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HUMANITIES AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN NATIONAL IDENTITY AND GLOBAL OPENNESS

Abstract: The Humanities have experienced a need to defend their actual existence. They are anchored in the national languages and in the micro- or macro-regional themes, but are also predestined for international comparison and for reception regardless of the borders. The current problems of the Euro-American world and the insufficient understanding of oneself and other civilisation circles is the consequence of a long-term underestimation of the Humanities. The intensive and goal-oriented development of the Humanities, the projection of this knowledge into education, instruction and public life, can then aid humanity in protecting itself from dehumanisation and a global catastrophe. The Humanities should emphasise their irreplaceable position in the resolution of the cardinal problems of the twenty-first century and their positive potential in the further advancement of humankind. This lies not in suppression but in the cultivation of self-aware national identities and in their comprehending openness with respect to other national or civilisation identities.

INTRODUCTION: FOUR INITIAL THESES

(1) In the last few decades, the Humanities have found themselves clearly on the defensive – they have experienced a need to defend their actual existence, to compare themselves with the natural sciences and emphasise their own usefulness. One of the defensive theses puts into conflict the connection of the Humanities with national values on the one hand and on the other hand universal openness. I consider this contradiction to be artificial, incorrect and counterproductive.

(2) The Humanities, particularly the historical, linguistic and literary sciences, are by their nature anchored in the national languages and in the micro- or macro-regional themes (in terms of the sources, the results of the knowledge gained and their primary reception), but are also predestined for intensive international comparison and subsequently for secondary reception regardless of the borders of lan-

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guages, states or continents. The position of the Humanities in small countries with local languages is in this regard more difficult in comparison with the Humanities cultivated in large states and in congress languages, but it is only a quantitative perspective not a difference in the essence of things.

(3) The current problems of the Euro-American world and the insufficient understanding of oneself and other civilisation circles is the consequence of a long-term underestimation of the Humanities in research and in the instruction at all levels of schools. The natural and technical sciences have proved able to transform the material base of life on our planet, the medical sciences have improved the quality of human life of people, but they have not led and cannot lead to a harmonisation of interpersonal and international relations. Therein lies the basic task of the Humanities (and Social sciences), which must be developed to all of their potential – from an understanding of one's own identity through learning about the specifics of other nations and civilisations all the way to intercivilisational dialogue and coexistence. The ignorance or underestimation of – positive and negative – experience, which humanity has acquired over the thousands of years of the past leads to a repetition of the old and creation of new mistakes, which in the present globalised world have a far more serious impact than in the past. The intensive and goal-oriented development of the Humanities, subsequently the projection of this knowledge into education, instruction and public life, can then aid humanity in protecting itself from dehumanisation and a global catastrophe.

(4) The Humanities should not adopt the role of a supplicant on the margins of the sphere of research, development and innovation and must not at all become a servant of ethnic or religious chauvinism. The Humanities should emphasise their irreplaceable position in the resolution of the cardinal problems of the twenty-first century and their positive potential in the further advancement of humankind. This lies not in suppression but on the contrary in the cultivation of self-aware national identities and in their comprehending openness (or in a justifiably critical delineation) with respect to other national or civilisation identities.

SOME SELECTED ASPECTS OF THE INDICATED THEME

(I.) In the past, slogans 'We do not want foreign things; we will not give up our own!' appeared in diverse variations. They certainly had their justification at the time of the battles of the smaller European nations against the Ottoman occupation, against the Nazi threat or against the Soviet hegemonic policy. We admit that these simplifying slogans often permeate not only politics but also science and particularly the Humanities. For instance, disputes on the appurtenance of German-language writers, scientists or artists among the Czechs, Germans and especially the Sudeten Germans are not such a distant past. Speculations on the affiliation of great cultural achievements and personalities to different nations, were intensified by the events after the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Disputes on the affiliation of artists and their creations to Catalonia or Spain, to Ireland, Scotland or England are of course known even in Western Europe.

It would probably be naïve today to want politicians to cease immediately such disputes of this sort – not only on the level of cultural heritage. Nevertheless, researchers in the Humanities fields could show a way. For example, Czech research has already adopted a wider assessment of the cultural production on the territory of today's Czech Republic; it includes in it not only the works of persons of Italian, French or other origin temporarily active in Bohemia and Moravia but also the entire heritage of German and Jewish culture on Czech territory, without of course denying their affiliation to other ethnic communities. [4; 6; 15; 23; 25] (It is however necessary to admit that there are much greater problems overcoming the differences between ethnic groups living on different civilisational levels, like the Roma in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and the majority nations – Slovaks, Hungarians, Czechs etc.) The Poles have gone even farther, as they in their dramatic modern history have inhabited significantly different territories. After the embarrassments that occurred in the decades immediately after World War II, they accepted the cultural legacy of the expelled German ethnic group as a positive value, and precisely on this basis they developed productive relations with Germans living today in the Federal Republic. The intermittent turbulences along this axis cannot refute that Polish Humanities have played an enormous positive role in this field. The strengthened self-confidence of the Polish nation made it possible to accept fully ethnic minorities, for example the Kashubians, whose culture in the north of Poland is presented on a scientific basis and on the popularisation level with magnanimity and mutual respect. How positive a significance this multilateral acceptance has is proved by the current development of Poland, which is led by Prime Minister Donald Tusk, a conscious Kashubian and self-confident Pole and European (after all, the doyen of Polish historiography Gerard Labuda, who recently died, was also of Kashubian provenance). [16; 22]

With these examples, I only wanted to indicate that the Humanities – particularly in European countries – are faced with a serious task: to acknowledge, justify and appreciate that the culture of individual European nations flows from many sources and that this fact is not its weakness but its strength. That does not mean to deny the value of any national identity but to investigate and interpret its sources and structure. If we thoroughly know the context and allow that the culture of our nation is the result of mutual action of its members in interaction with neighbouring and more distant nations, we will not have a reason to place this culture and its interests in contrast with other cultures.

(II.) In my opinion, it in essence also applies in relation to civilisation circles. Political correctness hinders us in evaluating realistically the differences between civilisations and thus also in examining the paths of their actual approaching one another. In contrast with that, the idea of an unavoidable clash of civilisations creates and enhances new antagonisms, which produce aggression and fear, the worst possible accompanying phenomena of humanity for the future. The Humanities should not assent to any of these extremes. They should refuse empty phrases of trouble-free world cosmopolitanism and accept with respect the study of shared as well as different features of individual civilisations. Respect in my opinion means

a fundamental awareness of dissimilarity, but not resignation to the right of critical research, i. e. the possibility to investigate a different civilisation and retain the right to one's own view but not to force one's own view on the members of another civilisation circle.

I see as one of the essential tasks of the Humanities the study of the complex identity structure – research of one's affiliation to local, regional and national but also civilisational and cosmopolitan identities. The knowledge of what specifically belongs to each of the layers of identity and what surpasses it. On the emotional level, we can advocate the beautiful utopia of the equality of all with all, but as scientists we help our nation, civilisational circle and the world when we learn about and explain shared features and differences of the individual identities. We should thus endeavour for a scientifically grounded stratification of identities, placed on various social levels, and show that they not only mutually compete but can also complement each other, that they can complete and enrich one another. The result of research of this focus could be the construction of a rational and psychologically acceptable structure of identities as one of the positive principles of interpersonal and intercultural relations. On this basis, they could then present recommendations of how to harmonise the interests of the majority and minorities in a certain milieu, how to stimulate or regulate large migrational movements and how to prevent the growth of interethnic and subsequently social tension. [1; 10]

(III.) A very serious task of the Humanities is the scientific reaction to the current chaotic situation of European people. Before our very eyes, the bipolar system collapsed, the clear predominance of Euro-American civilisation ended and new powers appeared, whose coming to the forefront of world events contributes to the diversity of the globalised world but at the same time also opens entirely new questions. Although at some academies of sciences and universities in Europe centres of global studies are emerging, their attempts at a decent answer to the current questions have so far been reflected only very little in public life. In contrast to that, the answers offered by politicians and journalists are biased in favour of the/a political party on the one hand and on the other hand are short-winded. They are marked by an insufficient probe of the past and so also an inability to capture the long-term developmental trends, just like by an at most very superficial comparison, which is one of the basic methods for grasping the diversity of the world here.

For contemporary Euro-American civilisation, the greatest dangers are not the manifestations of economic depression, which can be regarded as a component of cyclic development, but the signs of complex systemic crisis. To describe the evident symptoms is not particularly difficult – they are the problems arising from population aging in relatively rich parts of the world and from the uneven population development, from the imminent exhaustion of raw-material resources, from the unsatisfactory functioning of the traditional democratic institutions, etc., but such a statement definitely does not suffice; it rather only indicates that the Humanities face new serious tasks – to interpret critically the contemporary situation and development possibilities of complex societies; to attempt to determine the reversibility of the phenomena that lead to or could lead to the collapse of the Euro-

American civilisational sphere; to indicate which forms this collapse could take and perhaps what the possibilities for regeneration are. They are without a doubt themes that are of an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary nature; their successful resolution defies the possibility of individual countries and requires extensive international cooperation. [7; 9]

Nevertheless, the resolution of a complex issue is not possible without previous or parallel research of a number of other topics, whose being overlooked in the long term has contributed to the instability of the contemporary world. It was easy in the spirit of political correctness to deny Huntington's concept of a 'clash of civilisations' [11] and point out the partial inadequacies of the author's interpretation, but it will be much more difficult to implement as unbiased as possible research of individual cultural, religious (religious-political) and civilisational circles with respect to the contradictory tendencies of their development and to the possibilities of their long-term – real, not proclaimed – coexistence in the future.

Researchers in the Humanities should systematically counterbalance the inequality that was created under political and economic pressures, for instance investigate the escalation of relations between the bearers of Muslim and (post)Christian civilisations – whether in Europe or on other continents. It is certain that they cannot ignore the today unilaterally emphasised social motives, but they definitely should not satisfy themselves with a monocausal interpretation. If it can be – not very successfully – applied to the relations of Western Europe, then it certainly will fail to explicate the long-term concealed attacks on Christians in the countries of Asia and Africa as a phenomenon that gives the contemporary world an as-yet unadmitted but very dangerous dynamic. International and thoroughly comparative research can prevent individual researchers from falling into unilateral or even blind defences of those civilisational elements that are closer to him/her for personal reasons and into indictment of those that are more distant to him/her, but from covering up or trivialising serious problems in the spirit of political correctness. The value of knowledge should always outweigh the political preferences. [2; 3; 13; 19; 20]

(IV.) Despite all the effort of the researchers involved, it is not possible to deceive oneself that they will be able to achieve complete objectivity and unanimity. For greater illustration, it is possible to mention the example of the disputes that took place in Central Europe after 1989 and concerned the crimes committed during World War II and immediately afterwards just like the forced migrations and ethnic cleansing. The disputes between the Germans (predominantly German exiles and their descendants) on the one hand and Czechs or Poles on the other hand were successfully dampened to a significant degree precisely by the polemics having been entered by historians, lawyers and researchers in other Humanities fields, who clarified various aspects of these dramatic phenomena and placed them in the wider historical context. This made it possible to historicise the topic, remove its current political thorns and take it to a different level than that of forming prospective bilateral or multilateral relations. This did not unify the opinions on history; on the contrary, the right of individual (national) entities to their own inter-

pretation was respected, but a kind of ‘detoxification’ of these different opinions took place. Every observer can easily find out how the results of the Humanities research of the history of the twentieth century have benefitted relations in Central Europe. [4; 25]

(V.) Research of the fundamental themes of the Humanities, however, reaches stark contradiction with the contemporary formalist evaluation of science. The tendency in the assessment of science that has still been spreading since the beginning of the twenty-first century in Europe and in some countries outside of Europe has its understandable basis in the efforts of governments or other sponsors to control research and control the financial means put into research. Whereas in the natural sciences – despite all of the evident inadequacies – a preferential system for high-impact articles has on the whole been successfully implemented, in the Humanities and partially also in the social sciences we have been witnesses for a number of years now to fumbling, sometimes even absurd errors. The struggle for recognition of the value of monographs and articles in peer-reviewed journals without an impact factor indicates partial positive results, which has been graphically shown by the endeavour of the European Science Foundation to create a database of ‘high-quality scientific journals’, the ERIH – European Reference Index for the Humanities. In the demanding processing and differentiation evaluation of this index, it has been shown that for European science and culture both international and truly good national journals and the studies published in them have fundamental importance. The creation of ERIH and the information network associated with it, just like the publication of the CEJSH (Central European Journal for Social Sciences and Humanities) electronic database in the macroregion of Central Europe, introduced a clear system into the almost impenetrable jungle of the thousands of contemporary European periodicals and enabled the establishment of substantially better information ties between researchers in European countries. It is a good step towards the distribution of the next comparative research projects. [12; 14; 26]

The assessment of quantifiable results as a basis for the financing of the Humanities however brings also a fundamental unfavourable tendency – an enormous quantitative increase in production, which often threatens its quality. Some other steps towards formalisation, for instance the effort to recognise the value of monographs published only in selected publishing houses, can further worsen this situation, because they do not resolve the essential question of what is the fundamental criterion for the evaluation of the quality of Humanities research. The answer is often – ‘originality of the knowledge’, but even this slogan is deceptive. Seeking the declared ‘novelty’ of information frequently leads to further and further atomisation of research, to seeking ever more specialised themes, which interest an ever narrower circle of experts. The continuity of research and long-term observation of large objectives is thus replaced with fragmentation, which in the end could entirely undermine the authority of the Humanities and the recognition of their certain usefulness also from the perspective of the financing state or other sponsor. In short, here the only solution can be the thorough implementation of

the tenet that analytical studies are only or predominantly the background material for the creation of synthetic works, accessible also to the wider cultural public and at the very least partially utilisable ('applicable') in teaching at various types of schools or in the cultivation of public space. [24]

(VI.) In a number of countries, it has been possible to deflect the attempts for a radical limitation of the Humanities in favour of technical fields with industrially 'applicable' results. Great credit in that goes to the organisation HERA – Humanities in the European Research Area, which was created at the initiative of the countries of northern Europe and Great Britain and which has been joined also by several Central European states. The essential contribution of HERA lies in that the representatives of the Humanities from the ranks of the academies of sciences protested against the underestimation of these fields and that they attempted to formulate international research programmes. The themes of shared cultural heritage, divergent or convergent views of history, linguistic and visual communication etc. which were discussed at the sessions of HERA indicated that it can be mutually beneficial to join research arising from distinctive national identities with the resolution of the common problems of Europe and the world.

There has thus been gradually created a base for the formulation of truly large, literally existential themes, which sooner or later individual nations, continents and in a certain sense all of our planet will have to face. It is sufficient to mention only a few: the frequency of crises and depressions in the economic and social but socially psychological development of humanity; methods of governance, the distribution of powers and transformations of democratic participation; the relation of religion, secularisation and public life; confidence in the legitimacy and representative significance of the power and cultural elites; the degree of social cohesiveness on the local, regional, national or even higher level; the attitude towards migrations and the relation between the majority and minorities (autochthonous and newly emerging) in current or potentially conflict regions; the attitude towards the cultural heritage (towards the 'roots') and their sharing in interethnic relations. Thorough historicisation and detailed comparative assessment of these problems could contribute to our better orientation in the time and space where we live. There are naturally many weighty themes that are on offer, more than the number researchers on the national and international levels can handle in a short time. All the more is it necessary to select judiciously from the endless number of component topics which suggest themselves to researchers in the Humanities. Moreover, since it is not possible to manage or even finance them all, priority should be given to the truly crucial problems, starting from the most pressing problems of the individual states as well as European and global commonwealth of nations. The goal-directed selection of such topics, reaching component results, their correlation and subsequently the formulation of the final answers could become the criterion for the assessment of the quality of the scientific results. [18]

(VII.) Human identities as a synthetic expression of our basic notions are based both on personal and group experience and emotions and on systematic learning. If within the Humanities we manage to investigate thoroughly the motivations and

contents of identities on various levels and in various milieus, we will be able to structure more distinctly these identities and perhaps even expand their capacity. To attempt to create a planetary identity in the sense of a limitless cosmopolitanism would hardly be successful, because to identify with everything means not to identify with anything. On the other hand, developing a specific identity on local, regional and particularly national bases and cultivating these identities can open a space for a desirable superstructure European and civilisational identity. [7; 27; 28] The basic prerequisite however remains that such an identity be recognised and defined in its main features; that its fundamental characteristics will be determined, namely quite possibly also in a variant way. Such a task is very difficult as shown for example by the attempt of German and French historians to create a shared interpretation of modern history as a starting point for bringing the two European nations closer. [5; 8; 17] It is essentially doable however as was shown by the nationally proud Poles (with support in a significant interpretational contribution of Polish researchers), when from their history, full of 'historical injustices', they managed to derive a self-confident Europeanism at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The difficulty of the task but also the awareness of its being manageable should be an urgent call for European researchers in the area of the Humanities.

CONCLUSION

The increasing globalisation of the economy and of the political power of supranational corporations arising from it has not destroyed nation states and national identities. Rather the opposite – clashing with the integration tendencies (as is shown also by the development of public opinion in the countries of the European Union) leads to a strengthening of national identities in the individual countries and creates a counterbalance to the general centralisation tendency, but at the same time unprecedented intensive migration and permeability of the borders instigate the creation of new layers of identification – on the level of smaller regions surpassing the national borders, on the macroregional level (for example in culturally homogenous areas of the Czech Republic-Poland-Slovakia) and in the end also on the European level. This process will undoubtedly be long-term and complicated; it will bring ever new questions. Politicians and journalists, considering things in very short periods, will answer them at best superficially. The complex resolution of these issues can and also must be attempted by researchers in the areas of the Humanities, who are professionally equipped for research in the 'long wave'. The role of a bridge between national identity and global openness is their mission, but it can also become the source of their justified self-confidence.

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