically works great in Tunisia and now we are working to transplant it to Tajik ground, and to other countries, which according to general opinion are not the most developed, or do not have good Internet coverage. It turns out that in specific local conditions, it can function. There are areas where this type of tool is extremely effective.

I think the trademark of Polish development aid – especially in the area of democratization – is the involvement of the non-governmental sector. NGOs are a very important partner for the International Solidarity Fund, and, together with their local partners, they bring these programs into effect. This is the difference in the choice of our model. Poland hasn’t got a development aid agency that would deal with the implementation of this type of project. We are really a very modest structure, whose task is mainly re-granting to NGOs, precisely so that assistance is given by people who feel the local situation best, who are close to local partners, who themselves have the fresh experience of creating the NGO sector in our country – after all this only happened in the 1990s. It seems to me that this is a great added value to what we do, not only to serve up content – which is probably similar to that of other partnerships – but also the issue of partnership and methodology, even in creating an environment of non-governmental organizations and civil society activists in countries that interest us. /

Translated by Lula Męcińska

KARLA WURSTEROVÁ

Prior to joining the Visegrad Fund you headed the Department of Development and Humanitarian Aid at the Ministry of the Slovak MFA. What would you consider the major strength of Slovak Aid and its specialty? Why? What is lacking?

The Slovak development agenda has become an effective instrument and an integral part of the foreign policy of the Slovak Republic in the last ten years (following accession to the EU). The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic (MFEA SR) has managed to build an institutional, legal, and strategic framework of development assistance. However, the current mechanism of providing development assistance continues to require systemic changes, mainly in terms of increasing efficiency, transparency, and capacity building. One of the major strengths of Slovak Aid are

the long-term development activities of Slovak NGOs and entities in South Sudan and Kenya in the areas of healthcare and education, which have been rated positively by the European Commission.

Slovak Aid also achieved visible results in the countries of the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership of the EU. A successful Slovak project, the National Convention on the European Union, was implemented in several countries of these two regions. The main objective of the project is to transfer know-how and lessons learned from the transformation period at a very practical level. In 2012, the specific program “Centre for Experience Transfer in Integration and Reform” (CETIR) was introduced with the aim of transferring the Slovak transformation and integration experience to partner countries. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it is man-
aged and implemented directly by the Slovak MFA.

In recent years some specific programs and instruments were introduced to make Slovak Aid more effective and visible by involving experts, as well the public. Slovak Aid therefore pays special attention to young people. In 2012, The Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a new program of sending volunteers to developing countries. The main aim of this program is to build the capacities of Slovak volunteers, mainly young people, as well as obtain direct experience from developing countries, in the form of volunteer work.

Given the challenges, systematic work with professionals and the general public is needed to achieve better understanding of Slovak development activities and national solidarity. To achieve more coherent development assistance, a more comprehensive donor cooperation is needed. Slovak Aid should therefore support the participation of Slovak entities in public calls for proposals of the EU and international financial institutions.

The Visegrad Fund itself has been playing an increasingly active role outside of the V4, in part in terms of good governance and democracy assistance projects. Do you see this as a trend that should continue to develop? Is the Visegrad Fund planning to expand its operations to other transitional/developing countries in addition to the Balkans/EaP in the near future?

The Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans have both become very important and visible programs of the IVF, which has attracted the attention of other big donors. Last year, an agreement on cooperation between the IVF and the Dutch MFA in the EaP region was signed (for the period July 2012–June 2013). Based on the favorable experience the Netherlands had in working with IVF, the Dutch MFA decided to continue this cooperation. In addition, IVF is conducting advanced negotiations on Swedish government contributions to the V4EaP program. Two IVF projects were supported by the Emerging Donors Challenge Fund of the U.S.

There is always the potential for introducing new programs, which must be well prepared and approved by all the countries of the Visegrad Group. The introduction of new programs also requires adequate financial coverage and capacities for their successful implementation.

Three out of four Visegrad countries have strong development aid traditions. How to spark an interest in that field in Hungary? What would be Hungarian strengths/ experiences that you would consider exceptional and worth replicating?

Hungary, like other countries of the V4, has its ODA policy, implemented through projects, contributions for multilateral development cooperation or by providing scholarships for students from developing countries. Of course, it is entitled to question how much of the total ODA budget is given to the bilateral ODA and in which form. Hungary, like other V4 countries, has precious know-how and useful lessons it has gleaned from the transformation period, which can serve as an added value for other countries in transition.

The entire sector is falling short in terms of communication and cooperation between each of the V4 countries. Would you consider it an asset to introduce a mechanism of consultation on intergovernmental and ‘internongovernmental’ levels? If yes/no, why? If such a body is being planned, how could it be structured and what would its role be precisely?

There is already some positive development. In recent years it has become customary to organize V4 expert meetings on development cooperation by the presidency countries. Moreover, during the presidency of the Slovak Republic, the first V4 project in Moldova was implemented. There is always room to improve communication and cooperation between each and all of the V4 countries. IVF has supported several projects that focus on coordination of development and humanitarian activities of NGOs and entities from the V4. I greatly appreciate such creative initiatives coming directly from the implementers of concrete projects and activities in the field of development cooperation and humanitarian aid.
The V4 countries have amassed a large body of experience while transforming their politics from one-party states to democracies and their economies from planned systems to market economies. While clearly there is no single solution to the myriad of challenges which have arisen during the transition process, many of the best practices that have emerged may be transferable to other countries still coping with similar challenges. All V4 countries have made the transfer of this experience an integral part of their international development policies, especially towards the Eastern Neighbourhood of the EU.

The EU is putting increasing emphasis on promoting democratic governance in all its partners, but there is greater focus on the Neighbourhood. Having stable, democratic, well-governed and prosperous countries close by is a vital security interest for the EU, so it is no surprise that the community has made issues like “strengthening the stability and effectiveness of institutions guaranteeing democracy and the rule of law,” “ensuring respect for the freedom of the media and freedom of expression” or improving the investment climate, “through predictable legislation and by the fight against corruption” priority areas of action in relation to neighboring countries.

Does the EU make use of the V4 transition experience to enrich this policy? Clearly, the EU puts rhetorical emphasis on the transition experience, as evidenced by point 33 in the European Consensus on Development, the creation of the European Transition Compendium (ETC), and the 2013 Council Conclusions on Supporting Transition Societies. But how does this play out in practice?

### EU Assistance for the Promotion of Democratic Governance in the Eastern Partners, 2007-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTNER COUNTRY</th>
<th>TOTAL EU ASSISTANCE FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE</th>
<th>OF WHICH: IMPLEMENTED BY ACTORS FROM THE V4 COUNTRIES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>36 304 226 (Euro)</td>
<td>1 099 667 (Euro)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>28 160 977 (Euro)</td>
<td>0 (Euro)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>19 242 011 (Euro)</td>
<td>469 354 (Euro)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>51 669 013 (Euro)</td>
<td>3 324 750 (Euro)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>37 641 556 (Euro)</td>
<td>0 (Euro)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>192 866 628 (Euro)</td>
<td>4 401 403 (Euro)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe regional</td>
<td>98 688 767 (Euro)</td>
<td>835 856 (Euro)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>464 573 178 (Euro)</strong></td>
<td><strong>10 131 030 (Euro)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: based on the European Commission’s grant and contract beneficiaries’ database

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**VISEGRAD ABROAD DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE**

**V4 Transition Experience**

*An Added Value for EU Democracy Promotion?*

**SIMON LIGHTFOOT – BALÁZS SZENT-IVÁNYI**

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**EU ASSISTANCE FOR THE PROMOTION OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN THE EASTERN PARTNERS, 2007-2010**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>POLAN D</th>
<th>CZECH REP.</th>
<th>HUNGARY</th>
<th>SLOVAKIA</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>44.99</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>158.3</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>32.13</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<td>91.12</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>175.22</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>158.3</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>125.3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>378.51</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>108.92</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>194.1</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>378.51</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>244.8</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>216.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>123.86</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>250.4</td>
<td>0.12</td>
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<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>158.3</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>129.3</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
</tr>
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</table>

One way of looking at this is how much the reform priorities of the EU in the Neighbours are aligned with the transition experience the V4 countries have to offer. If we look at the ETC, which is a database of the new member state transition experience, and the EU’s reform priorities, as embodied in documents like Neighbourhood policy action plans, or the association agreement with the Ukraine, there seems to be strong alignment full stop. Based on this, at the project level, state and non-state actors in the V4 countries do seem to have the specific expertise that is needed for democratic governance reforms among the Eastern Neighbours. There is, however, a clear downside. When it comes to the actual implementation of EU-financed democratic governance projects thus far, the participation of actors from the V4 countries is rather low. Between 2007 and 2010, of 649 EU financed projects, which included the aim of democracy promotion in the Eastern Neighbours, only 16 were implemented by actors from the V4. If the EU truly thinks the V4 transition experience is valuable, stronger efforts should be made to include these countries in project implementation. V4 governments must also do their share in increasing the capacities of national actors to compete for the EU’s international development funds. If the transition experience is truly a comparative advantage of the V4 donors, then it should figure highly in any public debate legitimizing the future direction of V4 development aid.

The research for this article was supported by a Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowships for career development (IEF). Simon Lightfoot is a Senior Lecturer in European Politics at Leeds University. Balázs Szent-Ivány is an assistant researcher at the Department of World Economy at Corvinus University of Budapest.
Throughout its history, Central Europe has always been a bone of contention and a source of conflict threatening Europe as a whole. In this regard, the twentieth century brought not only the greatest carnage and destruction in the region’s history – it also brought a new challenge. It was this shared bitter experience that inspired visionaries such as Václav Havel and Lech Walesa to found the Visegrad Group. The project was intended to promote contacts and the cooperation of civil society throughout Central Europe, to do away with existing animosities, and to prevent future conflicts. It also aimed to promote political cooperation between three, later four, countries on the road to European and transatlantic structures. Contrary to the expectations of many, the successful accomplishment of these goals, especially admission to the European Union, did not bring the Visegrad cooperation to an end – rather, it was a milestone for the Visegrad Group, opening a new chapter of Visegrad teamwork.

The fifteen years following the fall of the Iron Curtain were a unique experience for the Visegrad countries and their politicians. They learned to look for shared interests and to tone down their national ambitions even in situations when emotions would tend to prevail in relations between neighbors. They learned how to disagree without breaking up their relationship and how to work together in areas of common interest. Despite this very important progress, some European politicians and journalists still tended to regard the Visegrad Group as a sort of a “political debate club” without any major strategic significance. Today, they note with surprise that the V4, thanks to its cohesion and lack of bureaucracy, has become an efficient and innovative group

Will Visegrad cooperation become even more efficient and attractive? The group should consistently focus on the chief topics reflecting Visegrad consensus and develop cooperation with partners in all areas of mutual benefit. What challenges lie ahead in the context of the Hungarian presidency of the group?
and, as such, an attractive partner for a number of countries inside but also outside the European Union, where it often acts jointly to promote its shared interests.

The last two presidencies, Czech and Polish, have brought a change in the content of cooperation and the way the Visegrad Group is perceived. The Hungarian presidency promises to continue this trend. It seems to be aiming even higher than the previous Polish presidency, but its goals can hardly be accomplished within one presidency period.

The Hungarian presidency seems to have a good approach to cooperation on European affairs, limiting it to coordination in advance of EU meetings, the multi-annual financial framework and EU enlargement: i.e., the fields in which Visegrad has always been able to cooperate.

Joint discussions on national positions and their possible coordination in advance of council meetings have already become a standard. The main challenge is therefore the multi-annual financial framework and identification of additional fields of possible cooperation. By agreeing on at least one medium-term project jointly financed from EU funds, Central European countries would take their cooperation to a qualitatively higher level and give it a new impetus. One possibility would be to establish cluster cooperation in one of the progressive fields supported under the Europe 2020 strategy.

EU accession has become the symbol of success for Visegrad cooperation. It is therefore understandable that the enlargement of the Union is the Hungarian presidency’s priority. From Hungary's viewpoint, it also seems logical that activities in the Western Balkans should be higher on the list than the Eastern Partnership, despite the fact that Central European cooperation in Eastern Europe involves many more projects. Visegrad will continue to support the EU accession efforts of the Western Balkan countries and bring them closer together, ideally through regional cooperation built upon the Visegrad model, under the International Visegrad Fund.

After successful ad hoc cooperation with Slovenia, the question now at hand is the V4 cooperation with Croatia, possibly also with Austria, and namely with Turkey, an important strategic partner of V4 also in the Eastern Partnership countries. It is therefore a very positive step that Austria and Turkey have been invited to the V4 ministerial meeting in autumn.

In developing cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries, Visegrad can benefit from its knowledge of the local conditions and from the shared historical experience with 20th century totalitarian regimes. Another great advantage is the non-bureaucratic nature of the International Visegrad Fund (though the specific local conditions will have to be taken into account), as well as the high quality of projects implemented by NGOs from Visegrad countries. Financing seems to be one of the few limiting factors for the development of project cooperation in the region.

In this respect, the Hungarian presidency correctly stresses the need to find partners who will follow the example of the U.S. and the Netherlands with regard to project funding, and to seek to involve European partners by inviting them to V4+ EaP sectoral meetings.

One of the unquestionable successes of recent years, especially in the last year, was cooperation in the V4+ format. In addition to long-term political and project cooperation with Japan and occasional consultations on selected topics with the Baltic countries and Slovenia, the Visegrad Group has established a promising partnership with the U.S. and developed projects with Taiwan. Although this type of cooperation is one of the V4 program priorities, the group should consider whether it really should take on more of these activities. Visegrad would hardly have the capacity to translate into reality all of the Hungarian presidency’s ambitions in this area. With regard to the long-term European, international, and sectoral priorities, the V4 should, in addition to the existing partnerships, pay more attention to cooperation with Germany, France, Austria, and Turkey.

As has become a tradition for V4 presidencies, the Hungarian presidency presents a truly exhaustive list of topics and activities. Upon closer examination, these can be roughly divided into the following categories: (a) description of the current situation; (b) consultations and exchange of views; (c) organization of meetings and conferences; (d) development of joint positions; and (e) description of specific practical goals. In this respect, the Hungarian presidency’s approach is also very active – in particular, the number of meetings seems to be exceptionally high.

However, attention should be paid especially to specific goals in the main fields such as the development of military cooperation (cooperation within NATO as well as joint capacity building) and energy cooperation projects (LNG, common gas market, electricity overflows).

The Hungarian presidency is also paying special attention to transport infrastructure. There is no doubt that traffic connections between the Visegrad countries are a real problem, but the presidency program does not seem to indicate whether there is any consensus between the Visegrad countries or any specific plan to improve the situation. Similarly, the education chapter, though containing a long list of educational priorities and a number of good suggestions could, for example, address the issue of mutual recognition of university degrees or joint Visegrad Master’s degree study programs. But these are only a few details in a generally very well-prepared program.

If Visegrad cooperation continues to develop as outlined in the Hungarian presidency’s program, it will certainly become even more efficient and attractive. However, the group should consistently focus on the chief topics reflecting Visegrad consensus and develop cooperation with partners in all areas of mutual benefit.

Keeping both feet on the ground and avoiding being carried away by unrealistic ambitions should be one of the guiding principles for the development of Visegrad cooperation in the future. We should also bear in mind the intention of the group’s founders, who cherished the idea of cooperation between the civil societies of our countries, enhancing the internal cohesion of the region. In this respect, we should also focus on the young generation and develop projects improving the knowledge of our cultures and Central European history. There are still too many national stereotypes and passions that provide breeding ground for nationalism and animosities.

Visegrad cooperation, with its numerous large and small aims, represents a strong potential for enlarging the zone of stability and prosperity in Europe. The new Visegrad chapter has promising prospects, and Visegrad’s hopes are now with the Hungarian presidency.

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Leadership of the EU?
NOT YET

A decade ago, the Visegrad Group accomplished its mission by securing synchronized entry for its members to the European Union, or so it seemed for a moment at least. But then Paris burst that bubble when it cautioned the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary to hold their breath until they had become real members. In the tense run-up to the Iraq War, President Chirac made clear an unfortunate truth: formal entry to the EU is not necessarily the same as full membership: not only were the four countries still not included in the core policies of the EU – notably the Schengen area and single currency – but they were expected to sit quietly and learn from the old guard.

In the years since the 2004 accession, the Visegrad framework has retained something of its founding rationale. The V4 have continued to fight for full EU membership, sensitive to any sign that they are being excluded from the core of European integration. They scored a notable hit with their subsequent accession to the Schengen passport-free travel area, and have worked together to prevent their exclusion from the emerging Eurozone. A greater sense of ambition is also becoming apparent. The V4’s joint political agenda has shifted from simply blunting the edges of a European agenda defined in Brussels, Berlin, and Paris to helping define it.

The change has been swift. In 2009, at the outset of the Eurozone crisis, V4 leaders were content merely to meet ahead of European summits, coordinating their positions with regard to the set agenda. In the past year or so, however, they have upped the stakes. The Visegrad states are exploring areas where they might be able to set agenda and influence European affairs in a more pre-emptive manner. They have also expanded the range of their activities beyond those policy areas, such as relations with Russia, where the EU expects a degree of V4 expertise, but for reasons of geography and history, the V4 struggle to forge a consensus. They are now focusing on the aspects of EU policy that bother them most, from the Union’s institutional architecture to defense.

What better way for the V4 to celebrate a decade in the EU, therefore, than by displacing France and forging a leading role in tandem with Germany? In a delightfully subversive essay, the European Council of Foreign Relations suggested last year that Poland was already replacing France in Germany’s affections: the Franco-German motor was stalling and Poland was stepping in to fill the vacuum.1 Of course, the essay was more a polemic celebrating Poland’s political rise than a serious manifesto for Polish-German leadership in the EU. But now commentators are asking whether the V4 might not fill the role. Collectively, the V4 carry considerable voting weight in the EU, as well as eco-

Illustration by Jan Bajtlik. The author is a Polish illustrator, a member of the Polish Association of Applied Graphics Artists (STGU). He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 2013.
onomic potential and strong intellectual heritage.

So what’s not to love about the idea of V4-German tandem leadership? Well, three small things.

First, this new partnership is not something that the EU as a whole would accept. The Franco-German engine may enjoy a reputation as the driving force of EU integration, but it is essentially a necessary evil, one justified by the need to neutralize Germany’s capacity for domination in Europe and France’s continued delusions of grandeur. If France drops out, therefore, other member states will be in no hurry to replace it: there is as little appetite for an eastward-facing EU as there is for one fixated on the Mediterranean, and there is the same intolerance for the idea of a Central European avant-garde as there is for a French-style Carolingian one. Other members would rather see a V4 that adds to the subculture of regional cooperation (Benelux, Baltic, Nordic) or bridges south/east tensions within the EU: over a European neighborhood policy, for example. This would create a stronger EU around the German hegemon.

Second, co-leadership with the V4 is not actually something that Germany wants. Certainly, there are considerable tensions between Paris and Berlin. And these are leading to a broader north/south split within the EU, with Spaniards and Italians complaining that Berlin is laying waste to their economies in order to exert pressure on France. The fact that Germany is not pressuring France directly, despite the latter’s dreadful fiscal flatulence, points to its strong attachment to the relationship. There is indeed a strong belief in Berlin that the very purpose of the relationship is to be difficult: by overcoming bilateral tensions, the pair will solve broader splits within the EU, be these between north and south or left and right.

More than this, what troubles German policymakers today is the fact that France is not strong enough to fight for its corner. They have watched with dismay as Paris undertakes risky international action in Mali and Syria and apparently uses political bravado as a means to break even in its relationship with Germany. In response, Berlin is now focused on giving artificial life support to the tandem and to Paris, trying to pretend that the French are in a position to behave as mature political partners. This makes the Merkel government intolerant of any attempts by other states to make mischief with the Franco-German motor – slapping down the Cameron government when it tries to play this game. If anything, then, Berlin views it as important for the V4 to bury the hatchet with Paris, rather than competing with it.

Third, and most important, this is not actually what the V4 wants, not if they really think about it. Talk of leadership is flattering, sure, but it is hard to live up to. The breakdown in relations between the EU’s Big 3 – Paris, Berlin, and London – has been a mixed blessing for them. It has lent the four prominence, but at a cost. London’s alienation in particular has created expectations of the V4 leading on behalf of euro non-members (Slovakia is the only one of the four countries with the common currency). In practice, this has boiled down to the uncomfortable choice of whether to align with the emerging eurozone core or with the British outlier. At best, this is making the V4 more significant, but in a far weaker EU. At worst, it will see them “leading by example” and lining up to adopt policies defined by the eurozone core before joining the troubled common currency.

So is the V4 getting ahead of itself? Well, no: in some ways, their current ambitions are too modest.

Efforts to trace the pathology of V4 aspirations to “co-lead in Europe” (insofar as these really exist) often come to a rather depressing conclusion: the V4 is, in fact, disinterested in a more prominent role on the European stage per se. What it really wants is to balance relations with its large neighbor. Germany is the principal focus of each of the V4’s foreign and economic policies, and the European Union provides a means of reframing the relationship on a more equal and more stable basis. If that is the strategy, however, then it is likely to backfire. It risks undermining the supranational structures set up within the EU to defuse Germany’s power, and it potentially weakens the cohesion of the V4, strengthening its intergovernmental character and diluting its already shaky social and cultural base.
Ironically, it may actually undermine bilateral relations with Germany by showing the V4 in a bad light. After all, some in Berlin remain unconvinced of the easterners’ political maturity, and wonder whether the V4 has properly digested its Communist past. All this speculation about a potential partnership between the four on EU affairs highlights the real gulf between them. Writing enthusiastically about his country’s cooperation with Central European countries, for example, Germany’s head of foreign policy planning recently praised this as an example of Berlin’s willingness “to go the extra mile in consulting with all members of the enlarged Union” — hardly the way to describe partners of the first rank. Similarly, the July 2013 Franco-German paper on revitalizing EU defense policy was produced without mention of the Weimar (French-German-Polish) or V4 frameworks, despite recent joint declarations in these fora.

When it comes to partnership with Germany, therefore, the idea of V4 leadership in the EU is a red herring. The V4 should concentrate on boosting links with other sub-regions, and drawing lessons about how to build regions from the bottom up. They should attempt to bridge the gap with the southern states — most fruitfully Spain — on issues such as the neighborhood policy and eurozone liabilities. And they should do the same with the EU’s more advanced economies, on energy and industrial policy, for example, potentially providing lessons for the EU to bridge the global gap with catch-up powers. The Four should also continue their efforts to shape European foreign and defense policy, including the recalibration of the EU’s transatlantic relations. And they should strengthen their relations with the EU’s common institutions, especially when it comes to maintaining the inclusiveness of the EU’s eurozone structures. But they should also ready themselves for greater things to come.

In a recent essay, the British journalist Edward Lucas described the Visegrad framework as “nice but not necessary,” saying that it reminded him of the British Commonwealth — a network of countries similarly drawn together by a common historical experience but still in search of a purpose. Funnily enough though, he was writing at a time when the usefulness of the Commonwealth has become all too apparent: reflecting a multipolar order, the Commonwealth comprises the EU members Cyprus and Malta, the long-standing powers Canada and Australia, the emerging powers of India and Singapore, and African countries tipped for great things in the future. If the Commonwealth still lacks a purpose, then it is because the British government allowed the framework to fall into neglect. The V4 should not repeat this mistake. It is all too easy to imagine that a shift in international relations could once again place them in the spotlight. They/we must work to identify this eventuality and prepare for it.

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Not many international groupings can compare to the Visegrad Group in its use of the word “solidarity” in various contexts and meanings. It has been present since the word go. As time passed it became clear that it was more than merely a lofty idea and was a good way of getting things done both for the V4 and for Europe. This may, though, be spoiled by unrealistic expectations or by the term being treated instrumentally.

For Poland, the birth of the Visegrad Group cannot be understood unless “Solidarity” is written with a capital “S.” The launch of this regional cooperation was linked to the spirit of that great social movement of the 1980s. When British historian Anthony Kemp-Welch observed the first “Solidarity” congress in 1981 and the message it sent to the working people from Communist countries, he wrote that it was an exceptional moment in history, when the limitations of the Cold War and the need to follow Realpolitik were cast off in the name of morality and the neighboring countries were offered a program of solidarity. The slogan “For your freedom and ours” was always important for Poland’s Solidarity elite, as was the conviction that Poland’s freedom is tightly bound to freedom and democracy in Europe between the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic Seas. Polish-Czech-Slovak solidarity and the anti-Communist cooperation with Hungarians were part of this idea. The Czechs, Slovaks, and Hungarians also have their “dissident” origins of the V4. This is connected to the traditions resilient during and right after World War II, of a Central European federal union, which were present in the political thought of the region’s nations.

Visegrad solidarity was a transcendent imperative for cooperation that grew out of the freedom movement and became a symbol of a certain kind of compromise in the historical-integrational tradition of its member states. Certain specific strata of regional self-reflection came into conflict during the development of this compromise. At first, the sense of an external threat served as a common denominator but this became less important over time. “Solidarity,” though, is perhaps the only word that aptly describes how the countries have cooperated since accession.

The romantic myth of a V4 based on solidarity was damaged already in the 1990s due to diverging interests and individual ambitions. At that time, regional cooperation could occasionally seem like a burden for the most upwardly mobile states of the region: the affluent Czech Republic and the Hungarian “Pannonian Puma.” Poland and its different scale played a crucial role in these deliberations. The region’s fear of “modernization baggage,” as Poland’s underdeveloped economy was termed, was at times displaced by the suspicion that Poland itself would withdraw from the idea of Central Europe once it joined the European Union, since its size would give it an independence that its neighbors to the south lacked. The desire for cooperation prevailed, though, as was seen when the regional partners showed solidarity in supporting Slovakia in its need to catch up on integration after 1998.

The V4, however, has not been merely an “antechamber” for the EU. In spite of those who saw V4 cooperation only as a “leg up to Europe,” an interlude before entering the utopian European super-state, the group overcame “integration fatigue.” Solidarity had a renaissance based on a community of shared interests. This was apparent in energy security. Although recent history had provided the V4 with lessons on the need for close cooperation in this area, it took a long time to develop its mechanisms. It was only when the Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis struck the region at the beginning of 2009 that temporary solidarity measures were seen. This also brought about a flowering in cooperation, for example in the development of interconnectors in the region and joint action in crisis situations. The benefits of a solidarity stance over “going it alone” are also made clear by the attempts to face up to EU’s climate policy and the cross-border impacts of Germany’s Energiewende.
which will be a common challenge for the V4. The V4’s area of cooperation here is currently uncontrolled energy transmission from the wind farms in northern Germany being sent south through the V4 countries.

The V4 has seen serious divisions in some crucial areas, such as the missile defense system and the future of the EU (the issue of institutional reform). However, there have been other cases in which the V4 has wielded true influence and achieved much with cooperation. Activity in cohesion policy has seen the slogans of solidarity turn into real political discussion. They were not based only on the principle of narrowing the gap between rich and poor in the EU. In its negotiations on the financial framework, the V4 has managed to strive for cohesion funds, convincingly linking these with the interests of the EU as a whole. The prophecies that V4 solidarity would weaken on budget issues have not turned out to be true. On the contrary, in the negotiations on the financial 2014-2020 framework, representatives of the region’s countries used their greater experience to do the math and came to the conclusion that regional solidarity quite simply pays off.

Reference to the V4’s idealistic beginnings and the treatment of “Central Europeanness” as an obligation to support the neighboring countries is not only sentimental – it is also pragmatic. It is in the interests of the EU as a whole that the countries to the east and south of the V4 remain pro-Western. The support given to these countries by the V4 legitimized the intra-EU solidarity formulated on the EU stage. The Visegrad Group has become the natural advocate for countries either currently aspiring to enter the EU or those that may do so in the future.

Poland has gained much in the V4 diversification of responsibilities for its support of the pro-European ambitions of the countries of the Eastern Partnership. Poland, as the largest V4 member, is also the most responsible for deciding what the group should prioritize to ensure long-term effectiveness. The V4’s efforts to maintain the intensity of its “Eastern dimension” are increasingly often linked to supporting the integration efforts of the Western Balkans. This, along with the construction of regional synergy in the Balkans, has long been a priority area for Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. This is a sign of Central European solidarity, but also the growth in significance of Poland’s role in the V4 and the EU.

V4 cooperation works in NATO and increases the influence the members have in shaping the EU’s integration processes. The V4’s main aim should, however, be catching up on years of neglect in our countries’ relations, especially as regards infrastructure. During the period of transformation and accelerated modernization, the countries of the Intermarium region were focused above all on rebuilding broken bonds with the West, rather than their relations with each other. The substance of economic and infrastructural contact on the North-South axis, as with the fabric of political cooperation (bilateral and multilateral), remains stunted in various aspects of the region’s politics, as compared with the dynamic development of the “Western” vector. This means that the region’s approach to solidarity remains a current challenge for the V4, as an autonomous goal being implemented in the region itself and of direct benefit to its own societies. This is an issue of the credibility of the solidarity rhetoric used by the V4’s political class. Loud declarations of cooperation are currently often treated as hollow, unfulfilled ritual.

The Visegrad project has certainly helped overcome the historic burden of the countries of Central Europe. Few now remember that the Visegrad Group brought together countries that had never before worked together in that grouping and nations that had, until recently, exhibited mutual distrust or even hostility. Mutual trust requires constant effort to prevent Visegrad solidarity from falling victim to the ongoing problems of domestic policy or bilateral fallings-out. This concerns the problems of national minorities in particular. These represent the wealth of the region and are bridges joining our countries. They are also a temptation for politicians who harness emotions and prejudice in pursuit of their individual aims. The V4 does not solve bilateral problems, but the environment of multilateral cooperation has led to their reduction on numerous occasions.

The V4 has often had internal differences concerning the level of European integration. In crisis conditions, though, Central European solidarity, which is often pared down to the Visegrad Group, has become the EU’s eastern motor, defending the gains made by integration. The motives of individual countries or their “European optimism” or “pessimism” were not decisive here. Cooperation on maintaining the cohesion of the EU as a whole and the strengthening of regional solidarity have become two sides of the same coin-cooperation to strengthen the identity and independence of Europe in the world order. In this process, Central Europe has more strongly and more frequently turned to the tried and tested principle of subsidiarity in supporting community institutions.

In pursuing the need for legitimation to be strengthened and direct democracy at the EU level, Poland has also expressed its wish for issues such as national identity, culture, religion, and lifestyle to remain in the competences of member states, and has also defended state sovereignty on tax issues. Poland’s partners had already formulated postulates of this kind (e.g. Slovakia’s declaration on the sovereignty of EU countries on cultural and ethical issues). Central Europeans are known for their resistance to a blinkered approach to harmonization and for their respect for diversity in culture, religion, and the economy. There are disagreements with EU institutions on these issues but they are in principle allies of Central Europe’s states, since it lies in their interests to maintain the EU and the gains made by EU integration. Through the centuries the differences between Western and Central Europe have rarely worked to the advantage of the latter. One threat to V4 solidarity may come from treating the EU institutions as outside organizations, hostile and imposed from above or from the legitimization of domestic policy using rhetoric such as “us against the EU” or “us and Brussels.”

The geopolitical position of Central Europe and its experience of the yoke of totalitarianism mean that Euro-Atlantic solidarity should still play a particular role in our region. We should not forget the limits of principles not backed up by force, or how dangerous force is when not backed up by principles. If good political and security cooperation are not followed by the appropriate steps to strengthen our own defense capabilities and to fulfill our commitments to our allies, it will be difficult to talk of true solidarity in the longer term. In this sense, the advancing asymmetry between Poland and its regional partners may hamper true partnership. /

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Literature exists within society, society feeds it with its topics, and vice versa, literature influences society with its products. Or at least, it should. The decline of literature as an important political force is an obvious fact. Literature’s interaction with society and politics, however, is another fact we have to accept. It has always been so and there is no wonder that we often encounter works of fiction that are directly inspired by political events, as well as books aspiring to an active role in social issues.

This has never been otherwise in Central Europe. Under communist regimes, all Central European countries boasted rich unofficial literary production that – quite unsurprisingly – set its
political role as one of its main goals. As has been said many times before, however, after 1989, the role of literature in these countries changed significantly. Not just as far as economics and significance is concerned, but also as concerns literature's self-delimitation in relation to society and its political climate. Many authors, who until that moment played a very active role in society, suddenly felt like retreating, as if they felt that political activism is not worthy enough of literature. As if literature and arts should indulge in higher, timeless topics and leave the issues of practical life to newspapers and television. Of course, this branch of literary production has always existed and undoubtedly has a value of its own, but we can hardly relate such a requirement to literature as a whole because, as stated above, literature is directly linked to the matters of this world and cannot survive if we cut off its natural power supply and place of operation. Somebody once said that every literary work is in fact a personal diary in disguise. A huge overstatement, of course, but not completely untrue. If we dare formulate another such overstated definition, we can say that all literature is also a political commentary in different disguises. Indeed, we can hardly find a book that, in one way or another, does not deal with the epoch of its creation and the problems that epoch faces. There are, of course, books for which a commentary on the contemporary political and social situation is their main raison d'être.

In Central Europe, we can hardly find such a well-defined movement as was the "littérature engagée" in 1950s France, but it is beyond any doubt that we too have literary works that play, or at least aspire to, an active political and social role. This takes place in traditional forms, such as novels or poetry, and in new, innovative forms, such as poetry slams, rap music, or different manifestations of street art. Of course, each country has its own problems and issues as well as its own creative traditions, which results in different approaches and results. Some forms of politically-motivated literary creation that have become prominent in the Visegrad countries will be the subject-matter of the following dossier.

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quarter of a century since 1989, the end of the Socialist era in Central-Eastern Europe, so-called political poetry has become newly popular in Hungary. Young, middle-aged, and elderly readers routinely send political poems to their friends via e-mail, or share these poems through social media like Facebook and Twitter. There has been an intense debate in Élet és Irodalom, a liberal literary and political weekly, and subsequently in other literary magazines, about the definition of political (or with a somewhat misleading expression: “engaged”) poetry, about its function and potential. Plenty of roundtable discussions, symposia, and workshops have been organized, the participants of which have reflected on the prospects of contemporary political poetry and weighed what its tasks (!) might be. The editorial board of Litera, the most influential Hungarian online literary portal, announced a poetry competition; hundreds of poems were submitted by well-known authors, as well as amateur poets. The literary market as a whole has reacted almost immediately to readers’ interest in political poetry; István Kemény’s poem “Farewell letter” [Búcsúlevél] – published in 2011 in a highly prestigious literary magazine, Holmi – stirred up the seemingly placid waters of contemporary political poetry. Today, a political demonstration in Hungary is almost unimaginable without somebody (even a poet herself/himself!) taking the stage to recite a poem that – in one way or another – reflects on what is going on in our sweet homeland. Klubrádió, the one and only among the radio channels broadcasting nationwide that openly sympathizes with the democratic opposition to the Fidesz government, has a daily program called “My sweet homeland” (the title is identical to that of the anthology). Apparently, political or “public” poetry works pretty well in the context of everyday political life. Certainly, there are many factors that are responsible for the unforeseen success of political poetry. Still, the most important one, I think, is that the “language” used by politicians and public intellectuals in the last two decades has gradually lost contact with reality. Their sentences and expressions are blatant and idle, rhetorical constructions that cannot function as a means for interpreting socio-cultural phenomena and for processing historical trauma (the Holocaust in Hungary; the Treaty of Trianon after World War I, which led to historical Hungary losing two-thirds of its territory and population; the vices of the Communist regime against so-called “class-enemies”, etc.) – these are no more than signals designed to arouse enthusiasm for “our” political community and stir up hatred against “their” political community. The application of this method of emotional manipulation via political slogans has been extremely successful, at least by the standards of political rhetoric. In the conceptual framework provided by politicians, our major dilemmas – concerning the growing gap between the rich and the poor in Hungary, the prevalence of racism (which in 2009 culminated in neo-Nazi pogroms against the Roma), the widespread political and everyday corruption, the Fidesz-government’s attacks on democratic
institutions, the spillover effects of the worldwide economic crisis, etc. – cannot be formulated, much less resolved. Our words have lost whatever meaning they might have had (today, in everyday political speech “liberal” means “somebody who did not vote for the right-wing party and doesn’t not care sufficiently about Trianon,” or something like that; compared to the Hungarian government’s “war of independence against the European Union”). But politics is too important to be discussed only by means of the language of politicians – and literature, especially poetry, can play a crucial role in suspending the recalcitrant biases and automatic interpretative mechanisms that determine our everyday reasoning about political issues.

Let us look to some examples. Virág Erdős’s poem, “so what” [na most akkor] – which was shared more than three thousand times on Facebook in 24 hours, while an average poetry book is usually sold in only two or three hundred copies in bookstores – calls attention to the metaphysical unfoundedness of the difference between the rich and the poor “in a mock-childish rhythm and rhyme pattern” (Ágnes Orzóy, “Politics and Literature,” Hungarian Literature Online, July 25, 2012, http://www.hlo.hu/news/politics_and_literature_in_hungary). Today, beyond doubt, Virág Erdős is the most popular poet in Hungary; her collection of political poems debuted at the top of the best-seller lists in June 2013 – the only poetry book to do so in the last fifteen years. István Kemény’s poem “Farewell Letter” [Búcsúlevél] metaphorically identifies the speaker’s “sweet homeland,” Hungary, with his mother who “became viperous, visionless and obsolete, / a strange, dull old lady who / rolls herself up in hatred and / wants to live for another thousand years.” In his response-poem, “Hungarian indifference,” János Térey criticizes Kemény’s poetic attitude towards political issues expressed by “Farewell Letter,” as well as the terrible political and social conditions generally present in Hungary, by using a very different (and more traditional) poetic form with some allusions to the poetry of Endre Ady (the poet of “the Magyar fallow” from the beginning of the twentieth century. Ádám Nádasdy’s poem “On Patriotic Loyalty” [A hazafúi hűségről] treats the issue of patriotism in a different way: the poem retains the original metaphor of one’s mother as one’s homeland, but construes it in a radically dissimilar vein. It shows the relationship to the motherland not as something that is a matter of choice, but a birthright, so “we ought not to be disappointed in our country, guys.”

Interestingly enough, the “professional” side of the Hungarian literary scene, namely the literary critics, is not unanimously happy with the rise of contemporary political poetry. Some are worried about the so-called “aesthetic autonomy” of literature, while others think that the success of these poems is just a symptom or byproduct of the economic crisis and, as such, a temporary phenomenon. Still others are skeptical about the effects of poetry on social reality (or on the nature of political communication); it may be true that in the sixteen cycles of the anthology My Sweet Homeland, the collected poems have entered into a poetical and political dialogue with each other, but this dialogue can hardly be taken up by real persons with entirely different political views. But why not? Someone need not be extremely naïve to think that in debating the right interpretation of a poem, we may settle our social conflicts – or at least become acquainted with the particular perspectives of others. And what, if not this, would embody our expectations of literature?

The author is a Hungarian editor and the author of the anthology Édes hazám.
The fall of the Socialist regime provoked a wave of euphoria and great expectations in Czech society. When looking back, more than twenty years later, we can say that those expectations have not been met. On the contrary, today, Czechs are going through a period of disillusion. Major corruption, clientelism, a disproportion between the standards of living of the privileged elites and lower strata, moral decay, and a fear of the future characterize the critical points that are crushing the November dream of a just society.

This process of erosion constitutes a topic in politics, media, as well as in the arts, and for the writers (who can rely on their specific tools when presenting their message) who are expected to contribute to this debate more and more.

Although Czech post-November literature has mostly refrained from reflecting on topical issues, a minority never accepted this voluntary monastic isolation. One of the authors in this group is Michal Viewegh, a commercially successful author who has achieved celebrity status as the Czech writer. As Viewegh sets his works in the contemporary Czech milieu, it is logical that he also captures the tensions present there, and as he is an author with remarkable self-confidence, he is not afraid to embed his political views in his books. From Bringing up Girls in Bohemia (1994) to his more recent novels Mafie v Praze (The Mafia in Prague, 2011) and Mráz přichází z Hradu (Frost Blowing from the Castle, 2012), we can trace a line of critical attitudes in his works, in which he does not hesitate to unveil the failures of authorities and the people involved. In this respect, Viewegh manifests great hostility towards Václav Klaus, the man who – in the capacity of finance minister, then prime minister, and finally, president – has had a negative impact on the Czech reality. As early as in Bringing up Girls, one of the characters makes this sarcastic observation: “Irena,” said Jaromír, “You can recognize dirty money? Not even the Prime Minister can do that.”

In one of its layers, the novel Wonderful Years with Klaus (2002) touches on the threat that Klaus’ way of doing politics poses for the young Czech democracy. In Women’s Novel (2008), he depicts nothing less than total social devastation. “This country is sick,” says one of the protagonists in the opening, as he is taken aback by the fact that the lobbyist Zdeněk Doležel, who was tried for requesting a bribe of five million crowns, was found not guilty. “More often though... lies and hate prevail over truth and love,” concludes Aneta, an investigative journalist, who is unwilling to come to terms with the state of things. The culprits are obvious: “Simply, politics has always attracted careerists and unscrupulous cynics – that’s the way it has been, is and will be.” To accentuate the contrast between political proclamations and reality, Viewegh quotes Klaus with irony: “Since 1989, we have walked a long distance on our way to freedom, democracy and prosperity. The years have changed our country. Its citizens are changing too. New generations that consider the current state as natural and logical are growing up. Our country is developing in the right direction.”

In Women’s Novel, just as in Viewegh’s other works, the political commentary is just part of the backdrop against which the dramas of the main characters take place. Nevertheless, in his last two novels, Mafia and Frost, Viewegh went a step further and put this “backdrop” front and center. To avoid any doubt in this respect, the actual text of Mafia is preceded by a foreword, in which the author explicitly formulates his intentions. “This thriller is loosely inspired by a number of crimes that actually took place in the Czech Republic and whose perpetrators were never found or convicted ... My intention was to write a fictional thriller that would comply with all the rules of the genre (including hu-
morous hyperbole), but that would at the same time tell the hard truth about the contemporary Czech Republic full of corrupt politicians, puppet judges and prosecutors, and unscrupulous and thievish mayors of many cities and towns. The extensive enumeration makes Viewegh brand the country as a Republic of Crooks, while his work is supposed to be a “perilously true image and mercilessly sarcastic satire of Czech reality.”

To battle the crooks on the pages of his novel, Viewegh calls up a whole league of good characters, who – in a plot laid out as a crime novel rather than a thriller – are supposed to face the bad guys, whose names are conspicuous references to real figures on the Czech political scene intertwined with the underworld. Dárek Balík is an amalgam of the lobbyist Marek Dalík, a close collaborator of ex-Premier Mirek Topolánek, the owner of the LBA security agency Boris Vítek reminds us of Vít Bárta, the former owner of the ABL security agency and today the leader of the completely discredited political party Public Affairs, and Interior Minister Stanislav Langross is a crossbreed of the infamous former ministers Stanislav Gross and Ivan Langer. Thus, the whole novel is a specific literary-journalistic commentary on events in the Czech Republic that undermine the public trust in democratic institutions.

However, just as in reality, in his novelistic rendering, evil tends to prevail. The good can win partial victories but the overall superiority of evil – its ability to regroup its forces and mobilize vast resources to impose its own intentions – means that the good guys cannot afford to rest. So, in Mafia’s sequel entitled Frost Blowing from the Castle, the same lineup confronts an even broader gallery of crooks, who appear under their real names this time. The role of bad guy No. 1 is played by Václav Klaus, which will not surprise anybody given Viewegh’s universally known aversion to him. However, it is how Klaus is depicted in the loose plot of the novel that is shocking. He’s portrayed as homosexual, one who keeps young lovers, and at the same time, he is an easily-bribed pawn for the penetration of Russian interests into the Czech Republic.

These two contexts are brought forward in the novel by the disclosure of a secret recording, in which Klaus talks to Vladimir Putin, and of the diary of the president’s young lover, who drowned under mysterious circumstances. The extraordinarily sarcastic tone points to the negative traits of the president’s personality: a tendency towards egocentrism, a lack of self-criticism, the frequency of hollow phrases, and the need to be surrounded by people who are willing to be his toadies. Viewegh expresses himself in a straightforward way; he does not complicate what he wants to say with metaphors, parables, or allusions that would have to be deciphered by the reader. He prefers caricature and hyperbole. His book is intended for the mainstream reader, who is not supposed to be puzzled by complex nuances, but rather disgusted with what is going on in the corridors of power. Nevertheless, it begs the question: in what way is the effort to hold up a mirror to those who abuse public power related to fantasies about Klaus’ sexual orientation, or the sensational scene in which – during a vacation in The Maldives – he looks on at the expected death of his lover with cynical calm? Is this just a cheap trick to add a fictional element to the novel’s reportage; a trick that ultimately betrays the author as it leads to literary decay reinforced with hate? Or is it a gamble by which he is trying to provoke a scandal: “If I put it this way, everybody will talk about it?” Or is it rather the means that, apart from satisfying the desire to get a high response rate, allows him to say something substantial about Klaus?

Both literary and non-literary critics criticized him mostly for the first and second points. In his review of Mafia in the daily Hospodářské noviny, Ondřej Horák claimed that Viewegh “just had his
share from the stealing he described.” The magazine Reflex accused the author that his only goal was to earn money on the market and if he were to succeed, it would be a triumph for the ideology advocated precisely by Klaus. Both titles really did become bestsellers, each selling approximately eighty thousand copies, which is a good result by Czech standards. Perhaps that is why the attacks aimed at Viewegh, which came above all from right-leaning reviewers, verged on hatred, which was also palpable on numerous Internet forums. Perhaps the furthest assault in this direction was carried out by the editor of the website neviditelnypes.cz, who announced the rhetorical intention to write a book called “Frost Blowing from Sázava” (where Viewegh lives), in which Viewegh would be represented as a paedophile and zoophile. Václav Klaus himself made it known that he considers the writer an utterly pitiful loser.

Almost nobody has come forward to defend Viewegh, not even in the alarming situation of the circles on the extremist edge around the former president publicly labeling him antisocial. That is symptomatic in its own right: an attack on a charismatic individual is viewed as an attack against the system that the person represents, defined by rhetorical moments, which in turn overlap with a completely different reality, of whose monstrous features the Czechs are becoming more and more painfully aware.

Sure, Viewegh as an artist does not need to be spared. He has paid a high price for his effort to provide as simple a message as possible, accessible to broad masses of readers. Both novels are superficial; they lack any deeper insight into the mechanisms and dynamics of Czech society. Viewegh does not explore how personalities like Václav Klaus assert themselves in the public domain and how they build their following. He does not ask when and how the great Velvet ideals gave way to private interests. He does not test his faith that a system that brands itself as democratic is also capable of holding up as democratic, and does not reflect on his own prejudices, such as his unrestrained admiration for Václav Havel or the right-wing daily Mladá fronta, which supported the ODS in election campaigns, the party known for its numerous corruption scandals. The author does not hide his ambition to provide an “image of Czech society,” but it’s a one-dimensional image, didactically simplified, and what’s more, rendered using linguistically mediocre means. In fact, it is only its non-literary element, the critical relation to the state of society, that stops it from falling into the category of light consumer reading. But it is precisely Klaus’ homosexuality where we can find a cipher that goes beyond an attempt at mere dissembling and sensationalism.

Viewegh actually tries to show up the enormous hypocrisy that characterizes Klaus’ whole political career in a simple and yet literary way. Klaus defines himself as an advocate of conservative values, and, consequently, of the traditional family, but it is just his far-fetched right-wing policies that worsened the position of the family, especially by taking away its material prosperity. Klaus’ homosexuality works as an element to draw attention to the discrepancy between what Klaus declares and what he does: the novelistic Klaus uses homophobic rhetoric of his real-world model but at the same time, has homosexual affairs and is unfaithful to his wife. Although Viewegh does not deal with the social problems of Czech society, and although we may discuss whether his loose fabulation is an appropriate tool for this kind of criticism, the actual endeavor to show up to what extent Klaus contradicts himself is correct. What’s more, it deserves praise as there are too many discrepancies like that which resonate in public space: Klaus presents himself as an opponent of the European Union and a savior of the national state but as a neoliberal, he changes the national state to a minimal state that ends up under the yoke of multinational groups. Klaus fears that
In Poland, committed poets have been in great demand for some time, or at least that is what it looks like if you read literary critical essays. One of the latest significant contributions on this topic, which provoked widespread debate, was the text *Old Poets Must Be Killed* by Przemysław Witkowski, published in *Przekrój* magazine (2011), with the subheading “The bruLion generation monopoly is coming to an end once and for all. In poetry, the private retreats, giving space to social commitment. The time has come for Kopyt, Góra and Pułka.”

The attack on the alleged establishment of Polish poetry (albeit these “old” poets are far from being media celebrities and do not even hold important positions in the world of culture) – the first generation of poets after the fall of communism (albeit these “old” poets are far from being media celebrities and do not even hold important positions in the world of culture) – the first generation of poets after the fall of communism that debuted in the 1990s – is being led by the point of view of young poets. However, their words are cited out of context, and the author tends to present opinions close to his heart as their own, including a mythical duel with the old generation – to the death, if possible. Przemysław Witkowski, just as Igor Stokłoszewski in his previous polemic articles, seems to be looking for leftist poets/revolutionaries committed to the cause to topple the existing order, reducing it to ashes and building a brave new world on its ruins.

Poland has a long tradition of committed poetry; such poems are by no means anything new. Their character, however, is neither leftist nor revolutionary, as their origins lie in times of fighting occupation, be it the occupying powers in the 19th century, the Nazi or Soviet repressive agencies, or communist government. The themes and symbols still betray their romantic roots and allude to what might be in today’s political parlance termed the right-wing view of the world. Of course, prior to 1989, the poetry revealed a prickly attitude toward communism. By contrast, the counter-currents, such as Skamander in the interwar period, preferred the everyday, with playful poetry full of joy, rejecting martyrdom in the form of patriotic sacrifice. These usually emerged when it was possible to “bury the hatchet,” for instance after the establishment of independent Poland and after the fall of the totalitarian regime. True, we could find some leftist and revolutionary poets (e.g., the futurist Bruno Jasiński), or some works critical of capitalism, but they have never become mainstream, as is understandable for historical and social reasons. While literary critics regularly announce the rise of “angry young leftist men,” the reality looks a bit different. If we searched hard for

The author is a Czech pedagogue and literary critic.
openly politically committed poetry, we would find it rather on the right side of the spectrum, the best example of which is the poetry written after the Smolensk air disaster of April 2010, the tragic fall of a government plane with the president and leading politicians on board. This type of poetry is best represented by Wojciech Wencel.

Witkowski’s essay about killing the old poets provoked a vivid response from all the authors at stake, including a discussion on fundacja-karpowicz.org. Szczepan Kopyt and Konrad Góra argued in particular against simplifying efforts to portray the current situation dominated by mutual recognition as a vicious battle-field. However, in doing so, Konrad Góra identified the key issue that might link all these poets together: “We live in an alienated, antagonistic world, where we are expected to divorce ourselves from our essential stance, calling it a necessary compromise … It is a reflection of the situation prevalent across Poland, where liberals see right-wingers as courageous radicals, whereas leftists are judged as people outside reality.” When Szczepan Kopyt visited Prague in March 2013, he too spoke of the loneliness he felt whenever discussing topics he considered important, and of the attempts to change social discourse. For Kopyt, commitment means mainly an effort to (after all) raise awareness. That’s why he, inspired by the bruLionist Marcin Świetlicki (sic!), links words with sound and sets his poetry to music, currently in a duet with Piotr Kowalski. For example, recently, he addressed the case of Jolanta Brzeska in the song-poem Who Killed Jolanta Brzeska (Kto zabił Jolantę Brzeską), an activist who fought for the rights of people being driven from their homes by soaring rents and other coercive measures. Her charred body was found by a random passer-by after she had been missing for six days. The case was closed due to a lack of evidence. Kopyt’s video certainly had much greater effect than a poem published in a prestigious magazine or collection of poetry; the numbers of both poetry readers and copies of books in Poland are comparable to those in other central European countries.

Kopyt’s poetry is not primarily focused on current social and political topics; he has a wider scope – from philosophy to journeying back to the rhythmic, almost ritualized texts that draw on the musicality of speech. To what extent is he a committed poet? The main problem of today’s Polish debate is above all the emptiness of the key word “commitment,” used in literary criticism as a magic spell without any real content. As such it refers to a poet’s public engagements rather than his or her work. After all, should poetry remain within the realm of literature, its content cannot constitute the main evaluation criterion. Unlike a fragile body of poetic text, a battle hymn tends to be short-lived.

Translated by Martina Neradová

The author is a Czech Polonist. She works at the Polish Institute in Prague.
It seems that stories of Germans living in the former Czechoslovakia at the end of World War II have in recent years become popular among very young Czech female writers. Following the critically acclaimed Money from Hitler (2006) by Radka Denemarkova, Kateřina Tučková, of the next generation (born 1980) published her second novel, Expulsion of Gerta Schnirch (2009). In 2012, Jakuba Katalpa (b. 1979) published the novel Germans (Němci), later nominated for this year’s Magnesia Litera annual book award. Both young writers explore emotional and moving plots through the sad life stories of Czech Germans extending into present.

Their focus is the same, but the stories are told in different styles and with different methods. While Tučková has studied the real lives of Germans from Brno and her novel has a strong historical background, the novel Germans (Němci), later nominated for this year’s Magnesia Litera annual book award. Both young writers explore emotional and moving plots through the sad life stories of Czech Germans extending into present.

The story is told from two perspectives. First, in the present: a young woman searches for her grandmother, never seen before, known only from letters sent from former West Germany into communist Czechoslovakia. The second perspective is the story of grandmother Klara Rismann in her young years, throughout her career as an elementary school teacher in a village in the Sudetenland (the Czech borderlands inhabited mainly by Germans), to the bitter end when is she forced to depart Czechoslovakia leaving her only son, three-month old Konrad, in Prague. It is the central part of the book, with a focus on two uncommon love stories, told in a catchy way with many secondary characters. It is also the most problematic part, because it treats the historical background too recklessly. The fictional village in the Sudetenland is like world of its own, nearly without connections to the ongoing war and its Czech neighbors.

Nevertheless, Germans is a significant novel in contemporary Czech literature because it breaks away from writing burdened by real war trauma and treats historical events mostly as backdrop for a precisely constructed fictional story. If only the scenery were better drawn and connected with the stories of the main characters.

The author is a book critic at the online literary magazine iLiteratura.cz, and founder of the Magnesia Litera literary award.
Jan Keller is one of the most noticeable Czech sociologists. His opinions differ from the rest and he is able to shape them into challenging propositions, often of an almost pamphlet nature (“Why I support the left,” “Ten reasons for rejecting the introduction of school fees”). When Czech society threw itself “on the path to democracy,” as was recently noted by one Czech writers, and the word capitalism smelled of heavenly nectar, Keller wrote of the inner contradictions of modern societies (Nedomyšlená společnost (An Ill-Conceived Society)) and their environmental debt (Až na dno blahobytu (To the Bottom of Affluence); Šok z ekologie (The Ecology Shock)). He thus established himself as a spokesperson of the critically inclined camp; nonetheless, his book Úvod do sociologie (An Introduction to Sociology) or the hefty volume of Dějiny klasické sociologie (A History of Classical Sociology) are the first choice when it comes to reading assignments in university classes. Somewhere between these two positions — that of a committed activist and an analytical scholar — we find his successful, repeatedly reissued book, Soumrak sociálního státu (The Twilight of the Welfare State).

There has been talk of a crisis of the welfare state since the mid-1970s. The welfare state was tolerably successful only during the first two, rich, post-war decades, when the economy, helped by auspicious demographic structure, grew to such an extent that there was enough money even for social benefits and pensions. But a lot has changed since then: a society of services is not innately capable of growing as fast as industrial society; the job market has become highly flexible, resulting in an increasing number of part-time jobs whose proceeds leave coffers half empty; big businesses systematically pass enterprising risks and uncertainties on to their employees; economic globalization freed up capital, which is no longer bound to particular places or societies, and gave it a strategic advantage over national states. All in all, says Keller, the welfare state has never been in such a pickle as today, and it has never been less supported by politicians. It is quite symptomatic that not only the critics of the welfare state but also its advocates have accepted the newspeak of economic discourse, as if everybody forgot that the idea of a welfare state originated elsewhere, that it emerged from the idea of social rights, which are just as extinguishable as human and civil rights. The welfare state is a cultural project, cultivated as institutionalized solidarity developed by modern society to substitute for the primary connections that — in traditional society — took care of the infirm and old.

This book shifts between sociological analysis and critical essay, but Keller remains true to himself: he wields a sharp pen and has a rare sense of paradox (at times taken a bit too far). In particular, he ironically questions the modernization of the welfare state, which is in his opinion no more than the abandonment of its essential principles according to the logic that says, “what does not work should be done away with.” But the severity of the situation is apparent not only thanks to Keller’s book but also because of it: Keller himself does not offer any solution. He sees Giddens’ Third Way project as a naive fantasy but falls short when it comes to providing his own recipe. By contrast, Horst Afheldt, a German researcher cited by Keller, has a rather radical view on saving the welfare state. He states that the crisis of the welfare state is no longer manageable at a national level, because it is currently experienced by all its models — continental, Scandinavian, and Anglo-Saxon. In order to re-establish market-state equilibrium, socially irresponsible multinational businesses must have an adequate adversary; the crisis of the welfare state is in fact a crisis of the state itself. The EU has been resisting efforts to unify social policy due to practicalities, but it may be just the thing it needs to find its ethos: to re-establish the balance between democracy based on solidarity and capitalism based on competitiveness, and, therefore, exclusion. / 

The author is a Czech writer and editor. He works for the literary monthly Host.
I was told about Papusza by a fellow student in Uppsala. We sat next to each other in a class on ethnic minorities’ languages, and he spoke long and lovingly of the poet, whom no one mentioned in Poland. My friend’s last name was Kwiek. Reading Angelika Kuźniak’s book, it turns out that the Kwieks – like other Gypsy clans – had no reason to say anything good about the poet. Could it be that so much has changed between what she describes and my meeting in Uppsala? Or maybe my fellow student – a Gypsy in higher education – simply had a sensitivity the rest of his relations lacked?

Today, we do not need great sensitivity to be moved by the fate of Papusza. Bronisława Wajs led a nomadic life, like all Gypsies in the early twentieth century. She stole her first chicken at the age of four. Since early childhood, she wore gold earings and long skirts, was given a husband at fifteen, as soon as she knew how to get by with divination. Papusza, the Doll, because her mother called her so, had only one thing no other Gypsy had. She could read and write. Her greatest treasure, as often happens in fairy tales, has become her greatest undoing.

Following the publication in 1956 of the bilingual volume of Papusza’s songs by Jerzy Ficowski, her people have turned their backs on her, accusing her of betraying their code.

Angelika Kuźniak, now the author of a number of phenomenal reportages, debuted in 2009 with a book on Marlene Dietrich. In Papusza she returns to her favourite genre – “mosaic reportage”, consisting of (perhaps more so because of the shortcomings and gaps in the memory of interviewees and in documents than the whim of the author) snippets of conversations, fragments of letters, poems and reports. These are beautifully complemented by images of Gypsy camps of the 1960s, by Jerzy Dorożyński.

Przyboś, Szymborska, and Kamieńska wrote about the Songs of Papusza. However, this did not stop the bad run in the life of the poetess, who died in poverty and loneliness. Kuźniak’s book, appearing twenty-six years after the death of Bronisława Wajs, has a chance to restore the memory of her poems, at a time when the policy of ethnic and national minorities in the European Union is of very high value in the cultural hierarchy, we have a chance to remind ourselves what a multi-ethnic state we were for centuries.

I owe one more thing to Angelica Kuźniak – in the afterword she explains the difference between the words “Roma” and “Gypsy” in favor of the latter, and somehow frees me of political correctness, which I learned at the seminar in Uppsala. This is an important and beautiful story of a Gypsy-poetess.

*Translated by Lula Męcińska*
One of the biggest public debates in recent years in Poland has been about how the heritage of communist-era architecture should be judged. Roughly speaking, Poles have been divided into two groups. The first believe that post-PRL (Polish People's Republic) blocks of flats, office buildings, department stores, and sports halls have been constructed based on standards forced by the planners from the Soviet Union; they are obsolete and underpinned by ideology and should therefore be destroyed or freely modernized. Others are convinced that the architecture of the period is part of the national cultural heritage, and that among the thousands of mistakes, there are buildings of outstanding quality. The temperature of the discussion was raised by Filip Springer (born 1982), the author of the bestselling book *Źle urodzone* (Of Low Origin). In a series of reportage pieces, Springer draws the reader’s attention to the thoughtless destruction of valuable buildings, whose only fault was the date of their construction – they were erected by communists. Zaczyn (The Leaven) continues the theme of *Źle urodzone*. Springer follows the story of the biggest, and at the same time least acclaimed visionaries of contemporary Polish architecture. The characters of the book are Oskar and Zofia Hansen. Oskar Hansen (1922–2005), the son of a Norwegian father and a Russian mother who had fought in the Polish partisan forces, a student of Fernand Leger and Pierre Jaenneret, tempted by prestigious architectural firms in Western Europe and compared to Le Corbusier in recognition of his talent, chooses to return to communist Poland. “There are ruins, they are waiting for me there,” he explained. He wanted to redesign Poland, destroy the unfair scheme of urbanization so that there was no center, privileged and underprivileged regions, or urban areas. According to his vision, the country was to be divided into four parallel zones stretching from the Tatra Mountains to the Baltic Sea, along the biggest Polish rivers. They were to include residential areas, forests, recreation areas, and industrial plants. Hansen brought a few of his ideas to life on a micro-scale – he designed a block of flats – the housing estate “Przyczółek Grochowski” in Warsaw, the longest residential building in Europe (1400 meters). Springer portrays Hansen as an uncompromising idealist whose projects were too bold for the technical and mental capabilities of his contemporary Polish industry and society. The book also offers a universal perspective – Zaczyn depicts the experience of an intellectual who chose to live in a part of Europe that was sorely disadvantaged by history.

The author is a Polish journalist and publicist.
The complete repertory of the recent nonviolent protests and movements against post-communist hybrid regimes has developed and evolved before our very eyes. In several authoritarian-minded (but more-or-less free) nations, numerous campaigns, protests, flash mobs, and movements (from single issue to occupy movements) have been started. These political-cultural actions were mainly nationally significant – Slovakia’s OK ‘98, Georgia’s Kmara, and Ukraine’s Pora, for example. However, some have taken on global significance: the critique of globalization by Otpor! in Serbia, the Occupy protests, and Femen (made famous by the band Pussy Riot), not to mention the recent developments in Brazil and Turkey, are all examples of such movements. For over a decade now, we’ve been hearing about COLORFUL revolutions, from 1996’s Serbian Egg (or Yellow) Revolution, the Georgian Rose Revolution of 2003, the Ukrainian Orange Revolution of 2004, or the suppressed 2011 Jasmine Revolution in China, and last but not least the Arab Spring.

Is there then a connection between the last fifteen years of colorful revolutions and the recent Hungarian political developments and the emergence of new parties and civil movements?

To what extent does Milla (One Million for Hungarian Freedom of the Press) continue the legacy of Otpor!? How about the connection between LMP (Politics Can Be Different – Hungary’s Green Party) and Serbia’s Zajedno (Together)? Does the Hungarian Solidarity Movement (SOLIDARITY) follow the footsteps of Ukraine’s Pora? What about the parallels between Hallgatói Hálózat (HAHA), a student union, and Slovakia’s OK ‘98?

Colourful Resistance, edited by Péter Krasztev and Jan Van Til, seems to be looking for the answers to these questions.

Thematically, the book consists of two different parts: the first presents a retrospective politological analysis of the post-communist movements (by way of authors such as Pavol Demeš-Joerg Forbrig, Olena Nikolayenko, Lucan Way, Martin Bútora, and Ivan Krastev); while the second part shifts focus to introduce the Hungarian scene. In doing so, it manages to avoid lapses into antiparty populism, that which pits “civilians” against politicians, on the basis of the former “not participating in politics” (versus the latter who do). Obviously, that isn’t the case, since anyone who comments on public matters is, by definition, taking part in politics.

The author is a Hungarian sociologist and politician and professor of political science at the Central European University.
There is widespread agreement among historians of Kádárism in Hungary that a key element in the consolidation of Communist rule after the 1956 uprising was a policy of “consumer socialism” – a tacit agreement between the political leadership and average citizens that kept ordinary people away from politics. If you did not interfere in the political life organized by the Communist party and did not express your discontent in any form, then you could enjoy the material benefits of modern life. In practice this meant that it was no longer obligatory to believe in Communist ideology, it was enough if you pretended loyalty and faked participation. As an exchange, you could buy various household appliances, motorcycles, cars, weekend houses, and the other accessories of a modern lifestyle – of course, if you had the financial means to do so. Consequently, a specific form of negative individualism emerged in a nominally collectivist state: one that facilitated the development of self-interest and enclosure in family life but did not promote social responsibility, solidarity, or cooperation in the civil sphere, beyond the circles of family and friends.

Many analysts argue that this kind of political apathy is the enduring heritage of Kádárism that survived the transition. Even the “collapse” of the Communist regime, which was so dramatic in other East-Central European countries, was a gradual, negotiated revolution that brought about only a partial elite change in Hungary. The argument goes that “politics” remained a sphere of activity organized from above, and not a result of deliberations starting from local communities. In short, while the structures of representative democracy were strengthened, participatory democracy remained inchoate. Ágnes Utasi and her colleagues also found in their research that without overcoming atomization and the lack of community networks and activities, it is very difficult to reinvigorate participation in public life and to renew democracy. The research confirmed that engagement in political activities is extremely low in Hungary (only 1.2 percent of the sample are active in political organizations), and while there is much discontent with the macropolitics of political parties, the respondents did not see it as possible to contribute actively to the development of local democracy.

The author is a cultural anthropologist and sociologist teaching at Masaryk University in Brno and Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in Budapest.
“The forms and specific nature of implementing motherhood in extreme social situations” is how the plot of Pavol Rankov’s latest novel Mothers might be summed up in the language of academia. However, this tortuous though apposite description is not the brainchild of an academic, let alone of an unimaginative reviewer: it is a literal quotation from Rankov’s text, recently published in Czech in a translation by Jana Faschingbauerová. It is the title that a character in the novel plans to use for her master’s dissertation based on the main character’s story. Lucia, a history student, uses the methods of oral history to collect material for her dissertation by conducting an extensive interview with an older woman who has survived many years in a Soviet Gulag. While there she gave birth to a son who also survives by a fortuitous combination of events. The student is fascinated by this astounding fact, as in Russian prisons death rather than birth was the order of the day. The first few pages, written from the objective, third-person perspective, are followed by the formally “authentic” testimony of the former convict, Zuzana Lauková, as recorded by the student. Here and there the terse but factually and emotionally rich narrative is disrupted whenever the student’s stern and extraordinarily cynical supervisor raises theoretical and technical objections to her research; it was he who instructed Lucia, among other things, to capture the survivor’s individual testimony in the “methodologically purer” way, that is to say, in the first person.

In the last months of the war, by a series of unfortunate accidents, a young woman in love with a Russian partisan is caught up in events that are to change her life for good. Soon after liberation, after her lover has been betrayed and killed by the occupiers, she is arrested by the Soviet militia and brought to impromptu trial, accused of having denounced him to the Nazis. Since she is not aware of having done anything wrong – in fact she would have been the last person to wish anything bad on her Russian love – she expects, like Kafka’s Josef K., everything to be soon cleared up. However, in the anti-collaborationist euphoria following liberation things have to move fast and nobody is interested in hearing her story. Soon she is dispatched to the Far East, to a Russian labor camp, having just discovered that she is expecting the dead partisan’s child.

The account of conditions in the corrective colony is strongly reminiscent of Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich and The Gulag Archipelago, which also provides the book’s epigraph. While this is not surprising, given that a substantial part of the book is set in the camps, there is nevertheless an obvious difference between Solzhenitsyn on the one hand, whose account is based on personal experience, and Rankov on the other, who fashions it from a distance, and from a female point of view to boot. Rankov is more interested in literature than in playing a complex literary game, but as a result he ends up rather unnecessarily downplaying the seriousness of the issue. For example, Rankov confidently takes the liberty of eliding seven years of camp life by using a literary formula: “Seven years later,” dumbfounding and perhaps even cheating the reader, primed by the preceding pages for regular and detailed descriptions of the prisoners’ fight for survival.

In his previous novel It Happened on 1st September or Some Other Day, Rankov’s use of ellipses proved an effective technique, complementing the unusual device of regularly taking stock of the events affecting the main characters. However, it seems less effective here. It is surprising to find that over a long period nothing much seems to change in the camp, as if people didn’t age (which is particularly interesting given the devastating conditions that prevailed there), except that Zuzana’s son is now old enough to begin to make sense of things. On the other hand, some passages – if only in their details – suggest the author is rather guessing at “what it must have felt like.” For example, a sentence like, “As Aleksey got a little older, he grew fond of my frostbite scars, feeling the bumps on my hands with his fingers,” is presumably meant to enliven the story. Details like these partly undermine the credibility of the text, not in the historical but rather in the artistic sense. Put another way: unlike Rankov, the Russian writer was primarily interested in personal testimony rather than in creating “literature” and aimed for maximum authenticity and specificity, yet in spite – or perhaps just because of – that, Solzhenitsyn’s fiction is undoubtedly literature par excellence.

However, unflattering comparisons with the Russian classic notwithstanding, we should not ignore the strong points of Rankov’s novel. The plot is meticulously

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**About**

**Matky**

by Pavol Rankov

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**Matky (Mothers) by Pavol Rankov.**

With *In the Name of the Father*, Balla has moved beyond the tormented self, focusing on an analysis of family relations. However, the results of this examination are bleak in a typically Ballaesque way. Family relations are marked by constant feelings of guilt, failure, and inadequacy. Sons hate their fathers, disappoint their mothers, fathers are indifferent to their sons, husbands cheat on their wives. Families are started out of stupidity, habit, or hypocrisy. The family is a trap, and indifference and emptiness are everyday reality. There are no family ties, only individuals who hate each other, or, in the best-case scenario, are indifferent to each other, yet have to live side by side.

The basic hallmarks of Balla’s work are all here — egotism, extreme loneliness, alienation, a disgust with life, and the numbing banality of everyday life marked by the atmosphere of a specific district town in the south of Slovakia. Although monstrosity, fantastic scenes, and logic-defying events remain muted in the background, they still form a firm part of the narrative, along with clear indications that the narrative is not to be taken too seriously and of the narrator’s unreliability.

The book’s title can be read on several levels. On the one hand, the book presents the memories of the main character — the Ich-narrator, a father and husband — composed of fragments of past events, fantasies but also of old dreams that play an equally important role. Balla’s protagonist is convinced of his own superiority and authority. He is a predator, an alpha-male, the only one among his peers who refuses to pretend he cares about anyone else more than about himself. He regards sentimentality as a weakness.

His superiority is further based on the awareness of being part of a higher plan, part of unknown forces that have been sealed under concrete in the foundations of his family house. The house is meant to be the machine that keeps the town’s inhabitants apathetic and reconstructed, with an arc stretching from the beginning, the partisan’s farewell to his Slovak lover, to the “present,” doubling at this stage and creating a parallel with the student’s — also not altogether happy — pregnancy. This is not the only variation on the mother-child relationship in the book. In addition to the main character’s troubled motherhood and Lucia’s motherhood-to-be, the novel also reflects the two women’s complex relationship with their respective mothers. A key minor character is the authoritarian camp commander, the childless Irina, who adopts Zuzana’s son. Rankov is at his strongest in the passages that focus on the specificity of the novel’s title.

Last but not least, the novel can be regarded as a kind of study in fiction: having chosen a subject and researched it meticulously and systematically (the text includes a plethora of “authentic” Russian words that permeate the woman’s testimony), the author planned and developed it in detail. However, the very thoroughness of his approach and the conscientious “completion” of his literary task may be the reason why the novel feels slightly artificial, as if lacking a spark. Critics have raised similar objections in relation to (contemporary bestselling Czech writer) Katerina Tučková: the text is a polished, skillfully crafted achievement, yet — while there can be no doubt that the author is genuinely fascinated by the topic — it falls short of the timeless literary quality to which it aspires.
signed. Under the concrete of the basement there grows the sacred Norse tree Yggdrasil and flows the Hvergelmir well, while the walls of the house conduct a direct current. As in Balla’s earlier texts (e.g. the story “….”), rather than becoming a “family nest,” a symbol of shared intimacy, the house becomes a monstrous site of failure, alienation, threat, and destruction.

However, as the narrative progresses, the protagonist’s own life also proves to be a banal waste of time, making him part of the inevitable forgetting and vanishing: “everything that had been has faded, vanished, evaporated, is gone.”

This awareness culminates in the book’s conclusion, as the main character discovers that the mysterious architect has prevented the house from exerting its influence. The father’s narrative, which aims to demonstrate his superiority over everyone around him, gradually disintegrates. All that is left is an “everyman”, a retired shop assistant running away from his failures, somewhat reminiscent of the “killed man” in the work of Rudolf Sloboda.

But who is the true source of this narrative, one might well ask? For it might have been just as easily narrated by his younger son, a writer who, echoing the book’s title, addresses the reader “in the name of the father.” The father is reflected in his father, and the son, in his turn, is reflected in the father: “I wasn’t aware of being observed. But my younger son had observed me. And that is one of the reasons he began to hate me. Mind you, he would have ended up hating anyone if he had observed them for long enough.”

Thus the father’s disappointment in his son can turn into the son’s admission of failure: “a son inevitably senses his own inadequacy and problematic nature, when constantly forced to bear in mind that there are things he is not up to because he isn’t trying hard enough.” At the same time, the narrative channels the younger son’s guilt over failing to come to his mother’s deathbed. In the mother’s dying scene – one of the book’s most powerful passages – the mother and her older son seem to be granted redemption from the cancer of apathy and disintegration, if only temporarily (and only in this sentimental reviewer’s reading). Even if they, too, are guilty of egotism and indifference toward their loved ones, they have not entirely lost their capacity to empathize.

But if the son is the originator of the father’s portrait, he is also his judge. This is where another level of In the Name of the Father – the title of course evokes the Christian prayer – might come to the fore. In the course of the narrative it is not only the image of a specific father that is destroyed but also that of the father as a symbolic figure, a divine authority. At times the author presents the father not only as Nietzschean Übermensch but also as God: “Baldur is the most beautiful, purest and youngest of all Germanic gods. Why can’t that apply to you, too?”

Yet, by the end of the book, the main character is reduced to a tired, stultified, and resigned old man with nothing left but “shards, crag-like protrusions from the grey sea of forgetting.”

In this book Balla continues to hollow out the meaning of existence, destroying every category that rules human life. Unwittingly he repeats the emotionally charged modernist gesture we know from interwar Slovak literature: “The world is a cruel place. As long as people are split into two genders, war and selectivity will rage. And after war and selectivity coupling always ensues, the reproduction of victors, the defeated of the future. This was how nature intended it although otherwise it does not act intentionally. Nature is a heartless automation. There is really no point talking about emotions.” These words echo the “principle of cruelty” manifest in the fiction of Gejza Vámoš.

The world according to Balla does not contain anything that might go beyond immediate experience. The only remaining certainty is disappearing and transience. Seen in this way life can only be lived as a slapstick comedy, in which all the intimately known objects in our world are suddenly emptied of meaning, appearing alien, inexplicable, and bizarre.

In 2012 Balla received Slovakia’s most prestigious literary award, Anasoft Litera, as well as the Tatra Banka literary Prize for In the Name of the Father. His latest collection of short stories, Oko (The Eye) has been shortlisted for this year’s Anasoft Litera. For an extract from In the Name of the Father in English see BODY.Literature (http://bodyliterature.com/2013/07/07/balla-2/); for an interview with Balla see Literalab (http://literalab.com/2013/07/08/damaged-by-reading-an-interview-with-balla/).

Translated by Julia Sherwood
Students occupy universities. As usual. But do they have the same transformative power as a generation ago? Political parties in Central Europe are seizing this opportunity. Governments portray them as political opponents, while the opposition hijacks their agenda, expecting the wheel of history to turn. The student movements, however, belong to a new, politically engaged generation, that has a new understanding of politics and participation. They are not a cliché from socialist times, nor can they be neglected.

February 29, 2012, Prague, Czech Republic. Thousands of Czech students demonstrate against planned educational reforms.
“STOP BELIEVING IN AUTHORITY. START BELIEVING IN EACH OTHER.”

The above quotation is one of the basic principles of the International Student Movement (ISM), which can hardly be called an organization – it is a network of students, who struggle against very similar structures, based on similar principles. Some of these are reminiscent of the student protests of ‘68, while others would rather connect them to the international Occupy Movement, but at the same time, despite their strong international interconnectedness, they are locally rooted, although, with different perspectives on locality and traditions. The ISM, as a platform for loose cooperation across borders, emphasizes the interrelatedness of problems and challenges of students from Sri Lanka to London, from Nigeria to San Francisco, connecting activists in Lima and Hong Kong.

The commercialization of universities all across Europe, the increased costs of higher education that governments have started introducing in countries that had previously provided a free higher education (and still reasonably lower quality compared to universities in Western Europe), the educational reforms within the EU introduced as the Bologna process did not leave the region of Central and Eastern Europe untouched by the massive wave of student revolts worldwide. In 2009, students occupied the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Zagreb. The protest started as a demonstration against the rising costs of studies – about EUR 500 to 1200 per year – and took a quite unusual form, escalating into a blockade of the university, which quickly spread to other Croatian cities – Zadar, Rijeka, Split, and Osijek, and lasted for thirty-five days. Protest events took place in the Visegrad countries, too, with varying intensity. That same year in Poland (mostly Gdansk), a student movement known as OKUPÊ organized protests, the Week of Unrest took place in the Czech Republic in 2012, and the revolts in Hungary from 2011 to 2013 organized by the Students’ Network, called HaHa, were quite sincere despite the name. (A similar initiative in Slovakia, the Štafetový Štrajk, Relay Strike, could be also mentioned here, even though it was the brief co-operation of a few schools in Bratislava.)

The students ended the occupations, the government made promises, and even though most of the reforms and the rise in tuition fees could not be prevented, the initial steps had been taken – students from different universities and different cities joined together, engaged in unusual action, and pressured their governments. Whether all that can be seen as a success or a failure is an open question, but probably not the most important one. What matters is that something is doubtlessly happening in this corner of the world, students have stepped out of the old, conventional, and inefficient frameworks and have demonstrated that they can once again organize themselves.

**BOILING POINTS – “THE BRAIN IS NOT A CASH MACHINE”**

It might seem surprising that in countries where movements in general have been relatively passive in previous dec-
ades, students engage in one event after another, employing peculiar types of protest that have no precedent or patterns in domestic protest traditions, or at least none in the democratic era of the last twenty-three years. The Croatian protests did draw on the Croatian Spring of the early 1970s, which was mostly dominated by students, but in other places, whenever the student revolts of the Spring ’68 in Paris or Prague came up, they were usually coupled with tones of disappointment and comparisons in which the contemporary movements were always unfavorable. This is not surprising, given the unusual forms and language of the protests, which can hardly be placed within the existing structural frames. The unusual elements involved a denial of hierarchy and formal organization – there is no membership, no official leaders, there are spokespersons instead (many of whom are women); decisions are made by participants (since there are no members or formal bodies), which means that anyone who is present at the plenary meeting can take part. There is a sign language that the students have adapted, and is widely used at other international, typically left-wing, sometimes anarchist networks (i.e., Occupy and Ecotopia). Wherever this type of communication was used, it turned out to be effective, with the most extreme case being the appearance of a group of football hooligans who had planned to take over the student forum and destroy the meeting. The ultras could not organize themselves properly, and to their surprise, their presence was accepted at the plenary, and after a heated discussion, the evening ended silently, without conflict or violence.

Even though the student protests broke out for different reasons in the CEE countries, the motives behind the mobilization are also strikingly similar. The main reason that led to the blockade of the faculty in Zagreb was the introduction and constant rise in tuition fees, gradually and massively excluding students of less stable financial backgrounds from the system. In Hungary, news of sweeping reorganization and a radical withdrawal of resources from higher education caused unrest among students, and rumors of closure of entire faculties activated the already existing networks of HaHa in the spring of 2011. After further stations of collective action, the students mobilized in early 2012, when the ministry announced serious austerity in the rates of state-funding for students (for instance, none for students of Economy and Law). In Poland, there was no particular event or reform proposal that provoked the strikes, but a number of reasons came together – a major one was lack of funding for PhD students, who were nevertheless expected to teach and work for the faculty.

The Czech Week of Unrest was preceded by the announcement of educational reforms involving tuition fees at the universities, and a series of changes that would seriously compromise academic autonomy. The commercialization of education and most of these issues behind the student protests are tightly connected to the structural reforms of the Bologna process, which have been basically introduced out of the blue, and shook the existing university structures to the core. One of the side effects of the rapid transformation is a high rate of unemployed, overeducated graduates (people with BA degrees taking positions that do not require a university degree), just to mention one of the many, which has reached basically all Visegrad countries, especially combined with the economic recession after 2008. At the same time, states have continued to withdraw resources and restrict the budget for higher education.

The student councils have also failed to represent students’ interests, and have proven inefficient in times of crisis. The problems start already with the election of representatives – in Poland for instance, participation in student elections was 13% among BA and MA students according to a 2009 study, while among PhD students this rate is even lower. In Hungary, one of the major concerns of the HaHa is the very functioning of the official student self-government, which lacks transparency and information on their work (moreover, a recent case revealed that official representatives had been abusing students’ data in Hungary). As they are opposed to those open and flexible structures of the newly emerged movements that have no leaders or representatives, it leaves the authorities puzzled when it comes to negotiations, which has been used as an argument against recognizing the student networks. The question of tuition fees is in the front line among the demands of the students, but there is no consensus among students about demands for entirely free education. Hungarian students accentuated availability to education and autonomy for universities, and demanded that the government stop extracting resources from higher education (just as an example: the University of Bonn receives about the same amount of state funds as the entire Hungarian higher education system). Autonomy was a central issue for the Czech protests as well, where the new education reform included external financial control over the university councils. The goals and demands of the Polish OKUPÉ in Gdansk were more concrete, such as a demand to stop control and surveillance at the university, scholarships for doctoral students (as many students had learned after their enrollment that there was no scholarship available to them), and, similarly, the autonomy of the university. The student movements in all these countries stood up against the commercialization of higher education, and while students were generally not against tuition fees per se, they were of the general understanding that “A brain is not a cash machine” (as Czech students put it), that is, that education should not become profit-oriented.

“The University Belongs to Us”

The blockade in Croatia lasted longer than a month, during which the university professors, at least many of them, initially stood by them and supported their case. Students reached out for solidarity and gained the support of the trade unionists who were protesting at the same time – until they struck an agreement with the government. The students gradually lost their allies, until the protesters themselves were exhausted and decided to stop the occupation. In Hungary, the protests unfolded in various ways, starting with demonstrations against proposed reforms in higher education in several stages starting in 2011, organizing forums and sit-ins in different faculties in Budapest (also joined by faculties in other cities, as well as the high school students’ network), with the peak being the massive street demonstrations in December 2012, followed by the occupation of an auditorium room at the ELTE Faculty of Humanities in February 2013, which eventually lasted for 44 days. The Polish resistance involved only
hundreds of participants, and focused on local issues at the University of Gdańsk – removing the fence from the university building, removing surveillance cameras from the library, and, partly inspired by activists involved in the ISM in some ways, expanded their focus to broader issues such as gender and the hierarchy at the university, while commercialization of education and other problems involved in the Bologna process were adapted to the agenda only later on. The Czech protests peaked in massive demonstrations (about 20,000 people altogether) in Brno and Prague, demonstrative acts in Brno, including occupying the tram and some other, rather scandalous artistic performances, and a one-week occupation of the university in Hradec Králové.

The elements of occupation, whether in the acts (Croatia, Hungary, the Czech Republic) or if not otherwise, in name – the Polish OKUPE (an acronym meaning Open Committee for the Liberation of Educational Spaces) – refer to international symbols and acts of protest, which connect these movements not only to Occupy, the Indignados, and the ISM movements, but also, and even more importantly, to each other. While many of these elements were adapted from outside, the claims of the students have remained local, and have looked beyond issues of education and called for solidarity – national and regional (as the HaHa has emphasized a need for Eastern European co-operation), or even cross-sectoral, an example of the latter being the failed co-operation between Croatian students and the unions.

**WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE SYSTEM**

It is hard to evaluate the protests in one consensual way, just as the participants themselves see the results from various standpoints. The Croatian government did eventually raise tuition fees, though they were more moderate than originally planned. The Polish students did achieve some results at the University of Gdańsk, but more importantly, the number of scholarships available to doctoral students has been raised. The Czech government did not introduce tuition fees but introduced registration fees instead. In Hungary, none of the six demand points were fully satisfied, however, they pushed for very important improvements – there has been an increase in the rates of publicly funded places in each faculty. Many questions remain open: can the occupations be seen as a success or is the fact that they left without concrete agreements a sign of failure? Were there enough participants in Poland and could the 7,000-8,000 participants in large university cities in the Czech protests be seen as a strong or weak statement? Not only the results, but the very functioning of these very networks evoke confusion, which is not surprising, as these movements do not fit into the dominant political discourses of their countries. The students find themselves in a political void (and therefore often in uninterpretable) spaces, entering university structures under unclear conditions, where they have to face increasing tuition fees and unfavorable and unpredictable constructions of student loans, just to be promised the dreadful statistics of unemployment rates (especially among young people), and more and more young people are forced to look for opportunities abroad. At the same time, the traditional structures of students’ self-governments have failed in their main function – communication and the representation of interests. Their governments see them as political opponents (or openly accuse them of being “parasites”), while the opposition tries to hijack them for their political goals and push them to either side of the barricade, thus generating multiple conflict zones. The student movements, however, do not fit into the “old,” post-socialist cleavages, and just like their participants, they belong to a new, politically-engaged generation, that has brought with it a new understanding of politics and participation; they can stand up again, and certainly cannot be neglected.

The author is a Hungarian cultural anthropologist writing her dissertation on post-socialist urban movements.
FILLING IN THE NICHE.
POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT AND THE CONCEPT OF SOLIDARITY.
The Populist Radical Right (PRR) in Europe, which is openly euroskeptic or euro-rejectionist and based on a nativist ideology ("Our people first!"), is perceived as a constant and permanent threat to European cohesion and solidarity, one of the EU’s driving concepts. Upon closer scrutiny, in this era of crisis when “solidarity” has been abandoned by domestic and European politicians, that same solidarity appears to be key to the persistence and potential of PRR’s future success.

**RATIONALE BEHIND POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT SUCCESS**

Populist right radicals’ re-activation in the 1980s and 1990s was proceeded by the oil crises, the eventual collapse of the social-democratic welfare dream, and enabled by a general shift in social cleavages as well as the deterioration of “traditional politics.” By the turn of the 21st century, it had become clear that many of these parties are here to stay. Numerous scholars and publicists reflected on the question: what led to the success of the populist radicals?

To get a full picture we need to carefully look at both sides of the coin – as academic research on that topic distinguishes between demand-side explanations and supply-side ones. In both cases, several crucial values and principles of liberal democracy have been redefined by PRR leaders and successfully exploited in electoral competition. One of these is “solidarity.”

Demand-side factors behind PRR’s success concern voters, supporters, and the issues fueling their grievances. What happens in social stratification, economics, and politics that encourage people to back PRR?

Research concerning social structure underlines that the most fertile ground for PRR is built on the domination of blue-collar lower-middle class, young, male workers and entrepreneurs who, statistically, are the most probable PRR supporters. When it comes to economics, the frequently given answer is increasing unemployment and high immigration rates. In politics, what vents this grievance are general distrust or disenchantment with mainstream politics, which in the eyes of society is ineffective or otherwise fails to meet demands.

In other words, the contemporary Europe that experienced the repercussions of the 2008 crisis became extremely fertile ground for PRR sentiments, at least when it comes to potential electorates; however, electoral results do not support this thesis. In the last few years, voting trends have been more than ambiguous.

The other side of the coin is missing – PRR’s fate in parliaments is also shaped by supply-side factors that focus on the political or institutional contexts of these parties, equivalent to how mainstream parties, media, and the international environment facilitate or hinder their status. Generally speaking, what matters most is electoral laws and strategies adopted by other political parties and/or media (i.e., the most favorable for the new entrants with multiple-seat voting districts and no thresholds, with major parties open to cooperation with the radicals in the government).

The last bastion is strategies towards radicals performed by other actors: parties, courts, etc. These vary from adaptation (Austria, Slovakia, Poland, Switzerland, and Hungary) and fractionalization to complete isolation (cordon sanitaire in Flanders, Belgium, or Sweden).

Taken all together, not only popular grievances but also the stance taken by the mainstream remain crucial in shaping PRR’s success so far. The question remains: does PRR still need mainstream politics in order to expand?

The new wave of radicalism is something we are experiencing here and now as a result of the crisis started in 2008, which burst not only the housing bubble but also a political one.

Many accounts in both academia and the media warn of the growing influence of radical right parties, but until now analyses of the direct effects on parties, policies, and societies show limited successes of the far right. As Cass Mudde concludes: “The effects are largely limited to the broader immigration issue, and even here PRRPs should be seen as catalysts rather than initiators, who are neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the introduction of stricter immigration policies.” (Mudde 2013: 1). Shall this “limitation to immigration issue” be read as a PRR weakness? This leads us back to the question of “solidarity” as populist right radicals’ modus operandi. That
which at first glance seems irrational is exploited on a regular basis in the operating practice of these parties and organizations, and should be considered the main factor attracting the demand-side (supporters), as well as weakening the supply-side (state institutions).

**Nativism – Solidarity with “Our People”**.
The Populist Radical Right in Europe is a product and an agent of structural changes in European societies. Specifically defined “solidarity” can be seen as the ideological core of these organizations, consisting of an anti-establishment stance and nativism. It needs to be underlined that the “solidarity” concept we have discussed here contradicts its European understanding. It is based on ethnocentrism, in which demands of favored status for a native (“own,” “pure”) population are mixed with xenophobia. One of the most direct visualizations of this concept was used in Switzerland during the electoral campaign of 2008. The PRR Swiss People’s Party campaigned with posters on which one black sheep was being literally kicked out of a herd of white ones. The poster has been re-used by its German counterpart – the NPD.

This topic stands out in their agenda and overshadows European discourse on immigration quotas, asylum, integration requirements, and citizenship laws (van Spanje 2010). The effects are two-fold. In Denmark, the Netherlands, and Italy these parties rose by filling a niche in political discourse and pursuing restrictions in immigration policies. After taking on the tough-on-immigration agenda, the Swiss People’s Party has remained on the Swiss Federal Council and gained an extra seat. Even when not in power the populist right still strongly influences the public discourse on immigration. That is the case in France, where politicians like Sarkozy integrated elements of their discourse (i.e., a presidential talk in 2007) and Martin Schain observed that: “Front National presence resulted in re-definition of the issue of immigration in national politics, from a labor market problem, to a problem of integration and national identity, to problems of education, housing, law and order, and citizenship” (Schain 2008: 283). This results in chauvinism when it comes to welfare...
In general, they call for “solidarity” with an exclusive group of citizens, for national (i.e., citizens only) preference in social benefits and employment.

Central and Eastern European cases, which differ in terms of cultural heterogeneity, do not differ much when it comes to the rationale behind them: an ethnically pure population in the eyes of radicals is faced by non-native elements like historical minorities (Jews), contemporary ethnic minorities (Roma people), or inhabitants of non-Caucasian origin and deserves protection: therefore, the concept of “solidarity with our people” is being used again.

**ESCAPING THE BOX**

Three decades of populist radical right parties in Europe did not end in the demise of liberal democracies, nor stop post-communist ones from integration with EU structures. Indeed, *nomen est omen*, radical scenarios would be the best indicators of the direct influence of the radical right’s vision of “solidarity”. Direct effects, however, are also accompanied by indirect ones, and here arises the question of bridging the gap in solidarity left by mainstream politics. It refers to the disillusionment with politicians and politics as a whole, especially among young generations.

We can observe in recent years that some of the successful PRRP’s have grown up. They have learned from their mistakes and have often gained more experience at the sub-national level, while cooperating in the European Parliament or organizing international meetings and workshops.

As a result, radical right organizations are thinking “out of the box” and becoming more sophisticated. This is a case of BZÖ in Austria (the heir of Haider’s FPÖ), the Freedom Party in the Netherlands (successor of the Pim Fortuyn List), Jobbik in Hungary, and the National Movement in Poland. The channels of influence become diverted and political parties surrounded by affiliated organizations better rooted, especially in the young groups of society. And this is where the idea of solidarity pops up again. We see the “evaluation of the context by separating the radical right from the other political parties and political system as a whole.” (Williams 2006: 41) In other words, the National Movement is consistently presented by its leaders as a social, grassroots movement organized and developed at different levels, and embracing different forms. The NM’s leader Winnicki’s new vision is “to build the social movement that mobilizes the nation, organizes it and overthrows the Round-Table Republic.” (Winnicki 2013a) This is a case of the innovative strategy of the radical right altering the political party type of activism. Indeed, since its inception, the NM’s strategy is to work on the ground and utilize existing local resources.

In the case of successor organisations, the concept of internal solidarity stands up. Organizations that are centralized and led by charismatic leaders build structures on the sense of group alienation on the one hand and internal loyalty on the other. What sympathizers are offered is a peculiar way of rebuilding solidarity and national/ethnic identity. One needs to realize that this vision is also inviting as it goes back to the 19th century and is a homogenous, nationally-oriented vision of communities. This, in an era of globalization and permanent change, could be perceived as the only possible ground for solidarity in practice.

The populist right, historically and contemporaneously, relies on a specifically understood “solidarity,” and gradually builds on that its social and political relevance. This is the case of “mature” democracies like France, the Netherlands, and Denmark, as well as the new or, as Huntington puts it, Third Wave Democracies (i.e., Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland). This notion is especially important in the (almost) post-crisis EU, where the *esprit de corps* urgently needs to be rethought, discussed, and implemented at both domestic and European levels.

The results of abandoning this element of public discourse and policy by domestic politicians and the EU institution are seen in Greece, where in the name of “solidarity” Golden Dawn activists violently “handle the immigration problem,” and step by step redefine one of the fundamental EU principles and benefit from it. Leaving this concept unclear, and questions of the future of “solidarity” unanswered, can cost societies, as well as Europe, more than expected.

The author is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science, Pedagogical University of Cracow.

### SHIFT IN THE RECENT ELECTORAL RESULTS OF THE PRR PARTIES IN THE EU  Percent of seats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IN PLUS</th>
<th>IN MINUS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUSTRIA</strong> — Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ)</td>
<td><strong>BELGIUM</strong> — Flemish Interest (FB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FINLAND</strong> — True Finns (PS)</td>
<td><strong>DENMARK</strong> — Danish People’s Party (DVP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FRANCE</strong> — National Front (FN)</td>
<td><strong>GREECE</strong> — Golden Dawn (XA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NORWAY</strong> — Progress Party (FRP)</td>
<td><strong>NETHERLANDS</strong> — Freedom Party (PVV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SWEDEN</strong> — Swedish Democrats (SD)</td>
<td><strong>SWITZERLAND</strong> — Swiss People’s Party (SVP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HUNGARY</strong> — Jobbik</td>
<td><strong>SLOVAKIA</strong> — Slovak National Party (SNS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
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</table>
Upon encountering homeless men we often ask “Why don't they go to shelters?” – which, of course, is not only about curiosity, but about blame. They must be strange creatures who, for some unknown reason, prefer to remain outside in the cold and dirt, who are to be blamed for their own homelessness. Instead, we should ask about the public interest. Namely, the right to housing for all. Criminalization and overcrowded shelters are both unacceptable answers to the plight of homeless people, because they are our fellow citizens and fellow human beings.

In what might have been the most important example of civil disobedience in a long time in Hungary, on 7 March 2013, about eighty citizens staged a non-violent sit-in at the headquarters of the governing party, Fidesz. The participants – with a variety of political affiliations, including the student movement, as well as the grassroots homeless advocacy group The City is for All – protested the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution of Hungary, which violated several fundamental liberties, and arguably clinched the annihilation of constitutional democracy. Among the several measures that the Constitutional Court had already found unconstitutional and the governing party then decided to write vengeancefully into the constitution (to circumvent judicial review), was the criminalization of homelessness.

Earlier, in its November 2012 decision, the Constitutional Court argued that “neither the removal of homeless people from public areas nor the incentive to avail themselves of the social care system shall be considered as a legitimate constitutional reason that could be the base of the criminalization of the homeless people’s living in public areas,” and declared that “homelessness is a social problem which the State must handle in the framework of the social administration and social care instead of punishment.” It was one of those rare occasions when one could be proud of being a citizen of Hungary: the highest court of the land finally stood beside the poorest members of the political community. This victory, however, did not last long: within days, the prime minister announced that the government would not keep to the decision because it is “impractical.”

The government did not yield to the criticism of its punitive approach to homelessness that had been put forward by a multitude of organizations, either: the ombudsperson, the most prestigious Hungarian Department of Social Policy, the Catholic Community of Sant'Egidio, and the national umbrella organization of homeless service providers all expressed
their criticism, as well as leading international human rights organizations and two commissioners of the U.N. The opposition to criminalization was led, however, by homeless people themselves, through The City Is for All: a grassroots advocacy group that prioritizes the recruitment and empowerment of people experiencing homelessness, based on the conviction that nothing is more powerful in countervailing the hegemonic representations of homeless people – another hopeless victims or a faceless urban nuisance – than homeless people reclaiming their citizenship by demanding their rights and justice.

Social justice certainly requires more than homeless people being able to use public space without harassment. The only end goal truly worth embracing by anyone who believes in the equal worth of citizens is not to make sleeping on the street legal again – but to make it unnecessary. What really matters is the right to not to live on the street.

These issues are intertwined, however. Criminalization presupposes the existence of mass homelessness, and people do not live on the street at their convenience: the root cause of homelessness is the unavailability of affordable housing, which is in turn a matter of distribution and social policy. Furthermore, punitive measures serve to reaffirm the legitimacy of a state – and its political ruling class – that continuously fails to fulfill even its most fundamental social and economic functions. The functional complement of a retracting welfare state is an over-expanding penal state. There is an inevitable trade-off; the minimal state of neoliberalism is a myth.

Causation goes the other way as well: punitive measures against homelessness are gravely harmful from the perspective of the right to housing. For one thing, the expulsion of homeless people from public space would hide one of the most dire and most obvious consequences of a capitalist system that makes the satisfaction of essential human needs – such as housing – conditional on purchasing power. We could continue to maintain a deeply unjust system without ever having to look its most destitute victims in the eye.

What is important here however is not only how the criminalization of homelessness aims to make the visible signs of homelessness disappear, but also how the related discourse makes homeless people appear. The discourse that aims to legitimize the criminalization of homelessness does at least as much long-term harm by blaming, stigmatizing, and dehumanizing homeless people, and by redefining homelessness as an issue of aesthetics and order by criminalizing itself through the harassment, fining, and incarceration of homeless citizens.

Criminalization can only be legitimized if the public is made to believe that homeless people remain homeless by choice. An important component of the exclusionary rhetoric on homelessness is the assumption that social policies are adequate and that homeless people will have somewhere else to go when they are expelled from public spaces.

People are homeless precisely because they do not have a home or private property where they can freely exist. In an imagined society in which all space is private, homeless people could not legally exist. Consequently, where there is no adequate homeless assistance system, excluding homeless people from public spaces would mean the prohibition of their existence, as everyone needs to be somewhere. No one argues in favor of this; even the proponents of criminalization are not so cynical as to suggest the mere removal of homeless people from public spaces as a solution to homelessness. On the contrary, there are frequent references to the availability of shelters in their rhetoric.

The claimed availability of adequate alternatives to homelessness leads us to ask, upon encountering homelessness, not “Why is it that they don’t have a home?”, but “Why aren’t they going to shelters?” – which, of course, is not only about curiosity, but about blame. The assertion of the availability of adequate alternatives thus cultivates the perception of homeless people as different from the general public (they must be strange creatures, who for some unknown reason, prefer to remain outside in the cold and dirt), who are to be blamed for their own homelessness.

The counterpart of blame is moral exclusion: in the rhetoric that attempts to legitimate the spatial exclusion of homeless people, the notions of “public” and “society” become restricted along with the scope of legitimate users of public spaces, and homeless people become excluded from these ideally universal categories, parallel to their exclusion from public spaces. Rough sleeping is often framed as an issue that inconveniences the “citizens” of a city, or simply the city – as if homeless people fell outside these categories.

This is the semantics of asymmetrical counter-concepts as elaborated by Reinhart Koselleck: the collective self-definition of the speaker is such that it excludes the other from the possibility of recognition. Political communities to which we owe duties of solidarity (such as nations) are “imagined communities” – a punitive approach to homelessness teaches us to imagine them without those who live without a home. Indeed, our little brothers and sisters, our children grow up in a society in which homelessness – this uttermost form of exclusion and disenfranchisement – appears as natural as the change of seasons. Sometimes it is disturbing of course, but so is rainy weather.

And if we think, with Rousseau, that the repugnance at seeing a fellow being suffer is essential to being human, then it is not the condition of those sleeping rough on the streets which is most profoundly inhumane, but ours, of the complicit and complacent majority insensitive to the suffering of fellow citizens.

Punitive measures gain legitimacy from the blame and moral exclusion of homeless people, which makes empathy, as well as a sense of community and responsibility – the very preconditions of egalitarian reforms necessary to eliminate homelessness – impossible to develop. In this way egalitarian social policies (along with the solidarity on which they are based) and punitive measures (along with the insensitivity to suffering of others in which they are rooted) are mutually exclusive.

Therefore, the stubborn insistence on the membership of homeless people in the community of citizens of equal worth and the defense of their basic civil rights can be an integral part of working toward the provision of the right to housing for all. In the end, it is for the same reason that criminalization and overcrowded shelters are both unacceptable answers to the plight of homeless people: because they are our fellow citizens and fellow human beings.

The author is a PhD candidate in political economy at the Central European University.
Václav Havel, in his famous essay “A Word about Words,” published in “The Power of the Powerless and Other Essays (1989),” noted: “In the beginning was the word. It is a miracle to which we owe the fact that we are human. But at the same time it is a pitfall and a test, a snare and a trial. More so, perhaps, than it appears to you who have enormous freedom of speech and might therefore assume that words are not so important. They are. They are important everywhere.”

Over the years Havel’s words have become subject to yet another interpretation, yielding their universal message to today’s Central and Eastern Europe, and essential to the global debate on human rights and the freedom of speech.

“WRITING FREEDOM”
IN CRACOW

A good excuse for a discussion about freedom of speech was provided by the extraordinary international conference entitled “Writing Freedom” organized in Cracow on 14-17 May by ICORN International Cities of Refuge Network and PEN International Writers-in-Prison Committee, the Cracow Municipality, the Cracow Festival Office and the Villa Decius Association. The conference was attended by almost 200 guests from 50 countries, among them writers, poets, journalists and bloggers. It was dedicated to persecuted artists, and also to those who have found a new home and a space where they can work freely, among them: Chenjerai Hove (Zimbabwe), Kareem Amer (Egypt), Mansur Rajih (Yemen), Dessale Bereket (Eritrea), Naeimeh Doostdar (Iran), Mezgebu Hailu Habtewold (Ethiopia), Abdullahi Muhiaeddin (Somalia), Easterine Kire Iralu (Nagaland), Najati Tayara (Syria), and Ali Amar (Morocco).

The conference was opened by Prof. Timothy Garton Ash with the lecture “Freedom of Speech in a Crowded World.” It revealed the many ways in which a word can be a miracle, but, as Havel said, may also be “a pitfall and a test, a snarl and a trial.” How are we going to withstand this trial? Are we, those living in young European democracies, able to manage the challenges to responsibility that we are facing today? Are the new cities of Central and Eastern Europe going to join in the discussion and take on the responsibility of protecting freedom, words, and artists...
whose writings put their lives in danger? Freedom is a gift, sometimes an “unfortunate gift,” which we are obliged to protect and care for.

CRACOW – CITY OF FREEDOM
It all began a few years ago with my discussion with Arne Ruth. I warned against the “revenge of memory” that might make it impossible for those who live in young democracies to build new, solid relations with their neighbours. A few days after our conversation was published by Eurozine, I was contacted by Helge Lunde, Director of ICORN International Cities of Refuge Network, who suggested that we cooperate. I thought of his e-mail for a few days before I wrote back. And this is how it all began. It took us over two years to persuade Cracow authorities to join in the network of cities supporting persecuted writers. Finally, we managed, thanks to the involvement of Magda Sroka and Robert Piaskowski. Together we were invincible! In 2011, the city of Cracow joined ICORN, and we began hosting exiled writers and human rights defenders and Cracow added a new gloss to the famous “Notes on Exile” by Czesław Miłosz.

Today, this has become a point of reference for citizens’ movements and non-governmental organisations from Central and Eastern Europe that work towards freedom of speech. Cracow, drawing on its many years of history and tradition, once again sent out a signal to Central and Eastern Europe that it is a city of freedom and takes responsibility for that, abroad as well as at home.

MARIA AND KAREEM
The first ICORN guest writer to arrive in Cracow was Maria Amelie – a young writer of Russian origin who migrated to Norway as a teenager with her immigrant parents. Having completed her secondary education and graduated from university in Norway, Maria asked for the right to legally remain in the country. Her request was denied and she wrote the book “Illegal Norwegian,” an attempt to draw the attention of public opinion to the situation of thousands of people who, like her, grew up in Norway, knew its culture and reality, and had nowhere to return to. The book caused a storm in the media and a famous debate on the situation of immigrants and refugees in Scandinavian countries. It became a bestseller and divided Norwegian society into those who supported her cause and those who did not. Imprisoned and then deported to Russia in December 2010, Maria Amelie arrived in Cracow in March 2011.

Kareem Amer was our second ICORN resident. He is 28 years old, studied law at the Al Azhar University in Alexandria and the Media in Cairo. He is a blogger and the first cyber-dissident in the world imprisoned twice for insulting Islam and President Mubarak. He served four years altogether, including high security imprisonment.

Kareem Amer was charged with atheism, defending women’s rights, criticising Islam-ridden universities, protesting against forced conscription, criticizing the authorities for prosecuting the Egyptian Christians in Alexandria, and for the events on Tahrir Square. His first blog posts were written in the Library of Alexandria. The first woman he defended was Ranja al-Baz, a beautiful Saudi presenter of a TV show who was beaten by her husband. He began writing when he saw her face covered with scars.

Kareem arrived in Cracow in January 2012. He looked nothing like a typical revolutionary with fiery enthusiasm, energy, and crowd-generating charisma. He did not feel safe, kept looking behind him, and spoke rarely and quietly. He did not ask for anything and accepted all he was offered. He could not walk properly; his upper teeth were gone. Years of imprisonment had left him with scars.

Slowly he got to know Cracow and fell in love with the city. “People are gentle here. They don’t kill birds,” he wrote in his blog. In his country birds can only be seen flying or caged indoors, in gardens or shops. One weekend he travelled to Zakopane to see the Polish mountains. His dramatic story circulated around town and the incredible happened. The local community, including a Catholic priest, started to collect money for the dental treatment of the Egyptian atheist. Kareem returned to Cracow with a beautiful smile.

He stayed in Cracow for a year, all the time busily writing, speaking at conferences, and lecturing. But time was passing quickly. What next? Where would he start a new life? He found a new family here in Cracow, but the city had to be a transitional place for him.

THE NEW POWER OF THE POWERLESS
Everyone has his or her own definitions of responsibility. Our responsibility toward Kareem is complex. It involves trust, belief, and hope. How can we not betray the promise of freedom and a safe life, or deny the idea of trust if we are as powerless as a small non-governmental organization? Is it ethical to invite a persecuted person to your own world, take his life into your hands, confront him with a new, foreign culture and say, “Now the future is yours. Go on!” Is this a responsible thing to do? Yes, it is. Because even though we are weak and powerless we keep on fighting all the time, we do and Kareem does. We are assisted by ICORN, the city’s authorities, and the local community. The imperative of freedom and solidarity makes us stronger. It convinces us that defending freedom of speech matters. “It matters everywhere.” The new “notes on exile” are written every day, and we should study them so that powerlessness becomes the common strength of all those who are not indifferent.

The Cracow conference made us aware of the fact that in many corners of the world, words are constantly tried, deceitfully muted, tested; that there is a large number of persecuted and imprisoned poets, writers, journalists, and bloggers whose voices are weakened and muffled. And it is our task to let them be heard and become of interest to the media, to the authorities and to ordinary people who live in free societies. Central and Eastern Europe should understand this mission particularly well as it is the Europe of Vaclav Havel, Czesław Miłosz, Milan Hodža, and György Konrád.

The text was prepared after “Writing Freedom” – The Biannual PEN International WIPC Conference & ICORN Network Meeting, Cracow 14–17 May 2013

Danuta Glondys is the Director of the Villa Decius Association.
Marcin Dyrz is a Polish literary critic and blogger.
Ondříček’s last film naturally raises questions about the Visegrad Four cooperating in the field of cinema, which seems most natural in view of their geographical proximity and similarity in historical experience, yet in practice surprisingly rarely becomes a reality.

Interestingly, it was not much better in socialist times, when these countries were part of the Eastern bloc and the internationalist friendship of the brotherly nations was officially decreed. In the late 1960s, Poles and Hungarians were planning a lavish historical super-production dealing with the hero of both nations – General Bem – but the project fell through as potentially politically dangerous, and the decision was made, as industry memory goes, in Moscow. Similarly, an attempt to make a movie about another common hero, Janosik/Ondraszek, this time a Polish-Slovak film, proved unsuccessful during the socialist era. In its way stood a dramatically different, as it turned out, perception of the main character on both sides of the Tatra border separating the potential co-producers.

Cooperation with the other film industry of the Czechoslovak state had a little more endurance. Its result was the comedy _Zadzwońcie do mojej żony/Co řekne žena?_, and Barnadovo was the location for Aleksander Ford’s _Border Street_. Of the latter film, Edward Zajicek, the unrivaled, unofficial chronicler of the history of Polish cinema, writes that the result of the collaboration between the director and Czechoslovak editor “was not only

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**MARcin ADAMczAK**

At the beginning of summer 2013, David Ondříček’s movie _In the Shadow_ came to Polish screens. The author of _Samotáři_, very popular here over a decade ago, this time presents a stylish film noir set in Stalinist Czechoslovakia. The Polish cinematographer Adam Sikora was director of photography, the Polish Film Institute the co-producer, two Polish regional film funds also supported the project, and some of the pictures of the film set in Prague were actually shot in Łódź.

Davide Ondříček’s last film naturally raises questions about the Visegrad Four cooperating in the field of cinema, which seems most natural in view of their geographical proximity and similarity in historical experience, yet in practice surprisingly rarely becomes a reality.

Interestingly, it was not much better in socialist times, when these countries were part of the Eastern bloc and the internationalist friendship of the brotherly nations was officially decreed. In the late 1960s, Poles and Hungarians were planning a lavish historical super-production dealing with the hero of both nations – General Bem – but the project fell through as potentially politically dangerous, and the decision was made, as industry memory goes, in Moscow. Similarly, an attempt to make a movie about another common hero, Janosik/Ondraszek, this time a Polish-Slovak film, proved unsuccessful during the socialist era. In its way stood a dramatically different, as it turned out, perception of the main character on both sides of the Tatra border separating the potential co-producers. Cooperation with the other film industry of the Czechoslovak state had a little more endurance. Its result was the comedy _Zadzwońcie do mojej żony/Co řekne žena?_, and Barnadovo was the location for Aleksander Ford’s _Border Street_. Of the latter film, Edward Zajicek, the unrivaled, unofficial chronicler of the history of Polish cinema, writes that the result of the collaboration between the director and Czechoslovak editor “was not only
an exemplary composition of picture and sound, but also the new Czechoslovak citizen” (Poza ekrarem 211). This cooperation was perhaps the most prolific of the four socialist co-production attempts of cinematography.

The situation has not changed much since the fall of the Iron Curtain. In fact, the only significant phenomenon was the considerable popularity of the Czech cinema in Poland, especially among the younger Polish audience. In Poland today there is a kind of Czech cinema complex, as one faring better than the Polish counterpart in the last two decades, just as the Czech footballers and hockey players fared much better than their counterparts from Poland. The reasons for these feelings of inferiority are manifold: the Czechs, at least for the first decade after the change of the regime, had far greater success on the international scene (headed by Oscar-winning Jan Svěrák’s Kolya and a nomination for Hřebejk for Divided We Fall) and in international distribution; an interesting group of filmmakers of the younger generation has come to the fore on the Vltava River, but especially envied was their spécialité de la maison: the light, cheerful, and unpretentious contemporary comedies, so beloved on the Vistula River, the admiration for which always went hand-in-hand with assertions of the severe lack of this type of production in Polish cinema. Hungarian cinema, on the other hand, almost completely disappeared from the sight of Polish audiences, and even Polish critics.

Interestingly, these feelings of inferiority to the Czechs are based on false premises and a gaze limited only to local conditions. As the market data shows, Czech films gained audiences in only three European countries: the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland, and all Visegrad cinematography faces the same basic problem, namely, the inability to enter into the international cinema circuit. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, films from Central and Eastern Europe accounted for less than one percent of the movies in cinemas in Western Europe and attracted less than one-tenth of a percent of viewers. The only guarantee of achieving wider distribution for a film from the region is success in one of the three major festivals (Cannes, Berlin, Venice) or in the Oscar race, but the films of the Visegrad countries did not see these too often in the last two decades.
Despite the popularity of Czech cinema on the Vistula and their decent artistic level, the two productions carried out in cooperation with the Czechs, with directors leading in popularity ratings, *The Brothers Karamazov* (2008, dir. Petr Zelenka, 40% Polish contribution to the budget) and the already mentioned *In the Shadow* (2012, dir. David Ondříček, 13% Polish contribution), have had very limited success both on the Vistula and the Vltava, yielding less at the box-office in both markets than earlier Czech productions by both directors. The impression is that these productions were considered remote by both national audiences; perhaps the incompatibility of the two films with a simple stereotype of Czech cinema operating in Poland also interfered with their reception. This is perhaps even more saddening, because co-production cooperation within the Visegrad community seems to be one of the best coping mechanisms for the medium-sized industries in the four countries. In the “global Hollywood” reality, productions from the U.S. rule supreme in the markets of all European countries (roughly 70 percent share of the individual national markets), and local output is viewed besides. In other words, Europeans, without exception, appreciate their native and the American cinema, and the productions of the Old Continent, using the industry terms “does not travel well.”

The joint potential of the four countries looks quite good. They have a strong tradition; at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century these, for at least a decade, belonged to the leading cinematographers in the world. Now, the economic situation of Polish cinema after years of turbulence and transition since 1989 has healed, and each year it produces well over thirty feature films, even up to forty. In the Czech Republic, twenty-five to thirty feature films are produced each year, and more than twenty were being produced in Hungary until the film industry fell into a financial crisis in the last few years. Slovaks make up to ten features each year. This adds up to almost a hundred films produced every year in the region, with strong public support and a market of 65 million potential viewers, and with good growth prospects (with citizens of the Visegrad countries statistically buying about one ticket per citizen per year; the European average is two tickets per year and progress in this direction, up until now rather slow, is expected). This potential is also defined by possibilities for combining the budgets of projects through co-production, and, it would seem, a reservoir of historically and culturally close audiences. Visions of the Visegrad cinema pooling resources up until now have turned out to be a pipe dream, because industries of the four countries apparently do not seem to see each other as any closer than most other European industries, and it is difficult to indicate an above-average number of co-productions, which would go numerically or qualitatively beyond projects undertaken jointly with Germany, Russia, or the UK.

Linda Beath, a specialist in co-financing, divides the Old Continent into five distinct geographical and cultural areas, with a specific yet slightly different approach to markets, budgets, and international cooperation. These areas are: industrial (central), Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, Southern European, and Eastern European (including the Visegrad countries, Baltic States, former Yugoslavia, Romania, and Bulgaria).

The Visegrad countries land in one “basket” but, first, Beath argues that the Polish film industry has been growing rapidly since the creation of the Polish Film Institute in 2005 and gradually coming to the specifics and financial levels of the central region, and, secondly, the issue of co-production is still, in her view, one of the biggest weaknesses of the Eastern European area (but, it must be added, a potential for future development). The model for the region certainly could be Scandinavia and institutional arrangements developed there. The Nordic countries traditionally maintain a strong position on the European film market, and what’s more they are very happy to co-produce with each other, creating a clearly distinct cinematic area. They cooperate with each other on such a regular
basis that they encourage local producers to be even more daring and go beyond the region. Scandinavia has both a regional institution that supports the production and distribution on the basis of public funds (Nordisk Film & TV Fund), as well as a private company with a century-old tradition of specializing in regional co-production, having strong local offices in the three countries and a partnership agreement with independent studios in Hollywood (Nordisk Film). Nordic countries also benefit from the expert support of researchers and practitioners who meet at conferences such as the Scandinavian Think Tank, willing to think about film in terms of the region, not just individual national industries.

Meanwhile, in the Visegrad countries, there are no funds or even legislation to support co-productions in the region. The modest history of joint ventures in recent years is rather rich in artistic and market failures rather than spectacular successes. Although model in financial terms, the co-production by all four countries of the region Janosik: True Story, directed by Agnieszka Holland and Kasia Adamik, proved a defeat on both counts, as was the Polish-Czech comedy Operation Danube by Jacek Glomb, rather awkwardly trying to present in a comic convention the intervention of the Warsaw Pact in 1968. Strawberry Wine by Dariusz Jablonski was funded in co-production with Slovakia, and Piotr Mularuk’s Yuma was co-produced with the Czech Republic. The effects of regional co-production projects undertaken without the participation of Poland seem to have fared slightly better. The Czech-Slovak Lidice (2011, dir. Peter Nikolaev) and the Slovak-Czech-Hungarian Bathory, with minority British and American input (2008, dir. Juraj Jakubisko), proved to be successful, at least in terms of audiences.

An interesting phenomenon for Central Europe is the so-called “runaway productions” by Hollywood studios, done wholly or partly outside the United States. The Czech Republic and Hungary were for years among the European leaders in this type of prestigious order for production services, and in this respect far outdoing Poland, lacking appropriate regulatory incentives. In this respect there is competition, not cooperation between the countries of the region. The Czech Republic has gained immense popularity as a great location, with well-trained crews and flexible employment rules already in the 1990s. Since then, Mission Impossible, Bourne Identity, Casino Royale, and The Chronicles of Narnia, among others, were filmed in and around Prague, and it has been called the “Hollywood of the East,” not without reason. In 2004, Hungary passed a law allowing filmmakers a twenty percent return on expenditures incurred in the country at the time of shooting, which was a very attractive incentive for foreign producers and led to a boom in the Hungarian film industry. Titles such as Munich, Hellboy II, Good Day to Die Hard and the flagship co-production project for the region, the Borgias, were shot in Budapest and its surroundings. The press discourse brought another impressive moniker, this time it was the “Hollywood on the Danube.”

It’s hard to conceal the rivalry aspect here. In 2008, an official report of the Czech Ministry of Culture presented in graphs a meaningful decline in foreign investment in Czech cinematography, correlated with Hungarian regulations and enhanced by a simulation of the investment, had the Czech Republic not lost it to its neighbor (Report on the Czech Cinematography 38-39). In 2010, a similar legal regulation granting a return of twenty percent of expenditure on production was passed on the Vltava. Nevertheless, it failed to recover the position of the only regional hegemon. This is best evidenced by the case of the movie Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy (2011) by Tomas Alfredson – a great adaptation of the classic spy novel by John le Carré. An important sequence of the novel is a Cold War secret mission in Prague and Brno. Meanwhile, in the cinema version, in contrast to the original and a previous BBC miniseries, said secret mission takes place in Budapest. As it turns out, the fight of the audiovisual industries for the prestigious and lucrative orders in production services is even able to change the paths of British spies.

It would be difficult then to speak of a wider-ranging regional cooperation in the Visegrad countries. Film industries in the four countries still operate in the national interest, and international co-operation is undertaken on a European scale, in a free process of selecting a partner for each project, in which regional community is not a decisive factor. Similarly, while global players perceive the geographical region as a whole, investments are made in the framework of national boundaries and regulations. HBO Europe has fifteen continental branches, including four in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania). Each of the units operates its own production projects and there are no permanent, regular forms of cooperation between them.

What emerges is a question common to all other attempts to integrate the region of Central and Eastern Europe: what benefits that go beyond those offered by cooperation with major countries of Western Europe can individual players gain by a common project? It seems that the only factor capable of the cinematic integration of the Visegrad countries would be based on Scandinavian institutional and financial solutions, in the form of a special fund for co-production in the region. But this, of course, does not come for free. The effectiveness of such measures, however, seems to be foreshown by the case of the Czech comedy entitled Polish Film (2012). The Czech director, Marek Najbrt, could not get the budget over on the Vltava. His prize of one hundred thousand dollars at the Off Plus Camera Festival in Cracow came to the rescue, and an additional 1 million zlotys to launch his next film was granted by the PFI, with the provision that he organize the shooting in Poland. Najbrt changed the scenario by introducing auto-the-matic elements into the script (trials and tribulations with the filming of the movie, and the need for it to be made in Poland), and the charming comedy moved its setting to Cracow, pretending to be Brno.

The streams of funding and institutional arrangement can bring about such funny effects and perhaps set a feeling of artificiality, yet it is difficult to point out another way to integrate Central European film industries. Without such solutions, the Four Visegrad Musketeers will compete separately to gain entry into international circulation and distribution to a wide audience and, on the other hand, to the notebooks and databases of Hollywood producers. In the latter case, it is impossible to hide the fact that the musketeers are not only fighting separately, but turning their swords upon each other.

Szabolcs Esztényi has, for nearly half a century, been actively co-creating the landscape of Polish contemporary music: as a virtuoso pianist (Kazimierz Serocki, Tomasz Sikorski and Pawel Szymanski, amongst others, entrusted him with the premiers of their work), an authority in the field of piano improvisation, a sought-after improvisor to the festival, to curb the “excesses of the avant-garde” . Luck would have it, this was also the year of the border conflict between the Soviet Union and China and based on folk influences. Except it was not the Soviet pseudo-folklore of “soldier’s songs” but authentic Hungarian traditional music, especially its most interesting “borderland” variety, steeped in the influence of Moldova, Transylvania, and the Balkans.

Kodály’s contribution to Hungarian music education, in particular universal music education, was also invaluable. The introduction of his method to schools has resulted in the development of the phenomenal movement of amateur choirs. Every Hungarian child has learned to sing, and the best choirs would perform at prestigious festivals and make radio recordings.

Returning to 1956, the change in Hungarian culture was not as revolutionary as in Poland. Bananas and citrus fruit appeared on the fridges, and in coffee shops, and then the radio started playing jazz. Initially it was Dixieland, often in a disguised form, but in the sixties modern jazz, even the avant-garde, became the norm. Then there came a very strong Hungarian improvisational group. Only a decade earlier my attempt to follow Oscar Peterson was met with repression at the conservatory.

What did the exclusive status of the “Warsaw Autumn” stem from? Was it this privilege of “the greatest nation in the Eastern Bloc” of which you speak? Or maybe a safety valve and propaganda showcase for the region?

Only in part. We must not forget the actions of specific individuals, prominent animators of culture, such as Józef Patkowski – the founder of the Experimental Studio of the Polish Radio and longtime member of the Program Council of the “Warsaw Autumn.” In 1969, the Soviets wanted to send their commissioner to the festival, to curb the “excesses of the avant-garde.” Luck would have it, this was also the year of the border conflict between the Soviet Union and China on the Ussuri River. So, Patkowski came up with the idea of inviting traditional the

What was the perception of your move to Poland by Hungarians and Hungarian musical circles?

In 1961, I was accepted to study in Warsaw. From then I visited Hungary two to three times a year, mainly in order to see my parents. Besides that, I was not regarded as “one of their own.” From the Hungarian point of view, the 1956 breakthrough in Poland was successful: there was no Soviet intervention, and the party was headed by Gomulka, who was released from prison.

Being the largest nation and economy in the Eastern Bloc was a point of privilege. But from the Hungarian point of view, Poland was also “the enemy from outside the Warsaw Pact.”

This situation was also reflected in cultural life. It was in Poland that the first gusts of freedom from Western Europe arose. There was the “Warsaw Autumn,” a real festival of contemporary music, and Józef Patkowski founded the Experimental Studio of the Polish Radio, one of the first centers of electroacoustic music in the world. I remember that the musicians from Hungary were a little jealous of me, as if I “made it” in Paris or London.

But wasn’t cultural life also liberalized in Hungary at the time?

To an incomparably lesser extent and at a much slower pace.

Before 1956, the situation in Hungary could have, paradoxically, been even better than that in Poland. To a large extent thanks to Zoltán Kodály, the famous composer, ethnographer, educator, and erudite. After the war he was Hungary’s undisputed “King of Music” and used this status to reconcile zidanovshchina with his own artistic explorations in an artistically credible way. Kodály’s music was also mostly tonal, transparent in the expressive layer and based on folk influences. Except it was not the Soviet pseudo-folklore of “soldier’s songs” but authentic Hungarian traditional music, especially its most interesting “borderland” variety, steeped in the influence of Moldova, Transylvania, and the Balkans.

What did liberalization in classical music circles perhaps even slower?

Well, György Ligeti – one of the most famous representatives of the European avant-garde – left Hungary in 1956 not without reason. The groundbreaking independent Budapest International Studio for New Music appeared only in the seventies, and the official radio electronic work center appeared a decade later.

For those Hungarians who were seeking new modes of expression, the “Warsaw Autumn” remained for a long time the most important, if not the only window, onto the world. In Warsaw, for the first time, they listened to electronic music, and learned the art of Cage and Stockhausen, banned in Hungary.

MICHAŁ MENDYK

ARS/LOOKING BACK CULTURAL MIGRATION

VISEGRAD INSIGHT 2 (4) | 2013
Chinese opera to the “Warsaw Autumn!” Of course, the Soviet delegation declined to show in protest, and so we were free of the commissioner.

In Hungary, music circles unfortunately lacked people with such cleverness, such a sense of politics and anticipation skills.

Since the “Warsaw Autumn” was such an important point of reference for new Hungarian music, has the “Polish school”, especially the sonorism of Penderecki, Serocki, and Szalonek, had any particular impact on the local art of composition? I would not overestimate its impact. Hungarians felt confident in folklore and its modalities for a long time. In the sixties there were some attempts in the field of atonality, rooted in the interval structuralism of Bartók. It was not until the emergence of the Budapest New Music Studio a decade later that the strong trend of today’s Hungarian music appeared, akin to the American minimalism of Philip Glass and Steve Reich. In Poland, such repetitious thinking was probably close to Tomasz Sikorski, and in part Zygmun Krauze. But in Hungary, it seemed natural and logical – it grew out of a Bartók rhythm tradition and a fascination with avant-garde jazz.

I have performed works at the “Warsaw Autumn” by composers from this circle: László Vidovszky, Zoltán Jeney, and László Sáry. And every time I was very impressed. In comparison, for example, to American minimalism, their music avoids cliché and shows surprising diversity and ingenuity, and a wealth of individual idioms.

A separate phenomenon, developing in parallel to this trend, is the work of György Kurtág. Because of his special position in Hungary, he is often compared to Lutosławski. But the relationship between the two composers can also be found at the level of musical language – very sophisticated and selective in its modernity, yet classically balanced.

Was this music well represented at the “Warsaw Autumn”? Definitely. As a performer, composer, and listener I have participated in this festival for several decades and I must admit that the repertoire commission always took a solid, interesting, and proportionate representation of music from all over the Eastern Bloc. And, at the same time, they carried out deep exploration, without regard for official recommendations, and kept inviting composers who often in their own countries were “stomped over.”

Let us go back to Hungary. How did the excellent tradition of music education develop after 1956? There was a flourishing of instrumentalists, especially the piano. Already in 1956, a whole generation of world-class pianists – György Cziffra, Andor Földes, Tamás Vásáry – emigrated to the West. Paradoxically, however, that brought some benefits to our culture. Their global success became the signal for the liberalization of musical life in Hungary. A foundation established by Cziffra allowed young Hungarian pianists to travel to the West and study with the master.

But positive trends also appeared in the country. In the early ’60s, an innovative teaching method was introduced based on the anticipation of emotional and physiological reactions of listeners. Earlier pianists indulged in the deep, uncontrollable experience of the music performed. Paradoxically, however, this often led to muscle blocks. The father of the new method, Lajos Hernádi, began to work on ways to enable the control of intellect over the emotions and body of the artist, and also a conscious – and somewhat perfidious – generation of specific emotional states in listeners. This approach teaches the pianist the economy of playing the instrument, but also psychological self-knowledge.

Hernádi’s heir was Pál Kados, who in turn has educated the world’s greats, Zoltán Kocsis and András Schiff.

And how would you assess the current situation of music culture in Hungary and in Poland? Frankly, I’m worried about the condition of Western culture in general. Postmodernity was undoubtedly an interesting line of thought, but it led to absurd conclusions. Fashionable relativistic gibberish is actually a manic dismantling of our cultural foundations. In music it manifests itself mainly in a joyful play on the styles of the past, devoid of meaning and discipline. This trend can be seen in Poland, Hungary, and many other countries. The cultural ties between the two national cultures have also weakened. Well, if all production, including art, is standardized, since everything can be bought and consumed on the spot, why look elsewhere?

The increase in conformity and loss of personal heroism leads to a sad and perverse reflection: perhaps the situation of global conflict, having to fight for one’s rights and beliefs, was more conducive to artists.

Translated by Łucja Męcińska

“And then the speaker produced hisses and crackles, then it burped, following this it had high hiccup and a finally roared, squealed and began to hiss again. And we – the old cuckoos gathered in the hall – listened in silence and concentration!” This is Poland’s first electronic music concert, which took place in 1958 at the “Warsaw Autumn”, reviewed by Jerzy Waldorf, one of the most popular Polish music critics.

Sixty-five years on, the “Autumn” is as respectable as an old lady, but still gets such backhanded compliments from more conservative commentators. In its lifetime, the festival raised generations: its children, but also their children and grandchildren. And not only East European audiences, for whom the Warsaw festival remained for several decades the only opportunity to listen live to the music of Cage, Stockhausen, Xenakis, and Schaeffer. It also had its artists, who have had as strong an impact on the face of contemporary classical music, but also film, or alternative genres.

The phenomenon of the classic of modernity, Witold Lutosławski, matured within the “Warsaw Autumn.” Here, too, rose the star of the great heretic of the avant-garde Krzysztof Penderecki and the hit-producing archaic of Henryk Mikolaj Górecki. In Warsaw, the whole world had the opportunity to see the original branches of the minimalism of Lithuania (Bronius Kutavičius), Estonia (Arvo Pärt), and Hungary. It paved the way to the west for the Czech postmodern Matín Smolka and Roman Berger who, beleaguered in Slovakia, found refuge here.

Today, the “Warsaw Autumn” is just a festival, one of many, but for a long time, it was a unique aesthetic asylum, a “musical Pewex,” and a living epoch in the history of modern music.

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1. Odra. Tygodnik Społeczno-Kulturalny, 1958, nr 42
2. Pewex (short for Przedsiębiorstwo Exportu Wewnętrznego – Internal Export Company) was a chain of hard currency shops in the People’s Republic of Poland. They sold otherwise unobtainable Western goods in exchange for Western currencies (Wikipedia).
JUST 18. Top Must-Attend Conferences in CE

ANNA WÓJCIK

The meeting of Bohemian, Polish, and Hungarian rulers in Visegrád in 1335 led to agreement on new commercial routes and gave a name of alliance of Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Today, regional summits, debates, and conferences gather decision-makers in overlapping fields such as politics, business, finance and academia. They vigorously discuss opportunities, as well as challenges, for societies and communities in global, regional and local perspective. Visegrad Insight presents a brief guide to brilliant speakers, inspirational keynotes, relevant debates and some quality networking in Central Europe.

DIPLOMATIC BATTLEFIELDS:
GLOBSEC BRATISLAVA GLOBAL SECURITY FORUM

When: mid-April
Where: Bratislava, Slovakia
Started in: 2006
Organizers: The Slovak Atlantic Commission (SAC)
Topics include: international security and world political perspectives
Focus on: European and Trans-Atlantic cooperation, Central Europe perspective
Rub Shoulders With: diplomats, foreign policy experts, politicians, think tanks
Trademarks: high-profile political event

PRIME MINISTERS’ QUARTET:
ANNUAL POLITICAL V4 SUMMITS OF PMS

When: spring
Where: V4 capitals
Organizers: chancelleries of PMs
Topics include: past, present and future of the V4
Focus on: cooperation in the framework of the Visegrad Four current PMs and most important politicians from Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary
Rub Shoulders With: participants include key security and foreign policy figures from both sides of the Atlantic
Trademarks: high-profile political event

PRINTED MATTERS: INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIRS IN THE REGION

When: spring and summer
Where: Warsaw, Cracow, Prague, Bratislava, Budapest
Organizers: local publishers and chambers of commerce
Topics include: panel discussions with domestic and foreign authors and literary critics
Rub Shoulders With: established and prospective writers, their publishers, and critics
Trademarks: various pleasures of texts

INDUSTRY PEOPLE SPEAK OUT: EUROPEAN ECONOMIC CONGRESS

When: May
Where: Katowice, Poland
Started in: 2010
Organizers: PTWP SA Group
Topics include: economic opportunities and challenges for the region
Focus on: Central European markets
Rub Shoulders With: CEOs, business and finance specialists, and politicians
Trademarks: initiated by Jerzy Buzek, former President of the European Parliament

TRANSATLANTIC TALKS: WROCLAW GLOBAL FORUM

When: June
Where: Wroclaw, Poland
Started in: 2010
Organizers: the Atlantic Council, the Municipality of Wroclaw
Topics include: trans-Atlantic, relations, democracy promotion, and security
Focus on: USA, Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East countries
Rub Shoulders With: diplomats, foreign affairs experts and politicians
Trademarks: The Atlantic Council’s Freedom Awards ceremony

RETHINKING THE CITY: RESITE FESTIVAL
INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL ABOUT COLLABORATIVE DESIGN PARTNERSHIPS FOR MORE LIVABLE CITIES.

When: June
Where: Prague, Czech Republic
Started in: 2011
Organizers: reSITE: Martin Barry, Osamu Okamura, Míša Sidorova and Yulia Yakushova
Topics include: how to make cities more livable
Focus on: urban projects from Mumbai to Copenhagen
Rub Shoulders With: municipal leaders, top urban planners and architects, real estate finance
Trademarks: workshops, design competitions, urban games and public space interventions

BACK TO SCHOOL: VISEGRAD ALUMNI SESSIONS

Annual meetings of the alumni of Visegrad Summer School

When: July
Where: Cracow, Poland
Started in: 2003
Organizers: Villa Decius
Topics include: transmitting knowledge and experience gained since graduating from Visegrad Summer School
Focus on: V4 countries
Rub Shoulders With: Researchers, journalists, social activists, young politicians
Trademarks: the diversity of career paths and success of former Visegrad Summer School participants

MAGIC MOUNTAIN: ECONOMIC FORUM IN KRYNICA

When: first half of September
Where: Krynica-Zdrój, resort in Southern Poland
Started in: 1991
Organizers: The Eastern Institute
Topics include: energy, media, banking, and finance
Focus on: Eastern Partnership countries, USA and China
Rub Shoulders With: CEOs and politicians
Trademarks: referred to as “Polish Carpathian Davos”

FOR A BETTER WORLD: FORUM 2000

When: mid-September
Where: Prague, Czech Republic
Started in: 1996
Organizers: initiated by the late Czech President Václav Havel, Japanese philanthropist Yohei Sasakawa, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel.
Topics include: human rights and democracy promotion, “bringing philosophy into action”
Focus on: societies in transition
Rub Shoulders With: human rights activists, spiritual, intellectual and political leaders
Trademarks: participants include prominent thinkers and Nobel Peace Prize laureates
EASTERN PROMISES: WARSAW EASTERN EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

WHERE: Warsaw, Poland
WHEN: July
ORGANIZERS: The Centre for East European Studies, University of Warsaw
TOPICS INCLUDE: the experience of political and social transformation, shared history of the region
FOCUS ON: Central and Eastern Europe
RUB SHOULDERS WITH: distinguished academics from universities all across Central and Eastern Europe
TRADEMARK: Poles, Ukrainians and Russians at roundtable

SEASIDE BUSINESS: EFNI EUROPEAN FORUM FOR NEW IDEAS

WHERE: Sopot, resort on the Polish Baltic Sea coastline
WHEN: second half of September
STARTED IN: 2011
ORGANIZERS: Lewiatan Confederation and BUSINESSEUROPE
TOPICS INCLUDE: economic, political and social future of Europe
FOCUS ON: European Union and other parts of the continent
RUB SHOULDERS WITH: representatives of business communities, academics, and politicians
TRADEMARK: Presentation of the Report by Polish Confederation

CITIZENS AND MODERNIZATION: CIVIC CONGRESSES

WHERE: national congress in Warsaw, local Pomeranian congress in Gdańsk, Poland
WHEN: October, May, respectively
STARTED IN: 2005
ORGANIZERS: Instytut Badań nad Godspardką Rynkową (Institute for Market Economy Research think tank)
TOPICS INCLUDE: modernization, development, civic society
FOCUS ON: how to pave the future
RUB SHOULDERS WITH: scientists, academics, industry people, politicians

PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS: CENTRAL EUROPEAN FORUM

WHERE: Bratislava, Slovakia
WHEN: November
STARTED IN: 2009
ORGANIZERS: Projekt Fórum, started by intellectuals such as Adam Michnik, Martin Bútora, Marta and Milan Simecka, and Rudolf Chmel
TOPICS INCLUDE: democracy, human rights, solidarity
FOCUS ON: European intellectual community, common heritage and future
RUB SHOULDERS WITH: writers, academics, public intellectuals from both sides of the former Iron Curtain
TRADEMARK: strengthening intellectual discourse in Europe

THE PAST IS ANOTHER COUNTRY: GENEALOGIES OF MEMORY CONFERENCES

WHERE: Warsaw, Poland
WHEN: November
STARTED IN: 2011
ORGANIZERS: European Network of Remembrance and Solidarity
TOPICS INCLUDE: state of memory studies in Europe and beyond collective and individual memory of different nations
FOCUS ON: promotion of Central and Eastern European memory studies
RUB SHOULDERS WITH: researchers in social science from all over the world
TRADEMARK: Central European University

CONFERENCE FRANCHISE: TEDx GDANSK, WARSAW, PRAGUE, DANUBIA

WHERE: TEDx Gdańsk, Warsaw, Prague, Danubia
WHEN: varies in every country, events are organized independently
TOPICS INCLUDE: technology and social change
FOCUS ON: more and more blurred boundary of digital world and reality
RUB SHOULDERS WITH: digerati, i.e. tech-savvy elites and social activists
TRADEMARK: brilliant presentations based on TED Talk's formula

LOOKING EAST: CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP SUMMITS

WHERE: Brussels, Berlin, Poznan, respectively, and Prague, Warsaw
STARTED IN: 2009
ORGANIZERS: European Commission / European External Action Service
TOPICS INCLUDE: democracy, good governance and stability, economic integration, energy security
FOCUS ON: promotion of the development of civil society in the EU partner countries
RUB SHOULDERS WITH: representatives of grass-roots organisations, trade unions, employers’ organisations, NGOs, think-tanks
TRADEMARK: to encourage various stakeholders to have interest in Eastern Partnership programme

AN DER SCHÖNEN BLAUEN DONAU: DANUBE REGION CONFERENCES

WHERE: various locations of Danube Region countries
WHEN: all year
STARTED IN: 2010
ORGANIZERS: European Commission in the framework of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)
TOPICS INCLUDE: mobility, energy security, environmental issues, culture and tourism
FOCUS ON: Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia
RUB SHOULDERS WITH: experts in respective fields from Danube Region countries

VISITING SCHOLARS: CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY CONFERENCES AND DEBATES

WHERE: Budapest, Hungary
WHEN: all year
STARTED IN: 1991
ORGANIZERS: Central European University
TOPICS INCLUDE: all range of topics
FOCUS ON: promoting distinctive Central European perspective
RUB SHOULDERS WITH: academics in fields such as social sciences, humanities, law, public policy, business management, environmental science, and mathematics
TRADEMARK: Central European hub of innovation and opinion-making

The author is Assistant Editor of Visegrad Insight.

A highly subjective guide how to pack your carry-on suitcase to be perfectly put together in Kyiv, Sopot and, why not, also in Davos. Every handbook recommends that you take your business cards. Here you can read about less obvious gadgets, pointers and new travel habits you should learn. For conference veterans.

The Look: Business is not done in tailored suits or cocktail dresses between conference pannels. Swimming shorts, trainers, and a pair of comfortable trousers will surely increase your confidence. The Glow: In Central Europe we like to end conversations in the wee hours and strongly believe that best ideas are born just before sunrise. Many thanks to Maria Paczko.
Central Europe is facing an opportunity afforded by the next, totally new wave of modernization that entails the mass use of the Internet and innovations. For years, it has endeavored to catch up to the West following external guidelines. Today, there are no off-the-shelf recipes, as all countries shape their own futures on their own. This is an opportunity for Central Europe to transcend its own history, provided that the new tech revolution overcomes the digital divide and everyone is included.
Today is already tomorrow. This has been noted by William Gibson, cyberpunk author and one of the most outstanding visionaries in the field of digital reality. In 1984, he published Neuromancer, a book on technologically inundated dystopia in which he popularized the term cyberspace and the dilemmas we later followed in the film Matrix. He wrote his novels using the same typewriter as Hemingway when the web was still merely an experimental inter-university network. Nevertheless, in those times he managed to create a veritable to describe complicated, yet to-be-declared phenomena. That was a measure of innovation, the product of a free and totally unfettered imagination.

In those times, when bestsellers defining the world of the future as ripe with hope and new challenges were being written elsewhere, Central European authors grappled with history and censorship. Even when they wrote about the future, they had to confront the past. While Americans were engrossed with enjoying the spoils of progress, in this region we actively remembered how progress served to authenticate crime against mankind. This part of the world’s bloody and unjust history has sparked the drive toward freedom for centuries. Intellectuals’ moral treatises were needed. They inspired their readers to change themselves and to improve the world, to open themselves up to experiencing freedom. We availed ourselves of the opportunity of experiencing freedom, though this did not apply to everyone in every venue. The ones who did so to the greatest extent were educated, were of open mind and were ready to take risks. In a word, they were the middle class. What can be done to enable everyone to reap the benefits?

William Gibson is currently a regular commentator on technological trends and the changes taking place in conjunction with them around the world. He anticipated the repercussions of the web being disseminated to a post-industrial general public and the twilight of nation-states and utterly unrestricted surveillance. In turn, he recently framed a dilemma that is surprisingly familiar to us: he claims that today is already tomorrow, though this does not apply to everyone, and not to an equivalent extent. How can this be changed?

Tomorrow unquestionably means new technologies, changes in manufacturing structures, the rising significance of urban communities, the downfall of paper-based bureaucracy, the upsurge of new, yet-to-be-defined powers, and the growth, progress, fast pace, and the new challenges that accompany them. Central Europe is finally catching up with the rest of the world and may even leapfrog to the front of the pack. During its first decade of freedom it bolstered its geopolitical position. It devoted the subsequent decade to a race relating to the speed of production and leveling the playing field in various regions. The finish line of this road rally is still a long way away but an entirely new possibility has emerged on the horizon. With a web economy, Central Europe could move to the front of the pack, as this road race has radically leveled the playing field from the starting shot.

Technological progress has altered the world beyond recognition. Consequently, the path of modernization has changed. Progress occurs spontaneously, accruing benefit to all. We all know how Polish drivers drive. Janosik is a smartphone application that allows drivers to receive warnings about photo radar and police vehicles on the road by acting like an enormous data cloud. The police explicitly encourage people to use this application as it makes roads safer. Absolutely no one, including the application’s designers or the police, expected such an outcome.

This new modernization is a change that is being brought about through undecreed political will. The world of tomorrow is at our fingertips today. Acceleration and alteration. The downfall of vintage monopolies and the emergence of new ones. Above all, the possibility of implementing changes in civilization whereby all individuals have a level playing field on which to compete from the outset, for the web does not tolerate asymmetry in relationships just as it does not condone censorship or stagnation.

What can be done so that this “tomorrow” may really apply to all? For it to be within everyone’s grasp? Here, now, with lightning speed, for Europeans to the same extent as for Americans. For rural residents and urban dwellers at the same price and the same level of quality? For each and every one of us to have truly unfettered access to the blessings of tomorrow. For this ‘tomorrow’ to be available to all on equal terms. Is it really plausible to be free if you desist from partaking in the progress taking place before your very own eyes? Ultimately, who benefits, who is already profiting today from “tomorrow”?

The Internet, like every manifestation of modernization, possesses enormous potential. It fosters growth available to all. The experience of freedom has taught us that without instruments and without strong institutions to guarantee freedom, the liberty once professed is fake. Without these guarantees the world turns into a jungle navigable only to the fittest. The same is true of progress and the web. Without guaranteeing access to the freedom afforded by the web, the fittest will dominate the meekest. High-tech people dictate terms to people who are behind the times, which is how new kinds of inequality, social division, and sub-class arise. At its core, the future of democracy hinges on whether we are capable of engaging everyone in this process. Let’s take a look at two examples.

The railways relatively recently introduced the possibility of buying tickets via the web, allowing urban residents, who live in areas where the Internet is widely available, to save time and thus money. Outside cities, where the Internet is less available, such functionality accrues even more benefits, but not to all. Elderly and less affluent persons who are unable to use the Internet, and thus to make web payments, have to spend considerably more time organizing their travels. As a consequence, the obstacles some people face mount. There are digitally excluded persons in our midst and their number is not inconsequential. Digital backwardness does not merely fail to produce growth, in today’s world it means that we are penalized. The accountability for altering this rests on our shoulders.

Another example: how are new technologies leveling the playing field in Central Europe? We are all aware of the verve Central European cities have demonstrated in their efforts to renew historical monuments, streets, and edifices. Nowhere else in the world are people so zealously engaged in reconstructing the tangible past. The drawback is that historical obstacles are frequently reproduced as an offspring of this zeal in parallel with beauty. Take stairs and curbs for instance: beautiful, sturdy, tall, and unreachable as an inaccessible maze.
to those of us who face mobility-related challenges. How are new technologies altering the face of these difficulties? A Budapest-domiciled association of handicapped people is teaching its members how to use Street View, virtual pictures at street level. That way they can plan their trips ahead of time and bypass obstacles. The Internet helps them participate in real life by creating equal opportunities.

This process therefore applies to individuals and entire groups, nations, and regions. Without access to tools to guarantee freedom we will not be able to engage in creativity, or make our creativity available to the world to the same extent as for those who have web access. Nor do we have access to the wealth of material available to the rest of the world. Whether desirable or not, the Internet is having an impact on economic development and already contributing to lower prices. It will continue to so to an ever-greater degree. Moreover, whenever it is generally available, it fosters democratization.

In their book entitled Freakonomics, Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner explicated, using the radio and the Internet as examples, how progress in communication is capable of eradicating asymmetry and dominant relationships, the heritage of the past. What is striking is that they juxtaposed the history of radical decline in life insurance rates and the causes for the downfall of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The point of connection between these two stories is that quality of life improved thanks to the free flow of information generally available to the public opinion, first through the radio, and subsequently, the Internet.

First, in the 1940s, Stetson Kennedy tapped into the knowledge gained over many decades concerning an ever more threatening and radical racist movement, which took its strength from conspiracy-like methods: passwords, secret meetings, and covert identities. Everyone knew that the KKK existed, and that it not only persecuted people, but also allowed its members to earn decent money thanks to secret connections and informal arrangements. Its mystery and the uncertainty accompanying its presence were what caused it to be even more powerful. Americans who were unaware of the facts were willing to assume that KKK’s tentacles were ubiquitous, with transcended racial boundaries punished by lynchings akin to those that took place in the 19th century. Meanwhile, Kennedy resolved to publish the amassed body of knowledge in what was an innovative approach at that time: through the radio. He delivered his reports to the editorial board of the Washington Merry-Go-Round program for adults and Adventures of Superman for children.

The mass dissemination of information concerning the KKK’s odd codes, pretentious nomenclature, and curious habits simply ridiculed this organization, which lost credibility and members as the radio programs became more popular. When information flows freely and is generally available, public opinion proves to be reasonable and capable of making wise and democratic choices.

The next example is considerably more straightforward. It turned out that in the 1990s life insurance rates plunged radically. This type of insurance involved remitting a certain amount of money to provide insurance to loved ones in the event of death. The only differentiating factor was the price of insurance. Its price plummeted when the first price comparison sites of insurance proposals appeared. As statistics showed, consumers saved a billion dollars a year as a result of this information becoming widespread.

These two stories are unexpectedly connected to Central Europe. The experience of breaking taboos, scrutinizing secret organizations, and unearthing the truth, was a story of removing the shackles of oppression and the self-censorship of communism up to the moment of the advent of free media. Contrary to the U.S., we did not have to wait fifty years for the Internet to produce another democratic revolution similar to the one described by Levitt and Dubner. Monopolies must reckon with the competition released by wide access to information. Corruption is less profitable. One example involves data for court bailiff auctions, which recently became a matter of public knowledge.

It was a public secret that the families and friends of court bailiffs were the major beneficiaries of auctions, which were previously undisclosed, as they were not compelled to announce what they were auctioning off on the Internet and sold debt-encumbered assets for a fraction of their value. The current policy hinders the sale of indebted assets for nothing. The effective flow of information builds confidence in public institutions. Confidence has long been a commodity in shortage and without it, it is hard to stimulate creativity and innovativeness.

As psychologists dealing with creativity have observed, a lack of self-assuredness is the gravest adversary of innovation.

This sentiment is not particularly alien to Central Europe, which was formed from feelings of exclusion and shortage. Milan Kundera brought this to life in his article in 1983, not so long ago, less than ten years before the Visegrad Group was formed. He asserted that everything is the same in our part of the world as in the West, albeit a bit different, because it was excluded from circulation and full-fledged access to global culture.

In a mere twenty-five years, Central Europe overcame the obstacles Kundera described. We freed ourselves and we acceded to Europe on equal terms. But the world did not wait for us. It went forward. Today, not just writers and artists insist on greater freedom to create and share with the world. We all want equal rights to participate in global manufacturing, since everyone appreciates that this offers a real opportunity for development. This is what every student, bibliophile, movie, and music lover wants. There is nothing odd in every entrepreneur/manufacturer/author wanting the same thing too. This is what everyone who has a new idea and the energy to implement it wants.

Meanwhile, Rafal Brzoska, the founder of one of Poland’s most interesting startups called InPost, which is competing for its share of the UK package delivery market with Amazon.com, describes the climate for innovation in this region in the following way:

The climate is poor. Even though we have a hefty number of innovations, only a select few manage to make a breakthrough. I don’t know whether that is a result of a lack of capital, entrepreneurial ambition or insufficient business experience. It is equally possible that this might be a combination of all these factors. One thing is certain: Poles have an increasing number of truly innovative and interesting products capable of being successful internationally. Unfortunately, governments, regardless of the political fraction they represent, continue to reward us with unintelligible and conservative regulations that hinder the natural drive toward innovativeness and attaining success. We are operating in an extremely non- conducive climate. If someone succeeds, I consider this success four times larger than for a German company, which operates in a wonderful, investment, export-focused climate”. – biznes.onet.pl
Statistics confirm his words as they explicitly indicate that innovation is not the region’s strong suit. According to the EU report entitled *Industrial Innovation: Innovation Union Scoreboard 2013*, Poland is in a group of the least innovative countries. Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic are considered to be moderately innovative after the top countries, which are leaders or show an average level of innovation. The only cities listed in the top 100 innovative cities in terms of their economies and social solutions are Prague (55th place in the *Innovation Cities Global Index*) and Budapest (58th place). Bratislava, Brno, Gdansk, and Warsaw are unclassified in the middle of the global index, which incorporates 445 cities.

This may change rapidly. Growth is taking place so fast and independently on the Internet that we may fail to perceive that our world has changed. As the InPost example illustrates, it is sometimes the case that the world has already changed. Central Europe is the first place in the world where the first wholly web-based bank succeeded. In the 1990s, such banks were established in parallel in the UK but they quickly went under. This region is one of the larger exporters of computer games. The new Silicon Valley could be established here on the backbone of the Grafton patent, which is already worth billions of dollars and which represents the future of computer subassemblies.

Let’s also take a look at an example from the media. Tomáš Bella, the head of the Slovak company Piano Media, a firm that supplies user-friendly mechanisms to subscribe to web newspapers for a fee, said last year in London: “In several years people will evaluate our times as an age when an incredibly large number of things took place when a single editor, programmer or publisher could unilaterally affect and change the course of media history.” – guardian.co.uk. At present, the V4 economies do not yet belong to the group of innovative economies, but strengthening innovativeness is their sole path to economic growth for the future. The Czechs are blazing this path. According to *Global IT Report 2013*, they are constantly improving their position in rankings relating to the usage and availability of web technologies. The first signs of upcoming change are already visible today. Innovative undertakings have been established in the Visegrad Group and are capturing the world, such as the Polish Ivona and Audioteka.pl, the Hungarian Prezi.com, the Czech Socialbakers, and the Slovakian Piano Media. The state does not have to support their operations actively; it should only eradicate the barriers to entrepreneurial growth so that new economic undertakings can be established and grow their scale of business.

The challenges facing the nations in the region are the same as the ones facing all other nations from the Indian to the Atlantic Oceans. The share played by new technologies and communication tools in producing the wealth of nations is rising, with the most developed economies at the forefront. They are growing on the wave of modernization, a totally new kind of modernization that does not require the construction of large-scale factories and road networks, but is predicated on ingenuity and individual entrepreneurship. However, the objective is not just wealth measured by the strength of GDP but also simply to eliminate exclusion or extreme poverty. Let’s consider what the world would look like without the currently ubiquitous auction portals and knowledge available on the Internet. Geography is unforgiving. People who are geographically remote have always had a worse run of things. Now? Not necessarily. By eliminating the distance barrier, small-scale manufacturers and salespeople from small communities can earn their keep to secure their own futures. Previously excluded, today they are connected. Who has failed to take notice of a sender’s address when buying from them? Their chances, just as for national economies, lie in the possibility of selling to a larger market. It suffices to remove obstacles.

People want the best available solutions and to an increasingly lesser extent accept the existence of any limitations. They want unlimited access to culture, knowledge, and travel, just as they want to be able to make secure and inexpensive purchases on the Internet regardless of the store’s venue. This is what it means to remove barriers: giving everyone a level playing field to participate in the Internet revolution is a challenge for democratic governments.

The twentieth century was a triumph of modernization. Modernity flooded the streets with the advent of radio, television, radical emancipation, jumbo jet flights, and medical achievements. Technology has changed, and so has the general public. Naturally, modernization has had a variety of faces. Some people challenge the democratic strength of modernization and progress. Philosophers have pointed to the victims: the excluded, the technocratization of authority, the decline in citizen commitment, and, above all, the tragedy ensuing from the toxic symbiosis of the ideologies of fascism and communism.

Central Europe’s last revolution attempted above all to catch up to the West, but even more than that, it endeavored to flee from the pernicious experience of ideology and oligarchization. Perhaps the entire problem is rooted in the attitude toward the concept of modernization and innovation? Where others perceive hope, we see threats. We have overcome the technologies of oppression, but the ideas of modernization and democratic progress have fallen victim to chance. Today, it is not enough to abolish censorship and permit people to print books. The competitiveness of the Visegrad economies should be improved radically, Internet technologies should be disseminated, and the democratic accomplishments of human creativity should be promulgated. This is what is meant by completing the road to freedom. We gain freedom when accomplishments available to the few become widespread. /

The author is editor-in-chief of *Visegrad Insight* and *Res Publica Nowa*.

This essay was written on the occasion of the Big Tent V4 – Voice for Innovation event organized by Google in Warsaw during the meeting of V4 prime ministers on 16, 2013. Visegrad Insight was a partner of the event in association with the Polish Presidency in the Visegrad Group 2012-2013 www.big-tent.appspot.com
Small sceneries.jpg (2002–2005), by Tomáš Pospěch. This small sceneries.jpg series consists of 20 large format contact photographs, silver print, of 12×16 cm and 12×24 cm size.

The series is based on a long tradition of Czech landscape photography, with references to Josef Sudek and Jan Reich’s oeuvre.

The author uses a traditional technique: a technical camera and large format negatives. However, the photographed scenery exists only virtually. These mountains, forests, and meadows are rendered from computer games; the photographs are taken from the computer screen.

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