

LSESU Baltic Society public lecture

Europe's growth and decline

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having been asked kindly to clarify the meaning of my topic: "Europe's growth and decline", I added two more nuclear sentences to be distributed and also decided to broaden the definition at the site here. Some words are so common and so commonly used that they are losing all clarity indeed.

Growth is usually understood in terms of numbers or quantities, while the question of quality quite often is left to one side.

Even the formula "quality of life" seems to be, unfortunately, too often met and presented quantitatively, again, in numbers. It seems that the basic question "Are you happy?" might be presumed as much too private and politically incorrect. Naturally, if you are not happy, your government is bad.

Anyway, what happened with Europe? Is it happy? What is it, at the very least?

Europe grew from **an idea of Europe**.

Leaving geography aside, it was about the most important spiritual matters realized as European ones.

The tragic experiences of the last century contributed to that, as well. Europeans have realized that common existence is more important than constant fighting. To live and grow is better than to kill and die. Discover yourself among brothers, not enemies.

Of course, a commune of brothers and sisters for a life in peace and for an essentially longer life than just your biological carrier, such a commune always meant open or secret Christianity. The Founding Fathers of Europe, even before it was turned by them to peace and solidarity, were aware of Europe's Christian roots and did appreciate this fact. By happy chance, they were Christians themselves: Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide de Gasperi.

Usually, the picture is presented as a series of events: the Second World War is allegedly over (with Central Eastern Europe still occupied by the Red Army, which means, the USSR) and a new tension is again arising in the Western part of our continent; the renewed competition of big companies and social depression makes that Europe unstable and vulnerable to Communist influence and threats from the Soviet empire just beyond the fence. Then comes an idea of European unification and it helps, certainly, together with the assistance of the Marshal Plan, with resolute steps to build the transatlantic union of common defence – NATO. Democracies want to survive.

That was one side of the picture, the reverse rather than the obverse.

The idea of Europe was indeed something more than such urgent needs as defence. The idea was the building of a Europe better than it had been before, a Europe better in a moral dimension, – and pragmatism followed only as a supplement to the inspiring idealism, not the opposite way round. Nevertheless capitalist profit often tried to take the upper hand and to become the ruler of progress.

In the course of over 50 years the word European or the European idea was becoming a body able to live, grow and mature in freedom. It should look exciting: there are no internal European wars anymore; resolve your painful and burdening colonial legacy; build a common prosperous existence, with improving living standards and the shining myth of the welfare state! Progressively, all free European states and nations enjoyed in this way the benefits of productive cooperation and deepened unification, and proudly used to call themselves: "Europe".

To call itself rightly "half of Europe" would be less popular. Therefore, those the other side of the Iron Curtain, if sometimes termed (rather in the US) "captive nations", were never called "captive Europe". Free Europe did not feel bad about being only a half. The modest remark by Robert Schuman "Europe is to be completed" was left to await better times.

They came. The problem of recognition and adoption of realities came in line with a discovery that the additional or the "second" Europe is still alive and goes on regaining its freedom. East Germany was assisted and followed by the other states of Central Europe and the Baltics. One and half a year after the three reform and liberation grass-root movements were established in the Baltic States still under the Soviet system of governance but already shaking its fundamentals, they went in millions to the Baltic Way manifesting freedom, the Berlin Wall fell.

Artificial and not true definitions were used for that discovery of the "second", "new", or post-communist Europe, instead talking about **one Europe** open for all wishing for and unifying in democracy. Idealism and pragmatism have been from then in a continuous debate, which recently is progressing in more and more open ways: what is at stake and where is the end?

Europe went forwards by unifying markets, trade, enterprises, legislation and judiciary, space for travelling and education, and was seeking, until now not very successfully, to have common external policies. It **was Europe's growth in a dimension of maturity**. The idea of one Europe was becoming embodied in the West.

Another dimension and track record was **the territorial growth**, called the **enlargement** of the EU. It was exercised not by any *Grand Armée* but through free-will accession, thanks to good will and good home work of more and more European states.

The greatest breakthrough on this path happened when ten Central European states, formerly captive nations including those from Baltic Sea and Black Sea coasts, joined the Union in 2004 and 2007. An even greater European breakthrough is in the minds. It already happens when an additional group of Western Balkan states is expected to be ready to join the Union in the foreseeable future. Turkey has already been accepted as a long term candidate and Croatia as a short term one, and still more Eastern European countries, at least the Ukraine and Georgia, disputed with Europe by Russia, are waiting to be sincerely and definitely invited by the Union to approach and accede.

Many say that the recent enlargement was the main success story for Europe, after the Cold War was over. Some say, it brought new problems, therefore, some "old" Europeans became uncertain and unhappy.

I say, **the openness** of the picture is also growing in Europe's mind. No more debates about whether the Caucasus is Europe or not. Even the unfortunate bleeding Chechnya, having been subjected to the genocide in a lavatory (in line with the vocabulary of Mr. Putin), is understood now as the remotest corner of Europe, therefore, our wound, as well.

In expectation of Turkey's membership, though distant, the map of the EU will grow essentially in geopolitical sense. This candidate country and member of NATO is already now on the outskirts of the turbulent Caucasus and borders Iraq – so will the EU, approaching the Middle East.

Over there, there is already at least one European-type democracy, the state of Israel. Despite its criticism, it is hard to believe that Europe could allow Israel to be destroyed; therefore, the Middle East is already becoming for the EU itself (with Turkey as a member or not yet) a field of competition with Iran.

If we like it or not, it is coming. Palestine and Lebanon, just next to Syria, are European challenges, as well.

Even Central Asia may become a new opportunity for Europe, and those states not by accident are defining themselves in a more open perspective as Eurasian ones. Even some part of Kazakhstan is in Europe, geographically.

To add, the fresh idea of the Mediterranean Union shows up how the previous European idea of only several founding states is expanding now in its virtual geopolitical growth. Remarkably, the possibly real expansion of the Gazprom Union does intend to take Algeria and Libya first, to make Russia a Mediterranean power sooner. Is Europe really ready to be a player and not a victim missing its time chances - that is the question.

Just next to Europe, there is Russia also seeking to be a global **Eurasian player**. Paradoxically, it was offered a *place d'armes* exactly inside of Europe and the EU. Such was the result of WWII and the then weakness of the Western victors – the Königsberg/Kaliningrad exclave. Eurasian militant imperialism in the very middle of Central Europe was a pretty gift of those unfortunately losing victors, the US and UK, in 1945, delivered to Stalin

There are great similarities with the victors of the Cold War.

So, Russia. Not so much a loser in the Cold War, as a loser in its post-Cold War striving for democracy. Otherwise, if neither democracy nor human life is an asset, there are no other losses for the Russia of today, but the "territories." Russia's passion to regain them back was recently manifested by the occupation and annexation of parts of Georgia.

To remake Western democracies by completely corrupting them, - that would be the sweetest dream and a global victory for the Kremlin. To make "them", Europeans, progressively obedient, that was the putinist energy strategy. Today it seems to have been postponed a little by the avalanche of international financial problems shattering Russia's unsound economy, as well.

All those challenges come in a bad moment of decline of Europe's spiritual and moral identity together with its demography.

After a period of official joy with the growing unification and territorial enlargement, when the milestones were Paris-Rome-Maastricht-Nice and recently Lisbon, and after the peoples' indifference and reluctance resulted in the failure of the Constitution for Europe, the European consciousness has partly turned back to more essential idealism.

What are we? Was it all right until now and was it adequate? Is Europe, while striving to be geographically completed, mature enough in itself and complete in its spirit to withstand global challenges?

Here again comes the concept: **Union of values**. Subsequently it requires some consideration, as to where and what we are – Europe and Europeans, short of existential determination about our values. And again Hamlet's question: to grow or to decline? I am sorry to say, both processes proceeded synchronically.

Now – on **decline**.

Consumerism as the European way of life appears not as a value in any sense but the tomb of all other senses. It causes and especially cultivates the poorest ideology (for the rich and the poor) about what human happiness is. The *Dolce vita* of being rich? The idea of a **short life** so similar to an insect's time given over to one-day's pleasure and adventure is again the fertilizer for the "culture of

death", as John Paul II described that feature of our times. In line with that, consumerism as a form of egotism in human hearts that are empty and disabled for compassion and a wish to help, is causing the perversely promoted alienation from children. Too often they are treated as a burden and not a joy and the sense of life. (To put it brutally, millions of unborns are treated as tumours. It cannot pass by without affecting our societies with increasing brutalities and cruelties.) The direct result of such an approach is the evident decline in European demography. Less and less love and children, an aging society and sweet hopes of immigration as salvation. In this way Europe will soon become very different. God help us to regain and preserve the forgotten Christian value of brotherhood.

Nature is exploited, as if it were not our house but our conquest. Too little attention is given to Nature's signals transmitted to us by its body language: disasters caused by typhoons, earthquakes and tides, the ever new diseases, the incredible suffering of polluted seas and oceans, loss of ice and water for lands. The world's ocean is rising and continues to do so. Sometimes it looks like Nature is becoming ready, for reasons of self-defence, to get rid of the parasitizing humans.

When the crazy bitopus, the creature on two legs, is eager to use even the earthquakes and typhoons, not to mention the newly invented diseases, as weapons against other human beings, this also will not pass unpunished. There again is a fundamental **decline** with no bottom in sight.

Europe is talking about fundamental principles, but is not able to simply say "no". Sometimes it says that to China, but never to Russia. Now the US is proceeding to delete "no" in its relations with China. Maybe, together they both will say "no" to Russia. Maybe, on the contrary, the US will prefer to love Russia as a maiden.

While calling for transparency, Europe is not yet introducing any transparency in its relations with Russia. Even more, while giving rare and good pieces of advice on recognition and reconciliation, our Europe (or the EU) is yet unable to cope or reconcile fully with its own past. Let us once again remember WWII in real circumstances and consequences. Then something big and ugly happened – the selling of the "second half" of Europe to the USSR at the subsequent Tehran-Yalta- Potsdam auctions.

Later the three Western victors administered their corresponding zones of the occupied Germany with no concern for what the Soviets were doing in their occupational zone, where even the Nazi

death camps of Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen were used for the same purposes of annihilation, having been officially incorporated into the Soviet Gulag system. The population of today's Kaliningrad Oblast was left to Stalin's mercy with no word about those people in the Potsdam deal. There the first European ethnic cleansing of "post-war" times took place. Nobody noticed it.

Finally, the question of partners for today.

- Tell me, Europe, who is your friend and I will know who you are.

In politics that word "friend" is replaced by partner and partnership in various combinations. Partnership for Peace, Extended partnership, Strategic partner – the latter looks very much like a desired friend. Eastern Partnership looks now like an extended hand of sincere and honest European assistance.

The EU often calls Russia its strategic partner in the energy business and in fighting terrorists. The foreseen merge of aviation and media (look at the Evening Standard becoming Morning Star) is also possible. The problem is that that this partnership contains different meanings for both sides.

In the Western understanding of partnership, it is cooperation with mutual benefits. The Soviet as well as Russian post-Soviet view is different. It is rather similar to gambling or playing sports. Accordingly, your partner is an adversary and opponent to be put down, and all beneficial awards from the game are then yours. Only the pleasure is mutual.

Europe now finds itself at a moral crossroads, and the overwhelming post-Christian relativism makes it difficult to choose the way to be called European. And Russia is a grim mirror to that situation. Thus for the end I used a magic mirror.

Strangely, most of EU politicians like to repeat mantras about the "strategic partnership" with Russia, but avoid defining the content and differences between the "strategies" of both. Many are still happy with the paper signed on four "common areas". One among them is for justice, freedom and human rights, since for Russia there is little compliance with reality. Are we in a common area when we look at Chechnya reduced to ashes and ruins for its political disobedience? Are we in a common area with authoritarian governance at home and professional killers sent to London?

Therefore, “common values” with Russia are too often put at the expense of ultimate incredibility, as to what those European values are.

One could say something fantastic: if you still want to remain Europeans in spirit and free from the Kremlin’s dictate prettily combined with bribery, you must at least show some moves towards living **without Russia**. With your seat belts fastened, say: we can! It is the only way to get the Kremlin to think normally even on the tricky subject of “interdependence”.

Such a way seemed to be too demanding for Western politicians, at least, before the Georgian war and Russian/Ukrainian/European gas crisis erupted synchronically with the world's financial crisis. Just in theory, that utopian idea of living for some time without Russia (before it comes to its senses) would mean that the illusions about welfare and leadership would be frozen. If not for the recent shift of preferences, it would be seen as too high a price, not worthy to be paid for European liberty plus identity. To say: moo, is simpler. Words, words and words about **community of values** cannot cover up the erosion of those values and the creeping disbelief. Today real values are mostly material, not moral ones. Therefore, if we wish to retain our European identity, that situation with our eroding values should be reversed.

May be it was already reversed before, when the sound teaching of Benjamin Franklin was so unwisely rejected. 250 years ago Mr. Franklin issued a booklet about the experiences of a person given the name Poor Richard. The following are some quotations form Poor Richard’s advices.

“If you would be wealthy, think of saving, as well as of getting. The Indies have not made Spain rich, because her outgoes are greater than her incomes. Away, then, with your expensive follies, and you will not have the so much reason to complain of hard times, heavy taxes, and chargeable families.”

“If you would know the value of money, go and try to borrow some; **for he that goes a borrowing, goes a sorrowing**, - as Poor Richard says”.

“Though I had at first determined to buy stuff for a new coat, I went away, resolved to wear my old one a little longer. Reader, if thou wilt do the same, thy profit will be great as mine.”

End of quotations from Benjamin Franklin, one of the Fathers of the wealthy America. I am not aware if Rich Gordon is aware of Poor Richard's wisdom, but the latter is worthy to be taken into account.

Ladies and Gentlemen, all that is your free choice, really, and the current situation calling for a new European self-determination may even turn out to be helpful. There is a chance, anyway. Not everything can be predicted. Sometimes utopias become realities. **A new philosophy of life is needed.** Otherwise, the life itself is not so much needed, and the culture of death is gaining ground. That new philosophy should be based on love, not consumption. While growth of consumption goes in line with decline of love, this is what we already have, and it may become even worse. Sorry to end with such a warning, but I only tried to share with you my observations and concerns before wishing everybody good luck.

You will find more on this subject in my book "Crossroad of Europe", which I leave to your School library.