

**Projev ministra zahraničních věcí L. Zaorálka na Politickém salonu
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„Escaping the Trap of Radicalism. Reflections on Central Europe“**

It is an honour to speak here at *the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*. I must start by thanking the IWM for its immense contribution to intellectual exchange between our two countries.

Before the collapse of the pre-war world, Czech and Austrian intellectual lives were part of the same universe. The greatest Czech minds, including President Masaryk, thrived in what used to be the Central European academic, literary and artistic community.

The Institute, and in particular Krzysztof Michalski and his team, deserve credit for nourishing these links even during the Cold War and beyond. For intellectuals in the former Eastern Bloc, such life-lines were essential – for, as we all know, intellectual creativity dies out in isolation. In short, IWM is one of the places where Central Europe truly happens, and where it blends into a larger continental whole.

Let me just highlight one of our common projects – the Jan Patočka Fellowship, which provides Czech researchers with a chance to partake in IWM research.

In many ways, Patočka's philosophy makes for an inspiring point of departure in thinking about the theme of the Czech-Austrian forum – radicalism. Radicalism is a subject of paramount interest and political relevance: for both the upcoming Austrian chairmanship of the OSCE and the Czech presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

It has become a commonplace to affirm that we live in a time of multiple and overlapping crises. Yet somehow we are struggling to grasp the essence of the problem. We can sense its existential weight - as EU leaders remind us rather frequently. But we're still unable to establish the basic elements of our situation. Such crises are, of course, conducive to false prophets of all kinds who reduce our predicament to a single set of causes and propose simplistic remedies.

In this context, turning to Patočka is instructive in two ways. First, his philosophical work is informed by a thorough knowledge of European history. He reminds us that crises were built into European modernity from the very start. Second, Patočka seeks to vindicate European modernity by pointing to possible pathways for its renewal. Far from taking *crisis* simply to signify that our means have become insufficient - and our ends inconclusive - Patočka reminds us, in the Husserlian vein, that „crisis“ derives from „*krinein*“, the Greek for „distinguish“. Crises shed light on our condition and help isolate the essential from the accidental.

But it would be a mistake to treat Patočka's philosophy of history as a nothing but a message of consolation in times of hopelessness. Erazim Kohák, who gained access to Patočka's writings here, points us to a programmatic – and deeply democratic – facet of Patočka's thought. This applies in particular to Patočka's essay *Supercivilisation and its Internal Conflict*, published in 1950's.

Patočka uses the term „supercivilization“ to describe the unique nature of European modernity. Unlike older civilizations, which were religious at heart, European modernity builds on creative impulses that are rational, „enlightened“ and secular. It has found its expression in the universality of science, in the capitalist world-economy, in secularization.

This will not strike us as particularly novel, at least those acquainted with Weber, Husserl or Masaryk. What is inspiring, though, is Patočka's ability to discern two distinct strands in rational civilization, both unfolding from the seminal event of the French revolution – radicalism and moderantism. The radical strand is marked by total adherence to rational organizational principles and obsession with transforming societies - to the point of suppressing anything outside of this remit.

On the other hand, moderantism, as Patočka calls it, retains an awareness of the limitations in rationalist modernity. It has no ambition to encompass the totality of life. It mobilizes the force of reason for means rather than ends. This is the liberal form of modernity, derived from the transformative idea of individual freedom. It leaves room for the heterogeneity of human interests, and for diverse social orders.

When Patočka wrote his essay, both the radical and moderate strands found their imperfect embodiment: the first in the Soviet Union, the second one in the West. As Patočka points out, however, these were but historical instances of wider trends. The threat of radicalism is virtually inseparable from modernity – in following its inherent principle, rational civilization is inclined towards radicalism: towards extinguishing diversity.

What remains of this analysis 60 years on? Soviet radicalism imploded. Unfortunately, its collapse did not re-invigorate Europe's moderate rational civilization. Rather, it gave way to its gradual erosion. The political crisis of today is the culmination of this process. The ultimate institutional expression of this civilization - the European Union - is under attack from radicals of all stripes.

Patočka vindicates radicalism on one score – in its moral intuition, radicalism points its finger at intolerable injustice. In eradicating injustice, radicalism is ready to spare no means. However, in the end, the radical gesture is self-defeating – it is heroic, rightfully enraged, yet its restlessness makes it negligent to historical constellations, prone to violence and conducive to producing either ever more injustice or more paralysis.

In this sense, the rage that propels today's European radicals can be seen as legitimate. There is real social injustice in our societies - in part thanks to the way the Eurozone is governed. The alienation from EU integration is undeniable. The anger over social inequality is genuine - and indeed morally justified. Today's radical and anti-European parties are not just a product of Russian intrigue. They channel real insecurities - over globalization, immigration or galloping technological change.

We all know that radicals have no real solutions. In some countries (such as the UK), their lack of responsibility is becoming patently obvious. But that's not enough - it is not enough to dismiss the anti-European backlash as misguided and sinister.

If European modernity is to survive, it must overcome its present condition. Unfortunately, the original manifestation of moderate rational civilization - political liberalism - is now reduced to economic liberalism. Instead of upholding social dignity and political cohesion, it breeds selfishness and atomization. Instead of promoting the plurality of social choices, it has degenerated into a technocratic system of governance where radicalism is the only alternative to *status quo*. This is the cycle identified by Patočka: without tolerance for diversity - without social cohesion, without democratic accountability - modernity feeds radicalism.

To escape this trap, our civilization – our politics and our institutions – must reinvent their primary function: in the language of Patočka – they must produce durable public assets capable of being universally human. In other words, they must generate truths, means and values that are independent of the interests of particular social classes or privileged groups. It

requires a political and social system capable of integrating all those who happen to languish on its internal and external periphery.

Patočka's philosophy does not contain a check-list of institutional solutions: and we should be suspicious of everyone who pretends to have them. However, his writing provides us with a key political insight: if we are to survive the onslaught of radicalism, pure rationality will not suffice. Patočka's conception of moderation is not the same as technocratic and managerial governance - in fact, it is the very opposite. It requires a positive and substantive vision of politics.

Patočka's moderate civilization is our shared European heritage. The European Union is its greatest political and institutional achievement - and the only framework in which the spirit of moderation can be redeemed. In this respect, the Bratislava summit may count as a first step. But it will be a long journey, and there are no shortcuts.

Our countries bear a special responsibility to contribute to Europe's renewal. Which means, first and foremost, standing up to the tide of radicalism in our own countries. Unfortunately, the political discourse in Central Europe has become tainted by anti-liberal and nationalist elements. We hear calls for a cultural counter-revolution. We hear proposals for radical change to the EU's institutional order - in effect, reverting European cooperation to the pre-Maastricht era. These are flawed and dangerous ideas. It is exactly the kind of destructive radicalism that Patočka warned against.

On the other hand, we should also acknowledge that the backlash against modernity is not a uniquely Central European phenomenon. It affects most of the developed world. Its sources run far deeper and wider than communism or the legacy of post-communist transformation.

We must also acknowledge that it is not representative of the prevailing attitudes in our own societies. A distinction must be made - and is not made often enough - between popular anxieties over uncontrolled migration, and attitudes towards the European project. We may find - as Ivan Krastev highlighted in one of his recent pieces - that our societies are more supportive of EU integration than some older Member States.

Today, it is fashionable to speak of new geographical division in Europe, in which our region is cast as a source of revolt against liberalism and EU integration. The dichotomy it is as simplistic as it is dangerous.

The story is much more nuanced. I am reminded of the work of Karl-Markus Gauss, the Austrian novelist and a great student of the Central European milieu. He wrote of our Hassliebe with Western Europe: an ambiguous relationship that accounts for the unique role of Central Europe in the continent's history.

There was always a degree of condescension in Western perception of Central Europe. The stereotype had the fortunate effect of stimulating our own curiosity and ingenuity. Our region rarely spawned any meta-ideas that would transform the course of history - this remained the domain of the West. But it was here that many vanguard ideas were put to a test. The region's sprawling intellectual life provided fertile ground for such political experiments.

But not all were successful. Consider, for instance, cosmopolitanism. It required a number of attempts until the idea took hold in our context. And only partially: despite its cultural and ethnic diversity, and despite its experience with totalitarian regimes, Central Europe never fully embraced the notion of a 'melting pot' as a cultural component of EU integration.

In our region, ideas of cosmopolitanism and European unity came in a more humble shape: Jiří Dienstbier, a dissident and former Czechoslovak foreign minister, wrote of "dreams of Europe" in the late 1980s.

It may sound self-depreciating or even sarcastic, but it is neither. Our "dreaming of Europe" turned out to be a very productive exercise. After all - who would have thought, back in the 1980s, that Europe's Cold War divisions would be over before the end of the 20th century? However, for our dream of Europe to become reality, it was never enough to simply wait for a miracle. Geopolitical conditions had to be right. And it also required a smart strategy.

This is where we come back to Patočka's dichotomy between moderation and radicalism. In political practice, they correspond to strategies of evolution, on the one hand, and revolution, on the other. Central Europe's political culture is one of pragmatism and restraint. It also had its fair share of revolutionary fervour: just recall 1848, 1948, 1968 in Austria and Germany, and, of course, 1989. The post-1989 period also witness a number of protests in which civil society mobilized against political elites. By and large, however, their success was limited: lofty ideas rarely survived day-to-day implementation.

More importantly, as is clear from modern Central European history - and as Patočka understood very well - radical departures are often self-defeating. Revolutions end up delegitimizing their own protagonists and disrupting legal continuity. More often than not, they lead to frustration and pessimism, and undermine any prospect for meaningful change.

Progress in Central Europe typically unfolded in an evolutionary form, through diligent and patient work to improve the state of public affairs. The advantage of evolutionary progress is that it must be a continuous process, unconstrained by time: so it is never too late to start. And, of course, it tends to be an inclusive and open endeavour.

We must remain true to these traits of Central Europe. Rarely in history has it been more important than today. The discourse in the EU, especially after Brexit, is rife with radical ideas and sirens of counter-revolution. We must resist them: our common task now is to reclaim the ideals of moderation and inclusive progress - in other words, to reclaim the foundations of European modernity, as Patočka understood it.

This is how I envision the role and responsibility of our two countries: to preserve Central Europe as a political space of openness and tolerance. From this perspective, the significance of Czech-Austrian relations goes far beyond a standard diplomatic agenda of two neighbours and EU partners. For me, it is also a deeply personal relationship, not least thanks to the intellectual connections facilitated by the work of the IWM.

We have a solid foundation to build on. During my time as foreign minister, Czech-Austrian relations have undergone something of a renaissance. The scope of our cooperation is expanding: it includes a broad range of areas from North-South energy and infrastructure linkages to EU enlargement policy in the Western Balkans.

There has also been a qualitative shift in our partnership, marked by deeper understanding and mutual trust. On many key questions on the EU's agenda - from the migration crisis to economic governance - Czech Republic and Austria share similar views. What is perhaps even more important - and symptomatic of our mutual trust and respect - is that no issue, however sensitive or controversial, is excluded from the conversation. There were periods in the recent past when our relations were plagued by miscommunication, railroad blockages and dramatic gestures, or disputes over aspects of our common history. It is safe to say we have closed this chapter. Which doesn't mean that our governments will always agree: rather, it means that, whatever problems may arise, they will be discussed with openness and good-will.

Today, we have added another layer to Czech-Austrian dialogue by establishing a Discussion Forum. Going forward, we must invest further in bilateral and regional cooperation, notably through the Austerlitz format. The platform has gained new meaning and importance in light

of the present situation, when politics of moderation and tolerance seem to be on the defensive. Let me therefore conclude by stressing that we now have a common political project: protecting soul of Central Europe. It is hardly an overstatement to say that our success or failure will shape the future of the EU as a whole.