

21st Century International Politics: The Philosophical Perspective from a Small State

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A Paper still in Progress! Not for Quotations!

INTRODUCTION

Two documents proposed as the point of departure for our discussion about order and disorder in international relations - Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of Pope John XXIII, published on April 11 1963 during the 2nd Vatican Council (1962-1965), and the Regensburg Address, the lecture titled *Faith, Reason and the University (Memories and Reflections)* pronounced by the Pope Benedict XVI on September 12, 2006 at Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg on the occasion of his first Apostolic Journey to his native Germany – have undoubtedly one common feature. They both can be perceived as *signa temporum*, they both bear clear testimony of times in which they came into being. When put together, they make us aware, first of all, of the gap perceived in our today's political experience between our past and our future.¹

Not being trained in theology or any other relevant academic discipline taught usually at Catholic Institutions of Higher Learning, I will leave gladly the task of their interpretation to more qualified commentators and will focus here exactly on this gap as perceived from my own perspective. The thing is that the reading of these two important papal documents (or rather re-reading in the case of the first one) has offered me an opportunity for a kind of *anamnesis*.² The following text consists of three parts. **First**, I will focus on the spiritual and political atmosphere that reigned in communist Czechoslovakia in the 1960s when *Pacem in Terris* came into existence (I was just teenager eager to enter the world of grown-ups). **Second**³, I will look at how philosopher Jan Patočka reacted to the transformations and turbulences of the 1960 and will analyze his response to the social and political crisis in the communist Czechoslovakia in the

¹ Hannah Arendt

² Eric Voegelin

³Expl. Where this part of the text comes from

early 1970s. The **third** part will focus on the climate of ideas existing in the Czech Republic in 2011, more than two decades after communism has become, thanks to the revolution of 1989, a matter of the past in East and Central Europe; after all her inhabitants, including Czechs and Slovaks, have been enabled to return from their Babylonian captivity in the Soviet “evil empire”, and are taking part now - as free nations finding themselves at the heart of the “old continent” and belonging to the West, i.e. integrated to the EU and the NATO - in international politics in the beginning of the 21st century.

PART I: THE “GOLDEN SIXTIES” AND THEIR BITTER END

The 1950s

The atmosphere that characterized the 1960s in Czechoslovakia when the John XXIII's famous Encyclical was published, can be evoked when one realizes in which sense it was substantively different from the spirit that had prevailed in our part of the world during the previous decade, the 1950s, the period when the fierce ideological confrontation between the East and the West - which started practically immediately after the victorious coalition in the WWII of the United States, The United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, joined in the last moment by the liberated France, broke up - was getting into full swing.

The Western liberal perception of the geopolitical situation that was created after the WWII was clear enough: one form of totalitarianism (nazism) was defeated, but the second one (communism) became much stronger than ever before. As result of two devastating conflicts which had started on its soil in the first half of the 20th century the "old" continent lost definitively its supremacy in the world affairs and was divided into two "antagonistic" camps - one lead by the United States and the other subordinated to the Soviet Union. The Western civilization and its fundamental principle of human freedom were again threatened by its totalitarian enemy, and had to be, henceforth, defended. The Fulton speech of Churchill in March, 1946 and the Long Telegram of George Kennan from Moscow to the State Department in the same year, followed by the

famous "X" article on "containment" which appeared in Foreign Affairs in summer issue of 1947, represented unmistakable signs of times that were coming. The American nuclear umbrella and the whole Cold War political architecture to be created within the next few years was only a natural response of the Free World to the Soviet expansionism threatening their open societies....

The lot of Central Europeans in the divided Europe was tragic, indeed. Thanks to the existing redistribution of power – most clearly demonstrated at the Yalta Conference in February of 1945, and just a few years later in the communications between Moscow and the capitals of countries of East Central Europe concerning their desire to participate at the Marshall plan of the Europe's post-war reconstruction⁴ - the peoples of this region, simply ended, without or rather against their choice, on the wrong side of the ideological barricade. One after another, they got on the same trajectory and set off on the same historical path. Their spirit and culture were crashed by the communist regimes that got into power with the "fraternal" assistance of the Soviet Union.

The Czechoslovak society that used to be essentially liberal and open in the past (one has to admit that already the Nazi occupation had strongly undermined this capacity) was being forcibly "closed" after the communist constitutional coup d'état in February, 1948. The building of a socialist "radiant futures" in Czechoslovakia, foreseen in Marxist-Leninist ideology, was accompanied here, as in all other countries turned into the Soviet satellites, by the ruthless and oppressive policies of the Communist Party, which seized the monopoly of power. Almost from day to day, the totalitarian form of government replaced democracy, and all its institutions were dismantled, gradually destroyed or transformed in order to correspond to the designs of new "revolutionary" rulers.

To be honest and true, however, one has to admit, that what was happening in the course of socialist "revolution" was not met always and everywhere by disagreement or resistance. What Czechs and Slovak got in the immediate aftermath of their fall into the communist trap was regrettably perceived by too many of them⁵ – most likely thanks to

⁴ Expl.

⁵ Crf. the post WWII election results

the post-war general chaos and confusion, but first of all thanks to the “Munich syndrome”⁶ - as their ultimate liberation from the “capitalist” oppression and exploitation.

The result was somewhat phantasmagoric. Even though the closing of society in the post-war Czechoslovakia – the systematic destruction of all social institutions, structures and intermediary bodies (in the sense of Tocqueville) whose nature and mission was simply not compatible with the idea of total control by the state, led by the vanguard political party – was carried by all sorts of brutal and ruthless means, this “revolutionary” transformation” took place in an environment that was still non-totalitarian. As is evidenced by all sorts of historical records, the customs and habits of society, including the lifestyles and self-presentations of the communist leaders themselves, still bore some traces of the old, prerevolutionary world.⁷ It was actually this “ancestral” aspect that gave the beginning phase of Czechoslovakian totalitarianism its specific “local color”, and if I am allowed to use this word with regard to the enormous suffering and tragedy experienced by thousands of innocent people, its flavor. Here is how the realities of new social and political order were described by Vaclav Havel:

*...In the fifties there were enormous concentration camps in Czechoslovakia filled with tens of thousands of innocent people. At the same time, building sites were swarming with tens of thousands of young enthusiasts of the new faith singing songs of socialist construction. There were tortures and executions, dramatic flights across borders, conspiracies, and at the same time, panegyrics were being written to the chief dictator. The President of the Republic signed the death warrants for his closest friends, but you could still sometimes meet him on the street....*⁸

The 1960s

⁶ Expl.

⁷ Expl.

⁸ Ref.

No matter how dark were the 1950s, the history, however, went on. What was rightfully perceived by all the victims of communism as a living nightmare⁹ didn't last in its worst form, thanks God, for no more than this unfortunate decade. The 1960s were very different from the previous decade in the history of communism in Europe and it is quite symptomatic that the process of gradual change in the Soviet Union and in the other socialist countries in Eastern Europe - which actually started already in the middle of the 1950s and culminated only at the end of the 1960s - still bears a name that explains how strongly the communist variety of totalitarianism was connected with the chief dictator: de-Stalinization.

Joseph Stalin died in 1953. His successor, Nikita Khrushchev, delivered his famous secret speech, denouncing the "cult of personality" of the previous adored leader and disclosing the horrible crimes of Stalin's regime, in 1956 to the 20th CPSU Congress. No matter what the Khrushchev's proclaimed goal to return from Stalinism to true Leninism really meant, and regardless of the principle question whether any reform of communism was only a vain attempt to "square the circle," because the foundations of the system where the leading party seized "total power" remained the same, the political atmosphere in our part of the world in the 1960s changed.

Thanks to Khrushchev and other reformers, communism lost its savage face and seemed to acquire at least some human qualities. The whole world was observing with a kind of relief and hope what was going on in the socialist camp under the label of de-Stalinization. For sure, there were crises within the system or between the Eastern and Western blocks (the Hungarian Revolution of 1956¹⁰, the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961¹¹, the Cuban missile crisis in 1962¹²). In spite of various setbacks, however, the reformist spirit seemed to be prevailing, even gaining, step by step, new ground. The ideological confrontation was being gradually reformulated. If at the outset of the Cold War the East-West relations were characterized by an uncompromising Manichean

⁹ Expl.

¹⁰ Expl.

¹¹ Expl.

¹² Expl.

struggle between life-and-death enemies, the relaxed 1960s gave birth to a much more benign concept of "*peaceful coexistence of the countries with different social systems.*"

No surprise that the "thaw" in the Eastern bloc caused not only to the improvement of international atmosphere, but affected also our domestic development. Thanks to the amnesty granted in 1960 by the President of Republic (not necessarily demonstrating his human qualities and generosity, but rather signaling that the communist regime felt now sufficiently stable and secure!) the most of political prisoners in Czechoslovakia were now released and returned home.¹³ Nonetheless, not only that. In spite of fundamental and unexceptionable fact that the Communist Party had the total control over the society and kept firmly its monopoly of power – in this regard nothing had changed! - the 1960s started to bring a kind of fresh breeze into our closed and that is why depressing socialist everydayness. And this is what caused maybe politically irrelevant, but still quite remarkable transformations.

On the one hand, the time seemed to be on the side of the regime. The most of people, either driven by fear or just by realistic assessment of their situation under given circumstances, simply got used to, accepted and coordinated themselves with the new political realities.

At the same time, however, there was more evidence now that in spite of all its successes in building socialism - supported now according to the regime propagandists by the overwhelming majority of our population¹⁴ - the Communist party simply failed to achieve its fundamental goal. This failure started to become more and more evident in the moment when nightmare of the 1950s was gone and the light of new day revealed the ghostly nature of totalitarian regime professed as socialism. Despite of the wishes and ideological incantations of ruling „politicians“ it became more and more obvious that the same people who were loyal to the regime in public (who went to the polls and voted for the candidates of National Front, participated in the First May parades and other official festivities, and eventually became even Communist party members or at least joined the

¹³ Expl. Amnesty of 1960, political prisoners in general

¹⁴ Expl.

ranks of some of the existing facade organizations¹⁵), had privately very different opinions.

No matter how intensive the party propaganda and indoctrination was, no matter that the upbringing of „new man“ (*homo sovieticus*) was being declared as the most visible success of the years of socialist construction, the great majority of people turned out to be quite resistant in this regard. On the one hand, they learned, indeed, how to live under the totalitarian regime without risking to get into trouble, especially with its security apparatus. At the same time, however, they were still yearning for freedom, for being somehow reconnected with the world behind the „iron curtain“; for belonging, even if in a very superficial, ersatz, uninformed, sometimes very funny and certainly more than imperfect way, to the orbit of Western civilization.¹⁶

Because it was clear that the existing power constellation in the world was not giving to the Czechs (as well as to other nations of the region) any hope to be released any time soon from their Babylonian captivity and to return home to the democratic Europe – the only option to get rid of the communist yoke was obviously emigration - it is not surprising at all, bearing on mind the whole history of the modern Czech nation which started in the period of Czech „national revival“ in the turn of the 18th century¹⁷, that the place where the positive changes of the 1960s were visible more than anywhere else, was not the political space poisoned by the dogmas of Marxism-Leninism and totally controlled by dumb party bureaucrats and functionaries, but the public life in general, and first of all our cultural and intellectual scene.

There is obviously no space here to start describing this phenomenon in its entirety, but just to characterize the spiritual atmosphere of the 1960s in Czechoslovakia in a sketchy outline. In comparison to the dark 1950s, during the 1960s the times were changing, indeed.

After years of silence, the voices representing the older, i.e. non-marxist spiritual traditions started to be heard again, at least at the margins of our public discourse.

¹⁵ Ref. Arendt and expl.

¹⁶ Expl.

¹⁷ Expl.

The universities and other academic institutions became, slowly and gingerly, again more open to the ideas that only a few years ago had been perceived, sheer and simple, as a tool of imperialist subversion.

Philosopher Jan Patočka could appear again in public and pursue his lifelong task to introduce the fundamentals ideas of classical European philosophy to the younger generations of students and to build step by step the Czech branch of philosophical school founded by his own teacher and spiritual father Edmund Husserl.

Out of sudden, there was new wave of Czech literature, theater, film, art here. First jazz and later rock music could be heard all around.....

To sum it up: The day by day one could observe the new manifestations of normal cultural life of a society that was naturally European; its free expressions that couldn't be easily stopped or silenced by the deadening influence of all controllers, censors and party ideologues. Whether communist oppressors liked it or not, in spite of all attempts of ruling regime at our „Sovietisation“,¹⁸ the communication with the spiritual substance of the Western world, at least the strong desire to keep the channels of communication as widely open as possible, survived the Stalinistic terror and managed to remain alive in the milieu of our national culture. Thanks to that, not only the gates of prisons opened in 1960 for those who were sent there in the 1950s for political reasons, but the whole world started to open up again in front of us.

It was no surprise that the great themes that emerged in the West during the „golden“ 1960s – obviously with all their problems, hidden assumptions, prejudices and illusions that were to be discovered only in the later phases of Europe's contemporary history - started to influence also the debates within our intellectual circles. What was especially amazing and admirable in all these efforts to revitalize our stifled cultural and spiritual life, was the fact that many former political prisoners - especially priests and laypersons who were coming home after serving long sentences - joined these activities immediately upon their release.¹⁹

¹⁸ Expl. D'Entcausse

¹⁹ Expl.

The ideas of the 2nd Vatican Council, the whole project of „aggiornamento“ initiated by the Pope John XXIII and realized in the postconciliar period by his successors²⁰, were received enthusiastically by the „progressive“ Czech Catholic intellectuals and debated with the same passion and excitement with their more conservative opponents as anywhere else within the realm of Christian OIKOUMENE.²¹ The dialogue between Christians and Marxists actually started up with unusual fervor and existential intensity in Czechoslovakia.²² Not only the internationalization of human rights²³ touched upon in the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, but also the other symptomatic documents of these times, for instance, „The Limits of Growth“ - the famous Report of the Rome Club published in the spring of 1968 and arguing that the major threat in the world to come was not going to be the nuclear war between the two ideologically defined camps fighting each other in the Cold War, but the global phenomena, in the first place the common environmental degradation and exhaustion of natural resources by our wasteful civilization – were discussed and commented on in Czechoslovakia, as well as in many other places behind the Iron Curtain. And so on, and so forth....

Was all of that surprising? I don't think so. What simply was in the air, felt by everybody and everywhere, was that not only in the free Western world, but even in the communist East, the time has come for new ideas, new insights and experiments; that even here the creativity and imagination seemed to be powerful enough to challenge even rigid totalitarian ideology enslaving the peoples of the Soviet block; that not only the West, but also the „other Europe“²⁴ behind the iron curtain was invited to take part in the on-going and ever-evolving „dialogue of mankind,“²⁵ whose new chapter was opened with the unusual energy, intellectual passion and curiosity during the 1960s.

²⁰ Comm..

²¹ Expl of ecumenical nature of Vatican Council II

²² Milan Machovec *Jesus für den Atheisten*

²³ Expl. The decade of great codifications, the ratification of international covenants, etc.

²⁴ Rupnik

²⁵ Expl. Patocka, Voegelin

Born in 1950, and thus progressing in this wonderful period through my teens, I was participating in the awakening of Czechoslovak society from the Stalinistic nightmare in the way which was available for members of my generation. Growing in the environment of an intellectual, non-Communist family, I became an avid consumer of everything – books, essays and articles published in „progressive“ journals and periodicals, films, theater plays, music - that was bringing a fresh breeze to our socialist everydayness. I hoped to learn more about the world beyond our borders, which was getting more accessible thanks to the gradual removal of ideological barriers. I desired to travel to the West and to establish new lines of communication. I had the same basic feelings as all other youngsters anywhere else in the world, believing, because of their age, that the future is a kind of reservoir of opportunities; that what one should expect realistically as an essential part of the human condition is the arrival of the unexpected; that tomorrow may always be different from today because the very essence of human life is the human capacity for new beginnings.

I was following the evolving both domestic and international events in my own way, discovering the world out there, seeking the guidance and inspiration from the ever-growing group of thinkers and public intellectuals, who, both Marxists and non-Marxists, were influencing Czechoslovak public discourse at this time. I never believed in socialism of any kind; it was not a matter of creed for me, but just a reality experienced. I did not feel at all to have been „brain-washed“, or indoctrinated by the communist education and certainly did not need to sober up from the previous temporary intoxication by Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Looking back now, more than forty years after, I have to admit that my political convictions were, indeed, products of the „mind of the new one“, in Plato's sense²⁶; fuzzy, regrettably uninformed, and certainly not clearly articulated. In this open, but rather messy and eclectic state of mind, I was fully immersed into the world of ideas dominating our public discourse of the 1960s, unable to see their limitations and problematic sides, and was waiting impatiently and with intellectual curiosity - but also with unreserved optimism and great expectations - what kind of future for me was about to come.

²⁶ Ref.

The lost illusions of 1968

The end of this story is well known. First, the Prague Spring made the overwhelming majority of Czechs and Slovaks, including the members of my generation, believe that the program of “socialism with human face”, formulated by the reform wing of Communist Party that got to power in January of 1968 and elected Alexander Dubcek the Party’s First Secretary,²⁷ might be an acceptable solution for our political problem under the existing conditions of the Cold War. For the first time, one had to admit, the whole nation stood behind the communist leaders, whose predecessors had usurped power two decades ago, enslaved us and ruled with the iron fist. The overwhelming majority of Czechs and Slovaks sincerely supported their efforts to launch the “regenerative process,”²⁸ to redress the wrongs of the past and begin a new chapter of our contemporary history.

Impossible? Could communism be ever reformed as we were hoping for? Wasn’t it another Benthamian “nonsense upon stilts?” Maybe, but we were certainly not the only ones believing in such dreams in the end of the 1960s. Were not, after all, *Pacem in Terris*, and other major documents articulating the spirit of the era, including the major human rights conventions, that were then adopted²⁹, the products of the same aspirations? The 1960s, after all, seemed to be full of hope all around the world that some sort of fundamental change in human matters, so badly needed, was really possible; that there was a window of opportunity here for such a “grand opening”.

For sure, observing the Prague Spring of 1968 from the save distance of several decades, there is no doubt that it was a great naivity, indeed, or a great ignorance as far as the very nature of communist variety of totalitarianism, what we then belived in. Nonetheless, no matter how sophisticated and principled the today’s critics of the Czechoslovak “sixty-eighters” (and implicitly of all of us who were there around) eventually are, they still owe us the fundamental explanation: What actually were the

²⁷ expl.

²⁸ Expl.

²⁹ Expl.

alternatives when the Prague Spring 1968 burst out? What else we were supposed to believe in? What else we were supposed to do in our situation?

The same questions, however, would have certainly got a very different flavour and meaning, if raised not in the spring, but in the fall of this historical year. From the moment when the Warsaw Pact armies lead by the Soviet Union entered the Czechoslovak territory at the dawn of August 21, the Czechoslovak government, the ruling party, and actually the whole nation, were exposed anew to the bitter geopolitical realities of Central Europe created in the Cold War and to the correspondingly difficult and tough choices to be made. Should we have resisted and be, for sure, crashed by the ruthless aggressor having evidently the overwhelming, practically absolute superiority? And later when the Soviet troops were already stationed on our territory and the political process in the country under the control of the occupying power – so called “normalization” - got into full swing: should we have remained faithful to the ideas of the Prague Spring or give them up? If yes how? Was it right, or at least understandable what “Men of January” lead by Alexander Dubcek decided to do - against the will of the whole nation which stood united behind them and entrusted them with its representation - after they returned home from Moscow where they signed the disgraceful “protocols”³⁰: to yield and submit to those whose aim was to restore the disturbed socialist order?

II. PHILOSOPHICAL RESPONSE OF JAN PATOCKA: FROM *CONSOLATIO PHILOSOPHIAE* TO THE SOLIDARITY OF SHAKEN

I will seek the answers to the questions raised in the end of the previous section not with politicians, historians or experts in various areas of political science or international relations, but with a contemporary classical philosopher³¹ - well aware of the fact that classical philosophers usually do not enter the public space and rather keep

³⁰ Expl.

³¹ Expl.

their activities within confines of their “academia”, and when they do enter the realm of their poleis, they do it in their own specific way.

The text I am going to focus on – *The End of Europe and Post-European Age* - was written by Jan Patočka³² sometime between 1970 and 1977. It is his late work and it is not about the contemporary politics. Besides the much more known *Heretical Essays* and the lecture series *Plato and Europe* from the same period, it contains one of the most important articulations of Patočka’s philosophy of history. The fact that it was found on top of other papers lying on his desk after he passed away on March 13, 1977, led the editors of the Collected Works to believe that in spite of the fact that no significant changes were recently made, Patočka did not consider it entirely finished and was still working on it.³³

The audacious hypothesis

The text opens with the following announcement:

“What is proposed here will be most likely found by historians a-historical. Philosophers, on the contrary, will consider this proposition as a tributary to the accidental historical events. Both of them will criticize its overmuch constructivism. Its author, however, is ready to accept this risk. His aim is to propound problems, which are concealed behind the things we can see in our immediate surroundings - thanks to the fact that our momentary anxiety has made us shortsighted; to do away with what is closest to us and to let appear what is most distant from us. The realization of this aim, however, requires construction or rather demolition. Demolition is, after all, also a kind of construction.

*This essay departs from a hypothesis which is deliberately **audacious**. To let the whole process of European history revolve around one single principle, or rather around only one implication of this principle, is a nonstarter lacking any credibility in the eyes of both historians and philosophers - irrespective of the fact that this implication is apparently huge and decisive. Nonetheless, such a bold decision can be adopted more*

³² Expl.

³³ Patočka, J. *Péče o duši II*, SSJP, Vol. 2, edited by Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba P, OIKOUMENE Praha 1999, p. 396

*easily in the present times, thanks to a great thinker, who has already discovered the way on which something like a principle of European spirituality, distinct from all other spiritualities, can be found: Edmund Husserl, who in his book Crisis of European Sciences assumed the task of the renewal of rationality. To be sure, the notion that **Europe is logos and ratio**; that it is in Europe where the idea of universality - the only idea capable of turning the world into **one** world – emerged, has been known since long ago...*”³⁴

There are two things that must be thought through carefully when one reads the opening paragraphs of Patočka’s essay. On the one hand, it is his Husserlian hypothesis itself: what makes Europe from the very beginning of her history a spiritual unity distinct from all other cultures and civilizations, is her “*logos and ratio*”, originally discovered by Greek philosophy. But what we also should not leave unnoticed is Patočka’s characterization of his hypothesis as “*deliberately audacious*.” Why does Patočka actually need to say that? Would it be the same if he said “deliberately provocative”? Does he merely refer to a conflict pending between him and other historians or philosophers? Does he just provoke them by indicating that their histories and philosophies probably are among those things that must be demolished and removed if our capacity to see the fundamental problems of our epoch is to be restored?

Or does the characterization of his hypothesis as “*deliberately audacious*” indicate more than that? Is it his intention to bring us from the surface of things to the region of deeper phenomena which will arise before our eyes only after we manage to overcome our momentary anxiety and sharpen our weakened spiritual sight? Can it happen that what we will discover then will be the connection between “*logos and ratio*” inquired into by European philosophers and their audacity?

The point of departure: Husserl’s concept of the crisis of European man

A year before his last major book on the current European crisis was published in 1936 Husserl delivered two lectures, first in Vienna and later in Prague (before the "Cercle philosophique de Prague pour les recherches sur l'entendement humain", in

³⁴ Patočka J, SSJP2, p. 80

which Patočka served as one of its two secretaries).³⁵ The basic message of these lectures can be summarized as follows:

European civilization finds itself in the 20th century, in spite of all progress achieved during the modernization of the last three centuries, in a deep crisis. The reason, according to Husserl, “*European nations are sick*”³⁶, and “*Europe itself is...in critical condition*”³⁷ is the fact that the core element of European identity is omitted by Europeans. Europe, Husserl reminds us, “*is now no longer a number of different nations bordering each other, influencing each other only by commercial competition and wars.*”³⁸ Europe has never been fully determined “*geographically, as it appears on the map, as though European man were to be in this way confined to the circle of those who live together in this territory.*”³⁹ Since the very beginning of European history “*the title Europe designates the unity of a spiritual life and a creative activity.*”⁴⁰ Being European has always meant joining other Europeans “*in spirit...in the unity of one spiritual image....exhibiting the philosophical idea immanent in the history of Europe.*”⁴¹ Europe, states Husserl, can only survive on the current historical crossroads if today’s Europeans will manage to rediscover that what they inhabit is not a piece of land, but a civilization, having its spiritual roots and being endowed with “*its immanent teleology*”⁴²; requiring

³⁵ *Die Philosophie in der Krisis europäischen Menschheit*. (Public Lecture in Vienna before the Kulturbund, May 7 and 10, 1935). The English translation by Quentin Lauer *Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man.*, in: . *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*. New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1965, 149-192. or by David Carr as *The Vienna Lecture*. in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology. An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970, 269-99.

The same lecture was read by Husserl again under the title *Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die Psychologie*. before the "Cercle philosophique de Prague pour les recherches sur l'entendement humain" in Pratur in November 1935

³⁶ Husserl, E. The Crisis of European Man, in: *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, translated into English by Quentin Lauer, Harper Torchbooks, 1965, p. 150

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *op. cit.*, p. 177

³⁹ *op.cit.*, p. 155

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *op. cit.* 156

⁴² *ibid.*

throughout its history animation by a “a new *spirit stemming from philosophy and the sciences based on it, a spirit of free criticism providing norms for infinite tasks, ... creating new, infinite ideals.*”⁴³

What characterizes Europe more than anything else in the current phase of its history, and what is the most important outgrowth of its innate entelechy, is modern science and technology. As a decisive social force in modern society, it has undoubtedly tremendous potential to empower men technically and to improve the material condition of human life. Its “efficacious” knowledge, which is increasingly capable of changing the human world according to human plans and wishes, however, is failing to serve “*les maîtres et possesseurs de la nature*”, when asked to become a reliable guide to protect and enhance the rational sense of their life. The reason is that its cherished rationality has fallen into the trap of “*naturalism and objectivism*”, and as such cannot be perceived as a signpost of Europe’s progress, but rather “*on a level with the rationality of the Egyptian pyramids!*”⁴⁴

This crisis, then, Husserl concludes, “*can end in only one of two ways: in the ruin of a Europe alienated from its rational sense of life, fallen into a barbarian hatred of spirit or*“, as I already quoted above, “*in the rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy.*”⁴⁵ What can help Europeans achieve such a renaissance? Husserl’s answer is not surprising. It is his transcendental phenomenology, the aim of which is to bring the lost “spiritual image of Europe” back to the attention of Europeans. It sets for itself the following fundamental tasks: to recover “*through a heroism of reason*” the broken thread of communication between the realm of scientific objectivity and the primordial sphere of human matters given to us in our immediate subjective experience; to rehabilitate the philosophers’ “theoretical attitude,” and to oppose it to the “natural attitude” human beings adopt towards their fellow-men and things they are surrounded by in their life-

⁴³ op. cit. , 177

⁴⁴ op. cit.,186

⁴⁵ op. cit., 192

world⁴⁶; to attempt a philosophy of history that would enable us to rediscover the forgotten TELOS, the inner motive of European civilization: the idea of human life based upon insight.

Patočka's adoption of Husserl's motive

The previous chapter explains why Patočka could anticipate certain criticism and misunderstanding. Does not Husserl's concept of the crisis of European man he chose as his point of departure represent the clearest example of Eurocentrism of the past that simply cannot grasp fully both the spiritual and political challenges of our times? What about the schema of world history implied in it - putting the discovery of THEÓRIA by the Greek philosophers at its beginning and Husserl's own discovery of transcendental subjectivity as a new apodictic origin of philosophy at its end? Did Husserl really believe that he discovered history's ultimate TELOS?⁴⁷ Wasn't Patočka's proposal somewhat *démodé*, if we take into account that postmodern winds were already blowing in nearly all European philosophical salons at that time? In short: To want to build a contemporary philosophy of history in the 1970s on Husserlian foundations? Wasn't it an enterprise doomed in advance and likely to fail?

I can offer two preliminary reactions to all these objections and doubts. First, even if it were true that Patočka, one of the contemporary Socratic philosophers, accepted entirely Husserl's Eurocentric interpretation of the history of mankind, his own Eurocentrism in this particular text still would need to be qualified. Having expressed many times before the highest admiration for his teacher, he stated a little later: "*Husserl's work, which was written to avert the final catastrophe of the European world*",⁴⁸ should serve a somewhat different purpose in our current historical situation: "*it still might be able to assist in the elucidation of the situation of mankind after this*

⁴⁶ There has always been a challenge to find an adequate English equivalent of Husserl's *Lebenswelt*. Quentin Lauer comes here with an unusual, but interesting version: "environing world"

⁴⁷ The sharp but very lucid critique of Husserl's concept of „Crisis of European Science“ is contained in Eric Voegelin's „*Letter to Alfred Schulz concerning Edmund Husserl*“ from September 1943, in Voegelin Eric, *Anamnesis, On the Theory of History and Politics*, CWEV, Vol. 6, transl. into English by M.J.Hanak, edited with introduction by David Walsh, University of Missouri Press, 2002, p. 45-61

⁴⁸ Patočka, J, SSJP, Vol. 2, p. 83

catastrophe already happened, and even to shed some light on the first short lap on our way into the emerging post-European world.”⁴⁹

And the second point: regardless of whether the above-mentioned schema of world history - with the discovery of a new apodictic beginning of philosophy chosen as its decisive turning point and with the discoverer himself elevated to the position of founding father and highest priest of a new sect of self-appointed “functionaries of mankind” – can be imputed to Husserl or not, Patočka certainly had somewhat different ambitions. Husserl’s identification of European spirituality with “*logos and ratio*” must be, according to Patočka, related to and primarily perceived through the lens of the real groundbreaking discovery Husserl made much earlier in Logical Inquiries, concerning “*the elementary mechanism of opinion and insight.*”⁵⁰

Turning attention to this philosophical problem, Husserl, in fact, “*recurs to the Platonic distinctions, examines the oldest switches, where decisions were made on the paths of reason for whole millennia and formulates the problems of reason in such a concrete way, that they can become the key to the questioning situated in the open field of history.*”⁵¹ What Husserl managed to achieve by getting hold of this key was “*to demonstrate for the first time in the history of the mind the elementary bond connecting EPISTÉMÉ to DOXA. The products of EPISTÉMÉ - thinking containing the active element of reflection – become parts of the life-world; they reshape and transform this world, both on the level of its individual things, and that as its elementary structures. As such, however, they can never surpass it entirely and make it unnecessary. Their relationship to the life-world is fundamental. Only through this relationship, though, and thanks to it they can always make sense and be at all comprehensible.*”⁵²

And here is the real question which, I believe, has attracted Patočka’s interest: Isn’t it just “*the elementary mechanism of opinion and insight*” - this “*miraculous, so far unexplored and unseen through, mysterious triviality,*” the principal cause of wonder of

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Patočka, J, SSJP2, p. 80

⁵¹ *op. cit.*, p. 81

⁵² *ibid.*

the classical Greek philosophers, rediscovered in present times by Husserl, and contained in his teleological idea animating, according to him, Europe from the very beginning of its history - where we should start to overcome our momentary anxiety? Doesn't this define the starting point of the new historical journey from the European past to the unknown post-European future? Isn't it what must be explored first, if we want - in our dark times, to paraphrase Hannah Arendt – to claim our right, or at least to hope, for some illumination?⁵³

Philosophy as an act of resistance

Husserl's observation that EPISTÉMÉ is founded on DOXA and not vice versa – the seeming triviality of his ascertainment that in order to adopt the “theoretical attitude” towards the phenomena brought to our attention in the world in which we live, we have first to leave the primordial “natural attitude” towards them through the movement of our thought – has, or at least can have, as Patočka was well aware, significant implications. What is the DOXA we are advised by phenomenologists to depart from? How is it changed after the phenomenological “epoché” has liberated us from the shackles of our natural attitude towards reality and has put us for a passing moment in the role of “*the disinterested spectator of the world that is demythologized before his eyes*”?⁵⁴

DOXA, as we all know, means “opinion”. It designates the immediate contents of our own unreflected and unexamined noetic life. It covers everything that the cultural environment we are a part of, has taught us. It denotes what we have inherited from our ancestors as our beliefs we share with all (significant) others. It is what we have received as “pieces of knowledge” or “skills” in the process of education at home, at schools, or just was imprinted in us thanks to the fact that we live in a certain society with its practices and habits. We can be confident, on the one hand, that all our DOXAI never

⁵³ „That even in the darkest of times we have the right to expect some illumination, and that such illumination may well come less from theories and concepts than from the uncertain, flickering, and often weak light that some men and women, in their lives and their works, will kindle under almost all circumstances and shed over the time span that was given them on earth - this conviction is the inarticulate background against which these profiles were drawn.“ (Arendt, Hannah, *Preface*, in *Men in Dark Times*, A Harvest Book, 1983, p. ix)

⁵⁴ Husserl, op.cit., p. 182

miss reality entirely and always contain some elements of truth.⁵⁵ On the other hand, we should be aware that they also harbor idiosyncrasies, illusions, misperceptions and even lies; that they can deceive us, instead of correctly advising us; to blind us instead of letting us see; to bemuse us instead of steering us towards wisdom.

What is then the matter with truth in our human situation? Our DOXAI - as Socrates discovered and all Greek classical philosophers were very well aware - can never be complete, unchanging and self-consistent. They must always be further examined, controlled, tested against reality and corrected in the light of experience. They should always be susceptible to further transformations in the process of noesis - described by Plato in his famous Seventh Letter as a sequence of steps leading first from DOXA to DOXA ALÉTHÉS, and from there through EPISTÉMÉ to NOUS⁵⁶ - we take part in as rational animals, living beings having LOGOS, endowed with capacity of reflection and insight.

The real moment of truth for human DOXAI, their most serious test, comes obviously with our actions, which they inspire and initiate. Is TI AGATHON - “*some good*,” every human endeavor “*seems to aim at*”, to use the famous first sentence from the Nichomachean Ethics of Aristotle,⁵⁷ the real good or is it not? Are our words and deeds by which we make our presence in the world - and also appear before others, who can listen to us, observe us in the course of our action and pronounce their judgment about it - capable of passing the test of reason true to the standards of EPISTÉMÉ? Can they be accepted when perceived *sub speciae aeternitatis*, or, at least, judged with the help of socially recognized values? Are they meaningful or meaningless? Do they follow some relevant target or are they rather confused and erratic? Are they moral or immoral,

⁵⁵ Aristotle, Metaphysics, Book II 993a30-993b7: “*The investigation of the truth is in one way hard, in another easy. An indication of this is found in the fact that no one is able to attain the truth adequately, while, on the other hand, we do not collectively fail, but every one says something true about the nature of things, and while individually we contribute little or nothing to the truth, by the union of all a considerable amount is amassed. Therefore, since the truth seems to be like the proverbial door, which no one can fail to hit, in this respect it must be easy, but the fact that we can have a whole truth and not the particular part we aim at shows the difficulty of it.*”

⁵⁶ Plato, the Seventh Letter, 342a6-343c6

⁵⁷ Aristotle, The Nichomachean Ethics, 1094a1-3: “*Every art or applied science and every systematic investigation, and similarly every action and choice, seem to aim a some good.*” (English Tranl. by Martin Ostwald, Macmillan Library of Liberal Arts, 1962, p.3

legitimate or illegitimate, law-abiding or unlawful? Do they keep us on the right road in our passage through life, or are they, on the contrary, sending us in a wrong direction, something that should be changed if we want to escape in the moment of our death our “final”, i.e. irreversible, damnation?

It is in the area of these and similar questions where Patočka - a Czech Socratic philosopher at the end of the European era - steps in. And his point of departure in the noetic process from DOXA to EPISTÉMÉ is – and it cannot be otherwise! – a concrete historical situation he himself is a part of. This is what he said in the introduction of the first lecture from the series Plato and Europe for a close group of his disciples in a private apartment in the fall of 1973, after he was forced, for the second time in his life, to leave his chair in the department of philosophy at Prague Charles University: *“People meet a lot nowadays to talk about various abstract and sublime issues, in order to escape for a moment from their current distress, and to raise in a way their souls and minds. I think it is nice, indeed, but rather like an entertainment for old ladies. Philosophical thought, on the contrary, however, should have a different meaning. It should help us somehow in our need. It should become our **internal action** in any situation.”*⁵⁸

What was actually happening in Czechoslovakia in the fall of 1973 when these sentences were delivered? How did Patočka and his students perceive the surrounding world at that time? What were their DOXAI, their actual opinions of it? What were their expectations? What about their preliminary thoughts, by which they tried to transform these DOXAI in the process of noesis into at least a kind of EPISTÉMÉ – a knowledge the exactness of which didn’t necessarily need to be measured by the established standards of humanistic sciences or philosophy, but just to respond to their basic natural desire to know (OREXIS TOU EIDENAI), to paraphrase Aristotle again, and thus shield them from the otherwise potentially devastating existential impact of their momentary situation?

A quick historical reminiscence: the years that followed the unsuccessful attempt of the Prague Spring of 1968 to reform the totalitarian communist regime and endow

⁵⁸ Patočka J, SSJP, Vol. 2, p. 149

socialism with a “human face,”⁵⁹ when Patočka was giving the lecture series *Plato and Europe* and writing about the end of Europe and the arrival of the post-European age, are known in contemporary Czech history as the “period of normalization.”⁶⁰ The then prevailing mood among Czechs and Slovaks was frustration, anger, distress and anxiety. After a couple of months of 1968, full of hopes and excitement caused by the almost miraculous arrival of freedom in our closed society, thanks to the invasion of the armies of the Warsaw Pact led by the Soviet Union on August 21, they were not only back where they had been before the “regenerative process,” but actually fared much worse in its aftermath. Tens of thousands, who refused the idea that they would be doomed to spend the rest of their lives in communist enslavement, emigrated. Those who stayed could only observe helplessly the restoration of the totalitarian regime in the country. Having taken their “lessons from the years of crisis,”⁶¹ the “normalizers”, backed and supervised by their Soviet masters, started to close the society again and liquidate systematically every single remnant of short-lived freedom. All those among the party members who took active part in the “contra-revolution,” were purged and removed from any position where they could exert any influence on society. Political apartheid was not only exerted against them, but also applied to those who refused to repent and were not willing to conform to the rules and habits essential for the orderly and smooth functioning of a closed totalitarian society. Extensive and detailed measures were adopted in the media, at schools, publishing houses, scientific and cultural institutions, etc., in order to eliminate any free flow of information, any open public debate, so that in the future similar disruptions of “socialist order” could never happen again. At the same time a kind of “social contract” – a relatively undisturbed private life and even some personal benefits for loyalty to the regime – was offered to the silent majority of the resigned and subdued

⁵⁹ There are many publications about the failed attempt to reform communism in Czechoslovakia in 1968. My own account of this period of our contemporary history (Palouš Martin, *Revolutions and Revolutionaries (Three Czech Encounters with Freedom)* can be found in: *Promises of 1968. Crisis, Illusion, and Utopia*, ed. by Vladimír Tismaneanu, CEU Press Budapest-New York, 2011 (forthcoming), p. 21-42

⁶⁰ *ibid*

⁶¹ *ibid*

population. Thanks to the existing power constellation - in Czechoslovakia and in Europe and in the world - there were no signs on the horizon that this situation could ever change.

Everyone could observe in the beginning of the 1970s a “late-totalitarian regime”⁶² emerging step by step and penetrating all aspects of life of the social body, brutally awakening its members from their 1968 dream. And the strategy of the “normalizers”, whose primary aim was to compel cooperation from the people by every means, and to use only the minimum force necessary to regain total control over their spontaneous, and thus by definition politically dangerous behavior, was apparently working. What was brought back to life in the process of “screening”, which was the main instrument of the policies of normalization, was the ugliest brand of typical Czech political realism, well known from the past, based on the capacity of members of a small and weak nation to conform themselves to the situation in the world dominated by bigger and more powerful players: to resign temporarily their own freedom, truth, honor and dignity, but to survive.

When this attitude prevailed it was not at all surprising that it became relatively easy for the power holders, as Patočka observed, “*to extinguish in advance the smallest glimmer of mobilizable social initiative,*”⁶³ “*to deprive the society entirely, or almost entirely, of its moral strength,*”⁶⁴ nonetheless allowing at the same time “*its external physical capacities...to grow.*”⁶⁵ The form of government established in the process bluntly characterized by Patočka as “*human machinery of decline and degeneration,*”⁶⁶ didn’t need the iron fist to have its way. What could be seen in action here was rather

⁶² the term late (or eventually advanced) totalitarian regime is used by Václav Havel (crf. his essay *Stories and Totalitarianism*, in Havel, Václav *Open Letters. Selected Writings 1965 – 1990*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1991, p. 328-350

⁶³ Patočka J, SSJP, Vol. 2, p. 100

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

*“fear, disorientation, wiles of comfort, possibility to gain advantages in the environment of general scarcity creating here an artificially interconnected complex of motivations.”*⁶⁷

In sheer defiance of the corrupting and morally bankrupt state of affairs in Czechoslovakia in the beginning of the 1970s, the basic tone of Patočka’s philosophical activities during this period was, in spite of their highly abstract and theoretical foundations and motivation, resolute, exhortative and audacious. Even in the bleak and stressful situation in which Czechs found themselves in the period of normalization, Patočka did not miss an opportunity to remind them *more Socratico* what the main mission was of a philosopher in such a situation: to come with his advice on how to resist the destructive effects of corrupted social and political order. What still could make a difference, according to Patočka despite the fact that all hopes connected with the “regenerative process” of the Prague Spring 1968 were irretrievably lost, was philosophical thought conceived as our “*internal action*” based on our capacity of reflection and insight! Patočka clearly stated in his lecture quoted above: “*Human reality is always situational. When reflected upon, it changes thanks to the very fact of reflection...becoming at least partially clarified or on the way to clarification...People trapped by a calamity are in very different positions when they give up and when they don’t. The man who is finding himself in a desperate situation still has different options on how to behave!*”⁶⁸

The Czechs might have lost all hopes that they could ever be liberated from their current Babylonian captivity in the Soviet empire, but the advice given to them by a classical Socratic philosopher in their midst had to remain always the same: Do not give up, say no to this machinery, and insist under any circumstances on your right to live in harmony with your insight!

In no historical situation is man allowed to resign his elementary task, to think, to examine constantly his DOXAI and to keep transforming them into EPISTÉME. In no historical situation should man refuse to put his life under the test of reason and care for the soul, to gain at least spiritual orientation in his situation. In no historical situation can

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Patočka J, SSJP, Vol. 2, p. 149

man escape the elementary consequences of his freedom and be absolved from the task to be “good”, from the duty to behave morally, to resist by all available means the decline and degeneration threatening always the very core of his human identity.

The suggestion Patočka came up with in the bleak atmosphere of the early 1970s was not at all surprising, at least for those who knew how he had reacted to the social and political crises in the past⁶⁹: *consolatio philosophiae*, the turn to philosophy in an attempt to formulate general, universally valid questions which would help us to gain basic orientation to our situation, because it is here we should start our search for solutions to our particular problems. So what did emerge before the eyes of those who were seized by his appeals? Who followed in the 1970s the demolition works of his “*audacious hypothesis*,” according to which Europe is a civilization that has come into existence the moment the ancient Greeks discovered its ruling principle - the idea of human life controlled and enlightened by reason - and this discovery began the whole process of human history?

To let the Patočka’s philosophical perspective enter the public discourse he shared with his fellow-citizens - shortsighted by the current political odds – meant first of all to enlarge dramatically the horizon of the world observed; to broaden radically the narrow-minded and originally very limited scope of this discourse; to bring into it the elements of generality and transcendence. If its original point of departure was a particular historical situation, that could be compared to the situation of the crew of a ship which had just been wrecked, the question to start from, according to Patočka, was the human condition as such: we can understand our own possibilities in our concrete situation *hic et nunc* only when we first become aware of the limitations we have to accept, because of our human nature. And here we have to realize: “*Man is always engaged in an adventure that cannot in a certain sense turn out well.*”⁷⁰ As finite beings, on our way through life from

⁶⁹ crf. his texts written after the Munich Crisis of 1938 and during the World War II *Filosofie k dnešní situaci* in: Patočka, J., SSJP, Vol. 1, p. 105-106); *K filosofii dějin* (SSJP1, p. 107-115); *Životní rovnováha a životní amplituda* in: Patočka J., SSJP, Vol. 4, edited by Daniel Vojtěch and Ivan Chvatík, Praha 2004, p. 53-61); *Česká vzdělanost v Evropě* (SSJP, Vol. 4, p. 27-52); *Dvojitý rozum a příroda v německém osvícenství. Herderovská studie* (SSJP, Vol. 4, p. 81-99); or the unpublished manuscripts from the same period *Filosofie dějin* (SSJP, Vol. 1, p. 339); *Harmonismus moderních humanistů* (SSJ, Vol. 1, p. 353-362).

⁷⁰ Patočka J., SSJP, Vol. 2, p. 150

birth to death, “*we are all in the situation of a ship the wreckage of which is inescapable!*”⁷¹

The confrontation with our own finiteness turned our attention to the realm of classical philosophy. Patočka, however, had a still more challenging announcement to make in this context: the finiteness of human existence does not concern only individual human beings. Historical formations - including Europe as a civilization - are also finite entities, proceeding from their birth through the prime of their lives to their death. The most important aspect of the historical situation in which we now find ourselves is that the European age is over, that Europe’s central position in human history has ended!

What we are experiencing in the world around us is the beginning of a new epoch in the history of mankind. Thanks to the destructive wars of the 20th century, Europe has ceased to play the hegemonic role. Her political and economic rule over the world, her supremacy based on the rationality of European civilization, especially on her modern science and technology, which guaranteed for centuries Europe’s monopoly of power, its complacent and self-serving belief that “*it is mankind and anything else is irrelevant*,”⁷² all of that is now definitively over. *The rebirth of Europe* Husserl still hoped for in the late 1930s was, according to Patočka, observing the historical situation in the early 1970s, simply not going to happen. What could a contemporary Socratic philosopher do under the current historical circumstances? Patočka’s response was, as I have already indicated above, clear and straightforward: to confront his *audacious hypothesis*, the origin of which he owed to Edmund Husserl, with the reality of the end of Europe and to start to examine with its help the emerging “post-European world”; to prospect at least the first stretch of the road on which mankind – no longer European - has set off, and to try to elucidate its spiritual problems, old and new.

Contemporary history of Geoffrey Barraclough

An important inspiration for Patočka’s exploratory ventures into the post-European world came from the British historian Geoffrey Barraclough (1908 – 1984), the

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² Patočka J, SSJP, Vol. 2, p. 156

author of the then influential book *An Introduction to Contemporary History*” which was originally published in 1964⁷³ and was apparently read by Patočka sometime in the early 1970s.

First of all, what is contemporary history? *“The problems involved not only in the writing but also in the conception of contemporary history,”* wrote Barraclough in the introductory chapter, *“have given rise, ever since 1918, to a long, contentious, and ultimately wearisome controversy. The very notion of contemporary history, it has been maintained, is a contradiction in terms. Before we can adopt a historical point of view we must stand at a certain distance from the happenings we are investigating. It is hard at all times to ‘disengage’ ourselves and look at the past dispassionately and with the critical eye of the historian. Is it possible at all in the case of events which bear so closely upon our own lives? It must be said immediately that I have no intention of entering into a discussion of these methodological questions.”*⁷⁴

Despite this rather lamentable declaration, however, a number of important points were made. Where does contemporary history actually begin? Barraclough pointed out that in spite of the trivial fact that it concerns primarily the most recent historical events, contemporary history cannot be delimited only by a period studied: *“‘Contemporary’ is a very elastic term and to say - as is often done – that contemporary history is the history of the generation now living is an unsatisfactory definition for the simple reason that generations overlap. Furthermore, if contemporary history is regarded in this way, we are left with ever-changing boundaries and an ever-changing content, with a subject-matter that is in constant flux.”*⁷⁵

According to Barraclough, *“contemporary history follows...an almost contrary procedure”*⁷⁶ to *“history of the traditional type.”*⁷⁷ Whereas the latter *“starts at a given*

⁷³ Barraclough, G., *An Introduction to Contemporary History*., originally published in 1964 by C.A.Watts. All reference in this text are from the 9th edition by Penguin Books, 1976

⁷⁴ Barraclough, G, op.cit., p. 14,

⁷⁵ op.cit., p. 13-14

⁷⁶ op.cit, p. 17

⁷⁷ ibid.

*point in the past....and works systematically forward, from the chosen starting point*⁷⁸, the point of departure of the former is the presence of a historian. It is only here that his search for the beginning of contemporary history in time and space can begin and where his first and perhaps the most important task comes - *"to establish its distinguishing features and its boundaries"*⁷⁹!

However, it must be said immediately: Barraclough is quite cautious to think instantly about some fixed specific dates, places or events in this context. He wants first to bring to our attention and make us think through a general phenomenon bearing upon today's situation of man in the world and having the decisive influence on our perception of contemporary history. It is *"the sense of living in a new period"*⁸⁰ as a prevailing mood of our historical consciousness; the sense of living in world in which the element of change seems to be much stronger than the element of permanence; the sense of living in a time which is, as Hamlet put it, "out of joint;" the sense of living in a period of transition, at a turning point of human history.

The simplest truth of our life world is that its presence differs dramatically from what we knew and still remember as "the world of yesterday."⁸¹ Isn't it just this difference – felt, experienced, subjectively lived through by individual men and women finding themselves in their concrete, and thus always unique, situations – that actually represents the very gist of contemporary history? What makes it different from "history of the traditional type", history following the ideal coined by the school of German historicism founded by Leopold von Ranke, the ambition of which is nothing other than keeping the exact record of the happenings of the past, to show the subject of its study only *"wie es ist eigentlich gewesen"*?

A seemingly textbook triviality, that history always has a double meaning (on the one hand it is what happened to men and women at a certain time at a certain place, and

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *op.cit.*, p. 12

⁸⁰ *op.cit.*, p. 13

⁸¹ I am borrowing this term from Stephan Zweig who used as the title for his autobiography (Zweig, Stephan., *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, Cassel, London, 1943.)

on the other hand it is an account of these historical happenings produced by a historian), obtains a new meaning and becomes a real problem here! If the difference between modern and contemporary (or post-modern⁸²) is to be justified by a historical analysis, the historian's role by definition must be different from the role of a traditional historian. Contemporary history – the features and boundaries of which he is first tasked to establish - needs to be **his** history, a history he cannot distance himself from in order to obtain necessary impartiality. He has to be willing and able to accept his role in it as its historian. In the words of Barraclough: only as long as “*we keep our eyes alert for what is new and different... (and) ...have the real gulf between the two periods fixed in our minds can we start building bridges across it*”.⁸³

Aren't we moving in this reasoning in a circle? At the same time, isn't it something we should rather accept than try to avoid? Isn't it true after all, that Ranke's “*idea of history as an objective and scientific study of the past 'for its own sake'*,”⁸⁴ is also an idea conditioned historically? Isn't this idea also just “*a product of the identifiable circumstances of a particular time*”⁸⁵ – European modernism which had grown to its prime in the 19th century? Isn't it true after all that, as Barraclough realized, quoting from R.W. Seton-Watson – that in spite of all the indisputable achievements and contributions of Ranke's scientism for the adequate precision and objectivity of our knowledge of historical processes, “*from the time of Thucydides onwards, much of the greatest history has been contemporary history*”?⁸⁶ Should “*the sense of living in a new period*”, which brings contemporary history into being and which turns its historians into bridge builders between the world of the past, sinking into oblivion, and the new, arriving and thus still unknown world of the future, be used as an impulse to build yet one more bridge, between contemporary history and classical philosophy? Wouldn't it be here, in their renewed communication and dialogue, that all the methodological questions Barraclough

⁸² Barraclough is actually one of the first historians who uses this term.

⁸³ Barraclough, op.cit., p. 13

⁸⁴ op.cit., p. 15

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

decided to leave behind - the question of periodization of history; the question of continuity or discontinuity of historical processes; the question of historical causality and explanation; the question of the historian's necessary distance from historical happenings; the question of historical truth, etc. - can and should be unfolded, examined and eventually answered?

Barracrough unfortunately remains utterly indifferent to such calls and proceeds immediately to a *tour d'horizon* of the landscape of contemporary history, which for him means the period between 1890, when Bismarck resigned his post of Chancellor of the German Empire, and 1961, when J.F. Kennedy became President of the United States. This period should be perceived, according to him, as a watershed, a great divide between the old and the new, an era of transition, when people live, finding themselves in the gap between the past and the future, in need of the bridge building activities of contemporary historians. On the one side, there is still the Eurocentric modern world our ancestors had still been living in during the 19th century; on the other side, our world today - the beginnings of which were announcing themselves, according to Barracrough, already in the last decades of the 19th century - where not only Europe, but all the continents have started to play an increasingly significant role in the formation of its order, where non-Europeans have become equal partners with Europeans shaping a new civilization.

For sure, there is no single cause of this historical process, and this process by its very nature does not have a single historical explanation. There is no simple historical force, materialistic or idealistic, behind it, but rather multiple factors are at work, mutually influencing and eventually reinforcing each other, taking effect in their interaction.

The individual chapters of the Barracrough's book then offer their sketchy studies:

1. The on-going industrial revolution which has changed in the course of time and still is changing man's life-world;
2. The "dwarfing" of Europe – the reality of the progressing decline of Europe's population;
3. The loss of Europe's power in the world and the replacement of the European balance of power by a new form, i.e. non-Eurocentric world politics;

4. The transformation of political organization within states, the rise of mass democracy and party politics;
5. The emergence of Asian and African nations on the world scene and their revolt against European hegemony;
6. The impact of the Bolshevik revolution and the creation of the Soviet Union;
7. The reflection of the new spiritual situation of the contemporary world in art and literature.

And finally the conclusion of Barraclough's analysis: "*The European age... is over, and with it the predominance of the old European scale of values... The civilization of the future, whose genesis I have tried in the preceding pages to trace, is taking shape as a world civilization in which all the continents will play their part.*"⁸⁷

To sum it up: there is no doubt that as a historian Barraclough did a fine job. He certainly put his finger on something essential when he turned our attention to "*the sense of living in a new period.*" He managed to collect a sufficient critical mass of relevant historical facts to support his point concerning the difference between modern and contemporary history. His concrete suggestions as far as "*its distinct features and boundaries*" – which indeed, "*begins when the problems which are actual in the world today first take visible shape*"⁸⁸ – seem to make a lot of sense from his current perspective (his book was written in the very beginning of the 1960s). Nonetheless, Patočka simply could not identify himself with Barraclough's analysis of the end of Europe and the arrival of the post-European age, and the reasons for his criticism did not consist in his disagreement with its results, but concerned its philosophical presumptions.

The care for the soul in the post-European epoch

Patočka in principle endorsed Barraclough's conclusion that the dominant feature of contemporary as observed in the 1960s is the transition of power (*translatio imperii*) from Europe to her non-European successors. At the same time, however, he clearly indicated, regardless of how inspired he was by Barraclough's book, that his text was not

⁸⁷ Barraclough, op.cit., p. 268

⁸⁸ op.cit., p. 20

its corroboration but a “*critical follow-up*”⁸⁹; that his philosophical approach to the problem of the post-European epoch was not to be linked, but contraposed to Barraclough’s contemporary history. The question to be clarified then is: where is the line dividing these two?

Unlike Barraclough, who was fully focused on phenomena discernible in the world of politics today that would enable him to study changing power constellations, Patočka intended to explore first of all its fundamental spiritual aspects; to approach the arrival of the post-European epoch not as a matter of current “realpolitik” - as the transition from the European balance of power to a new form, i.e. non-Eurocentric world politics -, but primarily as a philosophical problem. From this perspective he had to say, however, that Barraclough’s attempt to clarify what is at stake in the world today did not offer a way out of the current crisis, but a blind alley:

*“His ‘contemporary history’...is an approach which is perfectly pertinent for political analyses of this or that situation. It takes a stand in the middle of events and attempts to make from there a kind of sortie in different directions. This is, however, exactly the reason why this method is unable to illuminate and define the present in its essential relation to the past. The fact that the contemporary situation is post-European, that it is deeply affected by the negative element of the prefix “post”, hinders its real use by Barraclough. And further, “post-Europe” presupposes the idea about Europe’s past, about what it was. The depth of this divide can be fully measured only when we try to grasp the contours of Europe as a whole. All of that can hardly be revealed if we stick to this method.”*⁹⁰

Following are three disclaimers of Patočka:

“1. Barraclough presupposes one single mankind in the sense of mankind already Europeanized;

2. Barraclough accepts uncritically, without reflection, the European periodicity of history as if it were something that belongs to history as such. He does not consider the possibility – and most probably the necessity - of the existence of the pre-European

⁸⁹ Patočka, SSJP, Vol. 2, p. 85

⁹⁰ Patocka J, SSJP, Vol. 2, p. 96

historical epoch, the European epoch (further divided into antiquity, Middle Ages and Modern Times) and the post-European epoch;

3. Barraclough is unable to delineate in a convincing manner the contemporary situation, because he does not take into consideration its starting point in the inner sense."⁹¹

Is Patočka entirely fair to Barraclough, when making these points? Isn't he himself missing something important here? Isn't it actually a basic problem and major weakness of the philosophy of history at which he is aiming, inspired by Husserl, that he rejects the assistance and cooperation of a contemporary historian? I will get to these questions only in the subsequent chapter of this text. Now I will focus on Patočka's own philosophical analysis.

First of all, there are three things to be distinguished, according to him, when speaking about Europe and her civilization in the moment of Europe's end and arrival of the post-European epoch, "*in order to achieve the maximum of clarity*"⁹²:

1. "*The European principle, the principle of rational reflection, according to which all human activities, including the activities of thinking, must be based upon insight*";

2. "*Europe as a single historical reality, political, social and spiritual, including the ways in which this reality came into existence, the institutions created in the course of European history and also the forces working in the direction of unity even after Europe disintegrated into a group of sovereign particular organisms*";

3. "*The European heritage, which consists of things which all heirs of Europe accept from her and what they avouch to be as a matter of course, their common possession: science, technique, the rational organization of economy and society.*"⁹³

As far as the European principle of "logos and ratio" is concerned - whose future status might be uncertain in the long-term perspective, which, however, should at least "*shed some light on the first short lap on our journey into the emerging post-European*

⁹¹ Patočka, J., SSJP, Vol. 2., p. 97

⁹² op.cit., p. 83

⁹³ op.cit., p. 84

world” - one should always bear in mind: it doesn’t put a detached “theorist” on the pedestal of European humanity, but it is essentially a Socratic principle! The fundamental presupposition to bring this principle into action is the commitment and determination of concrete men and women living in their “poleis (cities)” in an open historical situation to resist the personal and social disorders of their age; to strive for unity with themselves under this condition, regardless of all the uncertainties, risks, temptations and distractions of social and political life, and thus to “care for the soul”.

It presupposes their clear awareness that insight, the examined life (according to Socrates, the only way of human life worth of living) should be based upon, cannot be made from the safe distance of solitary observers of human matters, but only in their midst, within the confines of a given and historically constituted public space. It requires their recognition that this public space is inhabited not only by a few philosophers (pretending to the role of “functionaries of mankind”), but by the plurality of “ordinary” citizens, by a concrete social and/or political body, having on the one hand its historically developed sense for transcendence and universality of “principles” and “values”, but at the same time characterized by all its peculiarities (religion, traditions, customs, rules and practices, etc.).

If the primordial task of phenomenology is to rehabilitate the “theoretical attitude” of classical philosophers as opposed to the “natural attitude” of humans toward their “life-world”, this rehabilitation cannot be conceived by separating the former from the latter; as an attempt to escape from a concrete historically conditioned situation to the *domus interior* of our thought. On the contrary, the insight which is at stake here can be achieved only as a result of the direct encounter or confrontation of philosophers with their “cities” (poleis) and all their inhabitants. It isn’t available in the form of “divine wisdom” (SOFIA TOU THEOU), but only as a kind of “human wisdom” (HÉ ANTRÓPINÉ SOFIA),⁹⁴ the manifestation of their Socratic audacity. It is, for sure, enabled by their “private” exposures to philosophical ideas - by all “intimations of transcendence” to use the wording of an important contemporary political philosopher,

⁹⁴ Plato, *Apology of Socrates*, 23a6

David Walsh,⁹⁵ they may have received - but it is what can be shared with all significant others, or at least with those who happen to be around. In this sense, it is not only their passive reflection (or speculation) of what is; it is not just a quiet meditation concerning pure being, penetrating from the surface of our human matters we are busy with in our daily existence within our life-world, into the depth of metaphysics; it is their “internal action” in the world inhabited by the plurality of others; it is their philosophical deed.

Then briefly as far as the next two points: Europe as a single historical reality and Europe as a legacy, as a heritage in the common possession of those who are emerging on the world scene in the post-European age - as something inherited by them as a matter of course, or as if, to use the Arendtian expression, “without testament”.⁹⁶ As a single historical reality, Europe lends herself undoubtedly as a rich and complex object for historical and/or socio-political inquiry and analysis. As a heritage, Europe certainly still is and will be around in the contemporary world - in the form of products of modern European science and technology, or as the rational organization of economy and society, which also have become indispensable parts of our life-world thanks to the progress achieved by European humankind in the process of modernization.

However, what about this distinction itself, the distinction between what Europe was and what Europe still is in the post-European world, being inherited, accepted and understood by Europe’s current heirs? Aren’t we confronted here with something that lies at the very heart of the philosophical problem of the incipient post-European epoch? Because, who are actually Europe’s “heirs”? What is the challenge they face in the moment they have received Europe’s past achievements and can claim that all of that is “*their common possession*”? Here is where Patočka’s philosophical reflection does begin. Much as Barraclough rightly identified the changing geopolitical constellation in the world and newly emerging patterns of distribution of power in the post-European age, according to Patočka, he still seems to be viewing this situation through the European lens. What we observe today is considered by Barraclough as the result of **one history of**

⁹⁵ crf. Walsh, David, *The Growth of the Liberal Soul*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London, 1997

⁹⁶ crf. Arendt Hannah, *Preface: The Gap between Past and Future, Between Past and Future, Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, Penguin Books, 1968, p. 3-15

one mankind that progresses in a linear motion. He wrongly believes, Patočka says, that one humankind is a historical fact and forgets easily that humankind and Europe is not one and the same thing; that there is no humankind yet, but multiple humankinds that still wait to be united, transformed into one global and genuinely post-European civilization.

“The heirs of Europe are very heterogeneous. Some are legitimate descendants of Europe, emancipated offspring of her body that have grown in the distant areas of the world to planetary magnitude. They are the formations in which Europe is still active to a large extent and also vice versa: they have also exerted their influence – not only political, but also spiritual – on Europe. The others are essentially pre-Europeans, characterized by different degrees of pre-Europeanism. During the European age they stood aside, or they were just manipulated objects and never subjects in the sense of active players in history, proceeding thanks to Europe’s initiative.”⁹⁷

The core of Patočka’s criticism of Barraclough lies in the inability of his contemporary history to formulate and think through with sufficient clarity and precision the real in-depth problem of the contemporary phase of world history, namely the grand reawakening of pre-Europeans accompanying the arrival of the post-European age, the fact that makes the gap between the past and the future much deeper, more fundamental and thus more revolutionary than Barraclough could ever think:

“The moral superiority, the awareness of insurmountable strength, which had spoken once in the orders of Chinese emperors, even in the moments of their most profound humiliation, turns in the times when those who up to now ruled the world, have lost their power, into a new bond for enormous consensus. What claims its rights here is the energy kept intact by isolation, untouched by barbarian rule, strengthened by humiliation, steeled thanks to its entry into the world processes during the revolution which lasted for long decades, the energy zeroing in an unknown direction; mankind speaks here, all of a sudden, from the abyss of times, which were pre-European; unconquered Egypt which persisted in isolation and waited for its moment to come back and reveal itself in its full strength. Post-European mankind speaks here from the pre-European depth, and if the language used is the one of all contemporary revolutionaries

⁹⁷ Patočka J, SSJP, Vol. 2, p. 84

– Marxist terminology – it is only conducive to the fallacy Europe so easily succumbs to... ”⁹⁸

And Patočka’s consequential questions: “What entitles us to expound the latest phase of the history of East Asia from the European perspective and view the phenomena such as the Chinese revolutions in 1912 and 1949, as the Europeanisation of China as matter of course, instead of at least considering - mindful of Europe’s own evolution through various catastrophes to an ever more complex new formation of the same principle – that what we might be confronted with here is, on the contrary, Sinitization of certain European cultural elements?”⁹⁹ “Is Chinese Marxism a continuation of the Marxian way thinking, applied to the Chinese material, or it is rather the continuation of Chinese universalism which uses the conceptual equipment of Marx as a welcome means of how to articulate its own historical mission?”¹⁰⁰

This observation, however, leads Patočka to a single unambiguous conclusion which is evidently based upon Husserl’s diagnosis and also his proposed remedy of the European crisis. It is certainly not Marxism or any other modern European ideology that should guide us in our efforts to understand our current situation in the world. Nor is it a postmodern relativism with its somewhat ridiculous attempts to get rid of all European metaphysics. On the contrary, if we want to prevent in the future what Husserl was warning in the 1930s – “the fall into a barbarian hatred of spirit” - it is the return to the core European principle of logos and ratio, the revival of European classical philosophy, that can help us to understand our current dilemmas and illuminate our current cross-roads. As much as the situation changed between then and now, states Patočka – and the emergence of totalitarianism which brought unimaginable and unprecedented suffering to hundreds of millions of people gave us a horrible lesson, indeed, - there are basically still two alternatives, foreseen by Husserl, as far as the future of Europe’s legacy in the post-European world:

⁹⁸ op.cit., p. 94,

⁹⁹ op.cit., p. 96

¹⁰⁰ op.cit., p. 96

*“Europe has put forward two ways the earth can be opened: the outward way of conquest and domination of the world, which brought about the eclipse of Europe as a single historical formation; the inward way of opening the earth in a sense of unlocking of the world, the transformation of the life-world of human existence as such. This is the course we should find, after all outside catastrophes and inner confusions, and stay on it to the very end.”*¹⁰¹

Coming to this conclusion, Patočka, however, leaves definitively the field of contemporary history, and descends to the philosophical depth of his own point of departure. Opting unambiguously for the second way of opening the earth and unlocking of the world, instead of its conquest and domination, he lets both “legitimate descendants of Europe” and also the other heirs of European power who emerged in the post-European epoch, as if arriving from the pre-European age, to be busy with their own actual political problems and agendas. He invites his companions to take the path of classical philosophy, and guides them – as he did many times before – from the origins of philosophy in myth through the pre-Socratics, Democritus, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle and develops again the ever recurring theme of his thought: “the care for the soul”.....

Contemporary classical philosophers versus contemporary historians

And now finally, I want to return to the questions raised in the previous chapter. Did Patočka use fully his encounter with Barraclough for the sake of his own cause? Wasn't his critical interpretation of Barraclough, basically rejecting his concept of contemporary history rather a missed opportunity?

Let us start with the restatement of what might be, or as I believe should be, a matter of implicit agreement between a contemporary classical philosopher and a contemporary historian. First, it is the prevailing mood in contemporary societies: “the sense of living in a new period”; the feeling that we all live in a world finding itself in a deep crisis, a world different from the “world of yesterday,” a world undergoing, whether we like it or not, a profound and irreversible transformation. Second, not only a contemporary historian, but a contemporary classical philosopher, too, needs to establish

¹⁰¹ Patočka, SSJP, Vol. 2, p. 94

“distinguishing features and boundaries” for his analysis; to identify the events of the past, thanks to which “the problems which are actual in the world today first take visible shape;” to point not only to the pragmatic happenings affecting the existing power constellations, but also, and maybe in the first place, to the events in the sphere of the mind – to the decisive “spiritual outbursts”¹⁰² that took place in the course of human history - in order to clarify our contemporary situation.

It must be stated immediately, however, that it is exactly here, where their connections end. Barraclough decided, as we know, to pick the year 1890 as his *terminus a quo* - adding the last decades before the outburst of the First World War to the period to be marked out as “contemporary.” Choosing on the other side 1961 as his *terminus ad quem*, he clearly delimited the subject matter of contemporary history – the period of Europe’s end - separating it from the previous historical epochs, namely from the Modern era, which catapulted Europe to the role of uncontested global leader, disposed to discover and conquer other continents of the world, to “civilize” them by imposing on them the Eurocentric world order, and ruling over them without any restraints for centuries.

In contrast to that, Patočka as a contemporary classical philosopher decided to return - in order to penetrate to the starting point of our contemporary situation in the “inner sense” - to a much deeper and more distant past. In order to recall in the contemporary situation the elementary truth that Europe as a civilization has been always animated by a certain principle – Europe as “logos and ratio” - he had to move back not only horizontally, but also vertically: to the very beginning of the process set into motion in the city states of ancient Greece, where not only Western politics, but also Western philosophy was born; the process which sent Europe on her historical journey, leading from ancient times through the Middle Ages and Modernity to its end in the present times - thanks to the tragic events which happened during the 20th century.

At first sight it appears, and Patočka himself seems to be confirming this point of view, that the overlap between approaches of contemporary historians and contemporary classical philosophers is actually very small. Barraclough stays on the surface of political

¹⁰² I am borrowing the term from Eric Voegelin. His uses: cfr Voegelin Eric, CWEV, Vol. 34, *Autobiographical Reflections, Revised Edition with a Voegelin Glossary and Cumulative Index*, p. 492-493

matters, but lacks the necessary philosophical depth. Patočka looks towards the deeper spiritual strata of contemporary European political reality, but leaves the ephemeral politics of the day with its power struggles and sometimes painful concrete existential questions behind. His *consolatio philosophiae*, offered primarily to his Czechoslovak fellow-citizens whose country was at that moment stricken by the totalitarian plague and had to struggle with the morally corrupting effects of the on-going normalization, sounds, when read now more than thirty-five years later, rather like an invitation to a contemporary Platonic Academy and certainly not as an appeal to wake up the spirit of resistance in the polis that fell into a deep crisis and start the Socratic struggle against the general morass, decayed morals and the resulting social and political decline. Nonetheless, is there anything wrong with this assessment? Wouldn't such a conclusion be in clear contradiction to the very gist of the Patočka's political philosophy?

In order to respond to these questions with sufficient precision and clarity and at the same time to reassess the relationship between contemporary classical philosophy and contemporary history which was laid out by Patočka himself in his criticism of Barraclough, one would need to unfold the whole field of Patočka's philosophy of history in a more comprehensive manner. We need to use as points of reference Patočka's other writing relevant to this topic. Such ambition would certainly exceed my current ambition. That's why I will limit myself here just to one key point made by Patočka in the most famous and also the most controversial chapter of his **Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History**, in the sixth one, called *Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War*.¹⁰³ Here, in my opinion, Patočka got closer to the sphere of contemporary history and to the questions posed by Barraclough than he thought.

Having started the project at the moment of transition from "prehistory" to European "history" and examining carefully its origins, after he analyzed in the previous (fifth) essay the nature of modern "technological civilization" - with its special relationship to Force that seemed to replace the relationship to Being dominant in preceding Christian era of European humanity - Patočka finally arrived to that event which marked the end of Europe and served as a gate for humankind to enter the post-

¹⁰³ Patočka, J, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, translated by Erazim Kohák, edited by James Dodd, Open Courts Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 1996, p. 119-137

European world. This is what he wrote in the first paragraph of the sixth essay, identifying the heart of the problem of the relationship between contemporary history and contemporary classical philosophy. This text also demonstrates effectively what was, and still is, the most significant endemic weakness of political program with which Czechs and Slovaks entered the 20th century - under the leadership of Masaryk (the first president of their democracy created as the result of the “world revolution” of WWI):

*“The First World War provoked a whole range of explanations among us, reflecting the efforts of humans to comprehend this immense event, transcending any individual, carried out by humans and yet transcending humankind – a process in some sense cosmic. We sought to fit it into our categories, to come to terms with it as best we could – that is, basically, in terms of nineteenth century ideas.”*¹⁰⁴

What WWI really was necessarily escaped the attention of most of its interpreters thanks to fact which was practically unavoidable: they were endowed with the ideas coming from the past. The real meaning of this “cosmic event” – an event that was powerful enough to change not only the power constellations in this or that part of the world but **the whole** world - started to come out only in the light of future experiences of humankind during the 20th century. What really happened has become known gradually, only thanks to those contemporary historians capable of acting as builders of a bridge erected over the gap which opened between the past and the future, and also with the help of the ideas of contemporary classical philosophers. The thing is that only the process of understanding itself, with both contemporary historians and contemporary classical philosophers participating, can offer a clue to what is at stake in the stage of human history opened by WWI; to answer the question of what has remained after the dust settled in the European battlefields, of European hegemony, and can be offered to all Europe’s heirs as her legacy.

When one reads this text now, there is no doubt that Patočka, attempting in the Sixth Heretical Essay to give his own account of WWI, indeed, managed to sketch this great drama of modern humanity with an exceptional existential urgency and all the persuasive power of his philosophical ideas. But what should not escape our attention and

¹⁰⁴ Patočka, J. , *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, translated by Erazim Kohák, edited by James Dodd, Open Courts Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 1996, p. 119

what is of essential importance to the argument, is the fact that Patočka didn't pay attention at all as usual historians certainly would have in this case – to the causes and results of it, but invites the reader to turn his attention to something else - to the phenomenon of the “front experience” – and states clearly what his main purpose is: to allow this experience to acquire the form “*which would make it a factor in history.*”¹⁰⁵ What merged from this experience, according to Patočka, was the most important aspect of European heritage left to Europe's heirs - “the solidarity of the shaken.”

Patočka's philosophical diagnosis of our contemporary situation in the 20th century is as follows: The world in the age of the end of Europe is and will be formed by “Force” unleashed thanks to the European “logos and ratio” – turned, thanks to the scientific revolutions of modernity, into science and technology. Force itself, offered by Europe to the emerging global humanity as its legacy, however, can become deadly and open the door to the invasion of a thus far unknown and unprecedented evil to our life-world, the evil that took the form of totalitarianism with all the unspeakable crimes committed in the name of ideas and ideological political projects against humanity. The only “weapon” that can be offered by a philosopher engaged in the act of resistance against this danger cannot be his idea only, but the “solidarity of the shaken.”

*“The solidarity of the shaken is the solidarity of those who understand. Understanding, though, must in the present circumstances involve not only the basic level, that of slavery and of freedom with respect to life, but needs also to entail an understanding of the significance of science and technology, of that Force we are releasing. All the forces on whose basis alone humans can live in our time are potentially in the hands of those who so understand. The solidarity of the shaken can say “no” to the measures of mobilization which make the state of war permanent. It will not offer positive programs but will speak, like Socrates' daimonion, in warnings and prohibitions. It can and must create a spiritual authority, become a spiritual power that could drive the warring world to some restraint, rendering some acts and measures impossible.”*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Patočka, J. , *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, translated by Erazim Kohák, edited by James Dodd, Open Courts Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 1996, p. 134

¹⁰⁶ Patočka, J. , *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, translated by Erazim Kohák, edited by James Dodd, Open Courts Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 1996, p. 135

The interpretation of WWI with the help of ideas coming from the 19th century was commonplace not only among historians and scholars. It was also built into the foundations of the independent democratic Czechoslovak state. Its founding father and first president, the retired university professor Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, subscribing to his positivistic creed concerning the history of humankind, and endowed with his set of political ideas strongly believed that what happened in Europe and in the world in the years 1914-1918 was a “world revolution.” Because it was essentially a progressive event, he saw in it a sufficient guarantee of our future free existence: “*The history of Europe since the 18th century*,” he wrote in a seminal essay whose main ideas were submitted to the attention of Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and that precisely reflected the dominant and unambiguously optimistic spirit prevailing in Czechoslovak society at the time, “*proves that given their democratic freedom, small peoples can gain independence. The world war was the climax of the movement begun by the French Revolution, a movement that liberated one oppressed nation after another. And now, there is a chance for a democratic Europe and for freedom and independence of all her nations.*”¹⁰⁷

The fallacy of all these expectations, when we take the historical experience of Czechs, Slovaks and other Central European peoples in the 20th century, is more than obvious. And also, going back to the atmosphere of the early 1970s when Patočka was sharing his philosophical “consolatory” thoughts and ideas with his stressed Czech compatriots, we already know what was Patočka’s own and final response to the current crisis; what was his personal concrete way of acceptance that the most important part of the European heritage in the post-European age is, as he phrased it, the “solidarity of the shaken.”

Patočka finished his last philosophical seminars and lectures and became the spokesperson for Charter 77. He died shortly after – having been exposed to all sorts of harassment from the Communist government and a series of prolonged police interrogations. What is then his final philosophical message, the last word to our on-going debate about *translatio imperii*, about the end of Europe and the arrival of the post-

¹⁰⁷ Masaryk, T.G., *The Making of a State*, New York, 1969, p. 372

European age? Most likely it is something that can't be contained and thus found in philosophical texts and that transcends the very activity we under normal circumstances call philosophy:

*The solidarity of the shaken is built up in persecution and uncertainty: that is its front line, quiet, without fanfare or sensation even where this aspect of the ruling Force seeks to seize it. It does not fear being unpopular, but rather seeks it and calls out quietly, wordlessly. Humankind will not attain peace by devoting and surrendering itself to the criteria of everydayness and of its promises. All who betray this solidarity must realize that they are sustaining war and are the parasites on the sidelines who live off the blood of others. The sacrifices of the front line of the shaken powerfully support this awareness.”*¹⁰⁸

III. FROM THE END OF HISTORY TO ITS RETURN

The end of the “short 20th century. What is coming next?

When the Pope Benedict XVI pronounced his lecture in Aula Magna of Regensburg University in April of 2007 and addressed in it the problem of dialogue over the structures of faith in the Bible and in the Qur'an, Jan Patočka was dead already for thirty years. We have been living for more than two decades in a very different world, the

¹⁰⁸ Patočka, J, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, translated by Erazim Kohák, edited by James Dodd, Open Courts Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 1996, p. 135

characterization of which as post-European (or post-Western, as some authors like to put it¹⁰⁹) has already become almost standard part of our current political vocabulary.

What only very few people would have predicted during the Patočka's lifetime¹¹⁰, has become reality. The Soviet Empire suddenly disappeared in the aftermath of the Revolution in Europe of 1989,¹¹¹ that swept through the whole East and Central European region after the new Soviet leader, Michail Gorbacev, had decided to launch the process of "perestrojka" and "glasnost" in the Soviet Union, and had called upon those who were in power in the satellite countries to follow, as ever before, the Soviet example. What was also to change, according to his "new thinking," was not only the conduct of domestic affairs in the socialist states of "Eastern block", but also the concept of their mutual relations: In that sense, Gorbacev had simply informed his partners that in future each of them would have had to rely on his own leadership in his country, and not on the Soviet military power, and "do it in his own way."¹¹²

The result of the Gorbacev's reforms of communism – of a bold attempt, indeed, to eliminate its totalitarian features, advanced this time not from the periphery, as in 1956 (Hungary) or 1968 (Czechoslovakia), but from the center of the "empire of evil" - is well known: its total collapse, and thanks to that also the abrupt end of the Cold War. The historical event of such a magnitude obviously has had not only the "local" or "regional" effect limited to the territory of "old continent". It affected significantly the rest of mankind as well and changed dramatically and fundamentally the political map of the whole world. In short: it brought, as first British historian Eric Hobsbawm put it and as it is generally accepted today, the whole historical era that started with the Great War 1914-1918, the "short" 20th century, to its end.¹¹³

Nonetheless, if we accept the idea that 1989 was such a milestone, we can hardly avoid the following question: What actually has begun, as a matter of fact, immediately

¹⁰⁹ For instance, Patrik Smith, *Somebody Else's Century: East and West in a Post-Western World*

¹¹⁰ Amalryk, D'Entcausse, ?

¹¹¹ Dahrendorf

¹¹² Sinatra doctrine

¹¹³ Hobsbawm and expl.,

after? The 21st century? In 1990? Could we have had any meaningful answer at all to this question before 2000? But even now, in the summer of 2011, what can be said about the era in which we have been living now for more than twenty one years? The era which is remarkably different from the previous historical period, now turned into the past, characterized by Hobsbawm as the “age of extremes”?

Three answers by global observers (Fukuyama in 1989, Huntington in 1993 and Kagan in 2008)

There is certainly a host of literature published in the course of past 21 years, analyzing from the different perspectives the emerging world order of the 21st century, and offering us various answers to the question raised in the end of the previous section. For what I want to say in this text it will be sufficient, however, to mention here just very briefly three seminal contributions into the on-going and obviously still unfinished debate.

The first one is the famous thesis of **Francis Fukuyama** which appeared in the very beginning of the new era and was later further elaborated into a bestselling book “The End of History and the Last Man”: *“What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government”*¹¹⁴.

No matter how much the idea of end of history got later under fire of all sorts of critics, both philosophical and non-philosophical,¹¹⁵ its power seemed to be almost irresistible and practically all who took part in the nascent public debate on the post-communist transitions in the early 1990s - new politicians playing active role in them or their Western advisors – accepted it, after the revolutionary enthusiasm died out and normal life returned, as their as if natural point of departure.

¹¹⁴ Francis Fukuyama: The End of History and the Last Man

¹¹⁵ Description of the debate

*“With all the fuss and noise, not a single new idea has come out of Central Europe in 1989”....The ideas whose time has come are old, familiar, well-tested ones. (It is the new ideas whose time has passed.)”*¹¹⁶, wrote in the spring of 1990 Timothy Garton Ash, who for years before the revolutions had been in touch with the Central European dissidents, and who represented for them a voice of authority.

His recommendations – and a similar advice could be heard from Ralf Dahrendorf whose “Reflections on the Revolution in Europe” became the classic of its kind, and from many others¹¹⁷ - as far as what was to be done after communism had miraculously disappeared, was straight-forward and clear, leaving no space for doubts or further questions: No experiments should be proposed, no utopian dreams turned into reality, no third ways between socialism and capitalism tried! It was good old liberal order what was at stake in the new brave world and what should be restored in it! It was the idea of open society and not some utopian blueprint of the radiant futures what should guide and shape the post-communist politics of transition! It was the restoration of Western liberal democracy with all its standard institutions (parlaments and political parties, market economies, independent judiciaries, the rule of law and the respect for human rights)¹¹⁸ - the return of post-communist countries to Europe - what was on agenda of the day! And it was certainly not a kind of continuation (for sure, with other means) of “non-political politics” invented and practiced during the totalitarian era by the dissidents¹¹⁹ or any other Central European phantasy or philosophical dream, as Ash, British liberal scholar and Anglo-Saxon empiricist, was always ready to admonish Central European public intellectuals turned over night into post-communist politicians and still often overwhelmed by the ideas they had lived with before the communism’s collapse; ready, for instance, to keep bringing the theme of crisis of modern European civilization into the

¹¹⁶ Op.cit. p. 27-28. I have discovered recently that the same argument I am making, based on my own conversations with Timothy Garton Ash, was made independently also by Mary Kaldor, another British scholar, public intellectual, activist of civil society and an old friend of mine, in her lecture given in October of 1999 (Mary Kaldor **Bringing Peace and Human Rights Together**, Public Lecture 9, the Centre for the Study of Global Governance, London School of Economics and Political Science)

¹¹⁷ Ref.

¹¹⁸ Comment.

¹¹⁹ Expl.

nascent post-communist political discourse and depart in the formulation of their current political programs, instead of usual liberal principles, from their own deep insights made in the realm of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology.¹²⁰

The second seminal contribution came from **Samuel Huntington**. Responding to Fukuyama he formulated his vision of the future of world politics as follows: *"It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future."*¹²¹

While Fukuyama wrote his text in the anticipation of stunning victory of the West and the Western ideas over the totalitarian Eastern Block lead by the Soviet Union, Huntington had already in front of him disturbing realities of new conflicts emerging already from the early 1990s, both in Europe and in the world. It was the shocking outbursts of violence accompanying the fragmentation of Yugoslavia into a group of new sovereign nation-states - the low intensity wars among them, the ethnic cleansing accompanying their creation, the crimes against humanity committed by nationalist warmongers, religious fundamentalists and irregular warriors of all kinds¹²² – what sent a clear signal: the relatively stable and "peaceful" bi-polar architecture based on the ideological competition between East and West¹²³ wasn't to be replaced any times soon by a global liberal political order foreseen by Fukuyama. What was ahead instead was a long and open-ended period of instability and chaos, the essential feature of which was the emergence of new conflicts and specific forms of transitional violence. What we were about to see in the coming 21st century after the short 20th century ended in 1989 were -

¹²⁰ Expl.

¹²¹ Quot.

¹²² Expl.

¹²³ The John Mersheimer's argument

in place of the wars of princes (the 18th century), the wars of nations (the 19th century), the wars of ideologies (the 20th century) - the wars motivated by religions, cultures and civilizations, the conflicts produced by all the anxieties in the more and more globalized, inter-connected and interdependent world stemming from our uprooted and profoundly shaken human identities....

So what then follows from the Huntington's hypothesis? What actually motivated his study of civilizations clashing in the today's world? What was the principal reason behind his research? The proper understanding of our current situation in the beginning of the new era – which should n't certainly fuel the dormant conflicts and turn them whenever is possible into the hot wars, but rather lead to the dialogue of mankind across the civilizational boundaries, the dialogue between the world cultures and religions! - is in the Huntingtonian scheme of things the first necessary step how to cope efficiently with all the new threats accompanying the coming era; the threats not only killing those who happened to be here and there directly hit by the horrors of different manifestations of transitional violence, but endangering ultimately the freedom all of us, which still is and will remain the very core of our humanity.

Third contribution to the on-going debate on the world order emerging in the 21st century I want to mention here comes from one of the leading representatives of American political realism in international affairs, carrying on the tradition of Morgenthau and Niebuhr, **Robert Kagan**. In his relatively short, but concise and well written book published in 2008, i.e. almost twenty years after the revolutionary changes of 1989, "The Return of History and the End of Dreams", he wrote: "*It may not come to war, but the global competition between democratic and autocratic governments will become the dominant feature of the twenty-first century world.*"¹²⁴

The process of the EU and the NATO enlargement, indeed, changed significantly the whole political architecture of Europe.¹²⁵ On the one hand, the Yugoslav conflict is slowly becoming a matter of the past and the "European option" offered to all its participants, including Kosovo, looks today really like a realistic and workable

¹²⁴ Robert Kagan: The Return of History and the End of Dreams, , Alfred, A. Knopf, New York, 2008

¹²⁵ Detailed description of the new realities

solution.¹²⁶ The idea of “the Europe whole and free”¹²⁷, however, that seemed to be almost at reach of hand just ten years ago, is slowly drifting away, thanks to much more assertive policies of the Russian Federation under Medvedev and Putin.¹²⁸ Turkey, a NATO member since 1952 and a the oldest candidate country of the EU is now getting more distanced from the European political space than ever before in the post-war period and becoming again, as it was the case in the past, a subregional power characterized by its Islamic identity and radiating its influence in all directions - Europe, Asia and the Greater Middle East.¹²⁹

The tragic events of 9/11 have changed irreversibly the situation of whole mankind and represent, indeed, a kind of horrifying gateway into the 21st century. The phenomenon of international terrorism and the necessity to struggle with it represent now one of the greatest challenges for the international community and the most serious test of its ability to maintain the world peace and order and to secure reasonable and sufficient levels of safety for their citizens.¹³⁰

If the victory of the West in the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union from the position of super-power could have created for a moment the expectations that the United States would become the sole global hegemon, the experience of the Iraq War in 2003 and of its aftermath has quickly changed that perception. It hasn't only brought a significant blow into the transatlantic relationship,¹³¹ but has sent a clear signal that the world we are going to live in will not be unipolar; that its outstanding feature will be multipolarity.

The climate change debate and its dynamic evolutions in the past years have opened another Pandora box in the ever broader repertoire of current global politics and have demonstrated more than clearly the difficulties to reach consensus within the

¹²⁶ Expl.

¹²⁷ Expl.

¹²⁸ Expl. Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova

¹²⁹ Expl.

¹³⁰ Expl.

¹³¹ Expl.

international society of states, when it comes to the problem of “governance” in the area of environment and other “global commons”.¹³²

The economic/financial crisis that burst out in 2008 and that is far from over today is another sign that times are, indeed, changing; that the models that worked reasonably well in the past don’t work today anymore and that we are in acute need to find and implement new solutions.¹³³ Especially here one can clearly observe that the era of European or Western supremacy is really definitely over and that what is coming next can easily become an Asian century. The growing strength of China and the emergence of other serious players within the global economy (the coming into existence of BRICS¹³⁴) proves more than clearly the novelty of our current situation and is quite indicative as far as the problems, challenges and dilemmas the Western civilization is confronted with in the post-European world of today.

Kagan - apparently relieved as a staunch realist, that, despite all these disturbing concerns and questions all Westerners may have, he can say right at the outset of his text: after the period of dreams and cravings for idealistic and thus somewhat utopian solutions “*the world has become normal again*”¹³⁵ - offers a concise account of the major actors on the current international scene in the beginning of the 21st century. He points to the new great power nationalism emerging in Russia and China and contrasts it with the post-modern and “post-national spirit” of the European Union. He looks at Japan, India, Iran, the United States, one after another, and analyses their current standing, achievements, intentions and potentialities on the international scene. The gist of his argument is that the world affairs today should be understood in the context of fundamental competition - that is new in its current form, but actually runs throughout the human history¹³⁶ - between what he calls “*the axis of democracy*” on the one side, and “*the association of autocrats*” on the other. This competition, however, doesn’t have anymore a form of

¹³² Expl.

¹³³ Comments on the financial crisis during our EU presidency in the spring of 2009

¹³⁴ Expl.

¹³⁵

¹³⁶ Wittvogel

ideological war of the 20th century between the West and the East that was taking place primarily on the European soil. The conflict that has burst out with the arrival of the 21st century is by its very nature global or “post-European”. And one can at least pose a disturbing question: What if the current distribution of power will change in course of time? What will happen if the superiority as far as global “force” is concerned will not remain for ever on the side of the Western democracies and their allies, and will be out of sudden on the side of their non-European autocratic contenders?

The current power struggle between democrats and autocrats touches the core principles of our now planetary civilization and re-opens a number of vitally important questions. If the fundamental argument in the context of Eurocentric Enlightenment Liberalism was that capitalism could flourish and generate prosperity only under the conditions of freedom and democracy¹³⁷, the emerging post-European world and especially spectacular rise of China in it, keeps sending signals that the globalized capitalism might be offering the unexpected advantages and the unprecedented strength to autocrats and totalitarians. What then is the realistic advice for democrats under the given circumstances?

The Kagan’s suggestion is clear and simple: they should be ready and willing to act in concert and think strategically. Their “axis” should be strengthened by all available means and the “association of autocrats” forced to play, wherever it is possible, according to their rules! The basic dogma whose origins can be traced back to the period of the European Enlightenment - *“the belief that a liberal international order rests on the triumph of ideas and on the natural unfolding of human progress”* - has been nothing else than *“the greatest fallacy of our era”*.¹³⁸ *“The world’s democracies need to begin thinking about how they can protect their interest and defend their principles in a world in which these are once again powerfully challenged.”*¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Michael Novak

¹³⁸ Kagan, p.102

¹³⁹ Kagan, 97

The United States and the European Union, in spite that they can be perceived from time to time as coming from two different planets, Mars and Venus,¹⁴⁰ - in spite that the post-modern “cooperative empire” of the EU¹⁴¹ relies on and subscribes to a somewhat different *modus operandi* than the more traditional “imperialistic republic” of the United States¹⁴² - have no other choice in the present moment of world history than to extend all possible forms of close cooperation. Their “transatlantic bond” is more essential and important today than ever before. They both should work closely and in concert with other members of the community of democracies (with Japan, India, Brazil, South Africa, and many others), regardless the cultural or religious differences, and to defend together the basic values and principles of their common, not anymore European, but global civilization.....

To sum it up once more: History, indeed, didn’t end in 1989, but rather returned to Europe after our liberation from the totalitarian enslavement. If something ended with the 20th century, it certainly was not the history as such, but the dominant role of Europe and of the West in general in it – the argument used by Jan Patočka to whom I want to return in the final chapter of this text. The transition from communism has turned out to be a process opening the world, but without a clear and well defined end. It is really impossible to find for the movement of history we are a part of now, an explanatory Hegelian scheme. The longer it is observed, the less historical reason can be found in it, the more it evokes the image of Thukidydian KINESIS.¹⁴³

The Legacy of Jan Patočka: A Socratic message from the 20th to the 21st Century

History has been undoubtedly very kind to the inhabitant of the “heart of Europe” in the past twenty years. The transition following after their miraculous liberation from the totalitarian yoke has been quite successful for the Czech Republic, as well as for other Central Europeans. When one sees the current standing of all countries of this region in

¹⁴⁰ Expl.

¹⁴¹ Expl., Kagan 10

¹⁴² Raymond Aron

¹⁴³ Quot.

Europe they had been separated from by the “Iron Courtain” for four long decades until the revolution of 1989, one can say with pride and satisfaction: yes, indeed, we have really “returned”. We are now back in the arms of European civilization, turned again into democracies, run by governments, formed on the results of free elections and endowed with the legitimate mandate, respecting the principles of rule of law and human rights. Our closed and state-controlled economies have been successfully transformed into free-market economies, have opened to the world, and in spite of current downturn and turmoil, all the countries of the region have certainly got a chance to rediscover the capitalist prosperity. They all have become members first of the NATO and later the EU, and are firmly anchored now in the security and defence structures of the Western world. The article V of the Washington Treaty concluded now between twenty eight NATO members, including the United States, gives them the guarantee that the aggression against their territories would be perceived as the aggression against the whole alliance and will be met with the adequate collective reaction of all others.¹⁴⁴

But no matter how important and really historical all these changes are for the Czech Republic and the other countries in the region, we too can’t escape the fact that the history has not ended with all these achievements, but rather returned. All of us are exposed to the dilemmas of current global situation and need to deal now - for instance, in our efforts to re-formulate periodically our “national interests” and formulate our foreign political priorities and strategies for the coming period - with the similar set of questions.¹⁴⁵ What should be our long-term plans or “national programs”¹⁴⁶ for the future? What we are to do, confronted with all the challenges and the new threats in the beginning of the 21st century to keep us on the right track and not fall again into some trap that might be prepared for us somewhere in the so far unknown future by “History” - *“that goddess of Hegel and Marx, that incarnation of reason that judges us and arbitrate*

¹⁴⁴ Quot.

¹⁴⁵ Crf. The Conceptual Re-statement of Czech Foreign Policy, published recently by the Czech Foreign Ministry, 2011

¹⁴⁶ Expl.

our fate”, in the words of Milan Kundera in his famous essay about Central European “tragedy”¹⁴⁷?

I certainly can’t open this topic - vitally important for us for obvious reasons, but maybe also interesting for others who may have similar concerns in the current international situation - in the end of this text, which has got too long anyway. What I want to do instead, in its conclusion, is to return very briefly once more to the thoughts of Jan Patočka discussed above and emphasize the importance of his legacy.

First an impossible hypothetical question: how Patočka would react to Fukuyama’s “end of history” or, on the contrary, to the way how Kagan interprets its return? What argument might be said from his perspective as far as the old good ideas of open society are concerned and the dangers connected with the inherent utopianism of the new ones? What concerns he would articulate - no matter how much he wished the Czechs and Slovaks and all other nations who were enslaved by communism to get rid of it and to become again a part of Europe and the West - were he asked about the possible scenarios or implications of our return in the current historical moment?

He certainly would be, I am convinced, as he was in 1968, against totalitarianism, for democracy and for our liberation. But what else besides that can be said? How he would interpret this event in the larger context of the world history? Would he offer us, as Fukuyama provocatively did, a kind of Hegelian speculative historical explanation? Or would he side with the political realists seeking their primary inspiration in the famous Melian dialogue in Thucydides? Instead of trying to answer all these and similar questions I can just evoke Patočka participating in the Czech public debate that burst out during the Prague Spring, carefully scrutinizing and examining PANTI TROPO everything “new” what was presented for his consideration;¹⁴⁸ challenging *more philosophico* all the arguments brought in by the current politicians, testing their propositions with his Socratic questions and by doing so disturbing the “peace” of their thoughtlessness, demasking mercilessly their slogans and daily routines. He certainly was not a politician able to please his audiences and to come with practical solutions....

¹⁴⁷ Ref.

¹⁴⁸ Plato

There are two ideas of Patocka, I believe, to be tested against the current realities. He proposed, as I quoted from his text in the previous section, to use the Husserl's work "*written to avert the final catastrophe of the European world....to shed some light on the first lap on our way into the emerging post-European world*"; to use the Husserl's discovery of "*the elementary bond connecting EPISTÉMÉ to DOXA*" as a point of departure in the dialog of mankind in order to humanize the current clash of civilizations; to protect the European legacy of *logos and ratio* against the fall „into a barbarian hatred of the spirit,“ leading, indeed, not only our continent but the whole world into catastrophe. He also stressed repeatedly the need to support actively all those who are in the front line, being confronted with and challenging by their free spirit and way of life the autocratic power; to make the „solidarity of the shaken“ a factor of human history; to speak up wherever and whenever it is possible on their behalf; to say no to „all measures“ and totalitarian solutions that may be presenting themselves in search of new world order and global governance, but only make the current state of war which destroys democracy and in which autocrats will always have upper hand, permanent....

Is it or is it not enough to start critically examining our current Czech national program in the context of current phase of human history? Most likely no, but, unfortunately, at least for the time being, I have no better answer.

Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, the founding father of Czechoslovakia that came into existence in 1918 - in the very beginning of the “short” 20th century, which turned out to be the “age of extremes” - stated repeatedly that the Czech question had to be formulated in the worldly terms; that otherwise it is no question at all. Looking again to two papal documents, one from the 1960s, the other from the first decade of the 21st century, with which I started this text, I have to admit I got quite far away from them in my reflections. However, they were not utterly irrelevant for my writing. They reminded me again quite strongly the gap between our past and our present and future, and also the power of international context in which our national existence has always been embedded. Philosophers like Jan Patocka always know how to elevate their thoughts above the level of passing, mundane and historical, and even to reach through the movement of their souls the eternal spheres designed by Plato as HYPERÚRANION,¹⁴⁹ and look at least for

¹⁴⁹ Plato, Faidros

a short moment at themselves and us, from the heavenly perspective. Nonetheless, as Patocka knew very well and experienced throughout his life, philosophy is always primarily an act of resistance of concrete humans in their concrete situation. What remains after they are gone is not only their life-work, the teaching contained in their texts, their ideas, but also their Socratic messages sent to their posteriority.