WAR AND PEACE IN EASTERN EUROPE: THE UKRAINIAN LESSONS

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Acknowledgements

This paper is based on the presentation made at the Fifth international conference on Baltic and Nordic Studies in Romania *A piece of culture, a culture of peace, re-imaging European communities in the North Sea, Baltic Sea and Black Sea regions*, hosted by Valahia University of Târgoviște and the Romanian Association for Baltic and Nordic Studies, August 17-19, 2014. Supported by EEA Grants, contract no 4/22.07.2014.

Abstract:

The issue of war and peace in Eastern Europe is discussed in this interpretive essay on the grounds of war between Russia and Ukraine in Eastern Ukraine. Focus is on what happened to the worlds of geopolitics, EU core values, European liberal consensus on human rights and civil liberties, and present Russia with its increasing rejection of the aforementioned liberal attitudes and democratic values. Made up by a series of insights into the clashes of Russian and EU politics, this essay offers a philosophical perspective on why and how ongoing low intensity conflicts waged and orchestrated by Russia in Ukraine and in Eastern Partnership countries substantially changed the character of war and peace over the past years. The question raised here is as to what kind of political implications we can expect from this process. The trajectories of moral and political consciousness in present Russia and the EU are examined and compared with the help of an overview of some recent political and cultural events.

Rezumat:

Problematica războiului și a păcii este discutată în acest eseu de interpretare pe fondul războiului dintre Rusia și Ucraina din răsăritul ultimei țări. Materialul se concentrează asupra a ceea ce s-a întâmplat în termeni de geopolitică, valori fundamentale ale U.E., consens liberal în privința drepturilor omului și libertăților civice, și Rusia actuală, care respinge tot mai mult aceste atitudini și valori democratice. Elaborat sub forma unor analize asupra ciocnirilor dintre politicile rusești și cele ale U.E., eseu oferă o perspectivă filosofică asupra motivelor și a modului în care conflictele de intensitate scăzută conduse și orchestrate de Rusia în Ucraina și în țările Parteneriatului Estic au schimbat substanțial caracterul războiului și al păcii în ultimii ani. Chestiunea pe care o ridicăm privește implicațiile politice pe care le putem aștepta de la acest proces. Traiectoriile conștiinței morale și politice din Rusia actuală și din U.E. sunt examinate și comparate printr-o trecere în revistă a celor mai recente evenimente politice și culturale.

Keywords: evil (Devil), fascism, guilt, insensitivity, peace, war

From the Kafkaesque to the Orwellesque:

War is Peace, and Peace is War

Timothy Snyder noticed that if we want to understand Vladimir Putin and his Russia, we have to read George Orwell's dystopia *1984*. First and foremost, he meant the phenomenon of Doublethink which allowed people of Oceania to hold two mutually contradictory and even exclusive truths at one and that same time. You become skilled at being oppressed to such a degree that you find yourself capable of switching from one truth to another, once you notice that the time of the first passed and the time for the second has come. If you contrive to reconcile in your head the balance of two mutually irreconcilable facts that there are no Russian troops in Crimea (as nobody has yet identified the insignia and background of little green men) and that there is some limited military presence in Crimea to relieve the pain of local population, then you can congratulate yourself on successfully passing the exam.

The same perfectly applies to the Donbass region: there is no Russian military there, just some rebels, yet you have to negotiate with Russia over the region whose status is to be determined by more than Ukraine and its legislation. We are here, and we are not here at one and that same time – a puzzle of politics which can be solved only by those who still possess the gift of unmistakable political intuition as to how to reveal the whim and indulgence of those in power. The ability to sustain and keep Doublethink in action appears as sort of postmodern game whose players poke fun on what we take as postmodernist epistemology and what Friedrich Nietzsche would have described as nihilism: nothing exists, nothing is there, it is just a play of your imagination – yet something may well be there if you change your perspective and social optics.

The transition from the Kafkaesque to the Orwellesque marks the dividing line between solid and liquid evil, as Zygmunt Bauman would have it: in Kafka's world before WWII, we would have failed to understand why and how all this should have happened to you – it just happened leaving no trace of clarity and logic in the air, yet we would know that there is an alternative which is to be seen sooner or later; in Orwell's world, we do understand why and how, yet there is little or even nothing we can do about it, as there is no alternative at all. Do it yourself – this is the logic of liquid evil. And you do. They make you do it by yourself. You, and not them, yell "don't do it to me, do it Julia." In the end, you love Big Brother.

Everything is denied or reinvented. Everything is made and unmade on the daily basis. Those who control the past, control the future. Those who control the present, control the past. Those who control TV, control reality. Those who control the Internet, control imagination and the principle of alternative. Those who control both the media, control the territories. Those who control TV,

channel anguish into hatred manufacturing love for Big Brother and hatred for Emmanuel Goldstein. Needless to say, the Two Minutes Hate is straight from Oceania. Collective hysteria as well as its translation into political action or legitimization of policies becomes a means of legitimacy and truth – or rather what Erich Fromm analyzed as mobile truth which is transferable to any situation, conflict, or war.

Yet there is one more aspect of the Orwellesque which shaped our present political landscape significantly. “War is peace,” claims the Party in Oceania. As soon as situation changes on the ground switching alliances and animosities from Eurasia (another spark of genius which led Orwell as far as Putin’s political fantasies about a rival civilization and political union able to outweigh the EU) to Eastasia (the third fictional superstate in 1984, a rival and an ally to Oceania and Eurasia at one and the same time), the logic may change completely. “Peace is war,” claims the Party conversely, and, again, those who contrive to switch to this revelation immediately are on the winning side. They wouldn’t expose their weakness and inability to get all big things right; only those who fail to do so, would be downed. “You don’t exist,” tells O’Brien to Winston Smith as if to say that it is Party that grants existence to individuals, rather than any other form of ever-presence.

What remains behind the world of political acting and mental acrobatics of the elite combined with fanaticism of the masses, whether sincere and long-term or situational and short-term, is the fact that low intensity conflicts may change the logic of war and peace considerably. Territory is not an issue nowadays, and all territorial claims are merely a tactical maneuver to hide the real objective that lies in political destabilization, social disempowerment and dismemberment of citizens, and, finally, disruption of life. Intimidation with the aim to plant fear and distrust in one’s perception of reality is the real goal of Orwellesque politics. Like Winston Smith and Julia who are bound to lose their love and powers of association for the benefit of Oceania, Inner Party, and Big Brother, societies can lose their visions, alternatives, hopes, and forms of faith. The world without alternatives may be designed by all forces that foster social determinism and political fatalism – from technocracy masquerading as democracy in the West, to overtly dictatorial, neo-imperialist, revisionist, and revenge-seeking states, such as Russia.

How prophetic was Orwell in his dystopia? Quite prophetic, as we can see now. Emmanuel Goldstein’s secret treatise *Theory and Practice of Oligarchic Collectivism* appears as the best clue to understand oligarchy as a form of governance in Russia supplemented with a fierce denial of political liberty, individual ethics, and almost modern moral and political sensibilities.

The Devil in Politics

What does the Devil in politics signify? Does it make sense to switch to theology and demonology discussing seemingly all-too-human aspects of modern life? History teaches us that it does make sense to do so. The twentieth century shows that the Devil in politics signify the arrival of the forms of radical evil which manifestly devalue life, self-worth, dignity, and humanity. Instead, they come to pave the way for fear, hatred, and the triumph over someone's destroyed freedom and self-fulfillment.

Everything starts with robbing human individuals of their privacy, secrets, mysteries, and the most intimate aspects of life. European modernity and especially Baroque literature was full of such early manifestations of the Devil's spell and touch. Suffice it to recall Juan Vélez de Guevara's *El Diablo cojuelo* (The Devil on the Crutches), a seventeenth-century text where the devil has the power to reveal the insides of the houses, or a variation of this theme in Alain-René Le Sage's novel *Le diable boiteux*.¹

What early modern writers took as a devilish force aimed to deprive human beings of their privacy and secrets have now become inseparable from the reality shows and other actions of willful and joyful self-exposure in our self-revealing age. The interplay of religion, politics, and literary imagination, this notion of the Devil is manifest behind modern European art: for instance, recall Asmodea from *The Book of Tobias*, a female version of the devil, depicted in Francisco de Goya's painting *Asmodea*.

In his analysis of the emergence of the symbols of the rebellion/subversion of the established order, the Lithuanian émigré sociologist Vytautas Kavolis (1930–1995) traced the symbolic designs of evil understood as interpretive frameworks within which we seek the answers to the questions raised by our time interpreting ourselves and the world around us. Prometheus and Satan are taken here as core mythological figures and symbolic designs to reveal the concepts of evil that dominated the moral imaginations of pre-Christian and Christian thinkers and writers. Prometheus manifests himself as a trickster hero whose challenge to Zeus rests not only on his natural enmity to Olympic gods but on his compassion for humanity as well. Satan appears in the Bible as the one who subverts the universal order established by God, and, therefore, bears full responsibility for all manifestations of evil that result from this subversion.

Kavolis' work provides a subtle analysis of the models of evil as paradigms of secular morality and of the models of rebellion as contrasting modes of cultural logic. He offers his insights into the emergence of the myth of Prometheus (including the rise of Marxism) and that of Satan. Prometheus emerges as a

¹ See Z. Bauman and L. Donskis, *Moral Blindness: The Loss of Sensitivity in Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, England: Polity, 2013).

metaphor of progress combined with sympathetic understanding of, and compassion for, the urges and sufferings of humankind. Satan is interpreted as a metaphor of the destruction of legitimate power and of the subversion of a viable social and moral order.²

Therefore, the Devil in politics is far from a fantasy. It comes into existence in many faces, one of them being the subversion and destruction of a universal or at least a viable social and moral order. Yet the Devil may appear as the loss of memory and sensitivity resulting in mass psychosis. Both aspects are richly represented and covered by modern Russia, the country whose writers strongly felt and lucidly described the touch of the radical evil whose essence lies in a deliberate rejection of human self-worth, dignity, memory, sensitivity, and their powers of association and compassion.

In Eastern European perspective, that the fatal forgetting and oblivion is a curse of Eastern and Central Europe, we learn from Eastern European writers. In one of the greatest novels of the twentieth century, a work of genius and of warning, and also a Faustian tale about a woman's deal with the Devil to save the love of her life, a tormented novelist confined to a mental asylum, *The Master and Margarita* (written in 1928–1941, and published heavily censored in 1966–1967), Mikhail Bulgakov confers to the Devil an additional and, perhaps, pivotal aspect of his power.

The Devil can strip a human being doomed to be confined to non-person and non-entity of their memory. By losing their memory, people become incapable of any critical questioning of themselves and the world around them. By losing the powers of individuality and association, they lose their basic moral and political sensibilities. Ultimately, they lose their sensitivity to another human being. The Devil, who safely lurks in the most destructive forms of modernity, deprives humanity of the sense of their place, home, memory, and belonging.

Present Russia is evil. It is the evil empire even in a more radical sense than the former Soviet Union. The former USSR had its Promethean aspects of civilizational rebellion, since it perceived itself as a rival civilization to the West in terms of the Jerusalem of the Proletariat and also as a legitimate heir to the Enlightenment. Vladimir Putin's Russia can offer only its Satanic aspects of power due to its sole end and even obsession to disrupt someone's life, be it an adversary state (like Ukraine) or a human rival (like dissenting Russian journalists and human rights defenders). Disrupting life and undermining

² See V. Kavolis, "Moral Cultures and Moral Logics," *Sociological Analysis* 38 (1977): 331–344; V. Kavolis, "Civilizational Models of Evil," in M. Coleman Nelson and M. Eigen (eds.), *Evil: Self and Culture* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1984); V. Kavolis, "Logics of Evil as Secular Moralities," *Soundings* 68 (1985): 189–211; V. Kavoli, *Moralizing Cultures*. Lanham: University Press of America (1993).

existence everywhere where you don't prevail can clearly show how Russia chose to be a rogue state supporting terrorism and fascism – in fact, the plague of the twenty-first century which must be eradicated.

Ordinary Fascism

In 1965, the Soviet film director Mikhail Romm made an historic documentary, *Ordinary Fascism*, which still stands as an anatomy of the rise of fascism in Germany – the anatomy that has yet to be surpassed. Yet this documentary on ordinary fascism appears to have had its highly ambivalent side concealed from the sight of a more or less ordinary watcher.

More sophisticated and perceptive people were all watching this documentary with curiosity and wonder, as if to say that it is a déjà vu phenomenon – where have we seen all of this? Symbols and banners, flowers and ideological signs of a regime composed by human bodies parading before the eyes of the Benefactor/Fuehrer/Father of the Nation; the cult of the young; disdain for doubt, low voice and deliberation accompanied by quasi-religious enthusiasm, mass outbreak of fanaticism and hatred exposed in the right place at the right time – could it have been a broader perspective on the murderous totalitarian regimes and criminal political systems of the twentieth century?

That was it. We have all tried as hard as we could conceal this dangerous thought, yet it kept returning and crossing our minds. Mikhail Romm made a film with the stroke of genius on our own red fascism which not only bore family resemblance to German National Socialism, but struck us as its twin brother or the Significant Other. It was with sound reason, then, that Russian dissidents jailed and exiled to Siberia used to call the system Red Fascism.

Without minimizing the historically unique and unprecedented forms of evil and organized hatred manufactured by the Nazis, we can safely assume that bright and intelligent people in Russia clearly saw the affinity between the two military dictatorships based on the perception of the world as full of enemies and haters of their master race/hegemon class. Romm's *Ordinary Fascism* was about the USSR, rather than Nazi Germany. With horror, the film director put the question mark over the thought as to whether that was the end of this plague of modernity.

Nearly the same sort of déjà vu experience can be revisited on a closer look at the cult Soviet twelve-part TV miniseries, *Seventeen Moments of Spring*, directed by Tatyana Lioznova and based on the novel of the same title by Yulian Semyonov. The film portrays the Soviet spy, Maxim Isaev, who operates in Nazi Germany as a high-ranking SS-Standartenführer in the Ausland-SD under the name Max Otto von Stierlitz.

It was one of those rare cases when the Nazis were not poked fun at or else caricatured. On the contrary, incredible as it sounds, the film clearly exposed secret admiration for their discipline, fighting morale, loyalty, and Machiavellian stratagems. One had to be blind and deaf not to notice a parallel drawn between the Soviet secret political state police (NKVD, later KGB) and the Gestapo, the latter brightly and colorfully represented in the film by Heinrich Müller, chief of the Gestapo. The role of Müller was played by Leonid Bronevoy, a great Ukrainian-born Russian actor (born in Kyiv), who, incidentally, had the guts not to support Russia's invasion to Crimea. The cult role of Stierlitz was played by the recently deceased superb Russian actor Vyacheslav Tikhonov.

In a conversation between Stierlitz and Müller where the former has to confront and erase all the suspicions of the latter about his loyalty, the moment of truth unexpectedly comes with Müller refusing to salute "Heil Hitler." Stierlitz astonished at his superior's disrespect for the Nazi salute, learns from Müller that the story of the regime is over and that the days of Adolf Hitler are counted. With one important qualification, though. It is the story of Hitler that is over, but not the story of National Socialism which is far from over, according to Müller. One day the world will come to understand that there is no better world order than National Socialism. Everywhere where the folks will greet each other with words "Long live!" or else salute one another in praise of power and might, we will be welcome. We will be at home there.

The film in question strikes us even now not only as a curious amalgam of pro-German and anti-Soviet sentiment but also as a surgical prediction of how the opposites can coincide and merge. When the Soviet political analyst Andranik Migranyan, now based in New York where he works in a pro-Kremlin NGO, has recently started rehabilitating Adolf Hitler, one must have been petrified by the degree of his shameless openness concerning the political course that Russia stays in Ukraine and elsewhere.

Fascism came to Russia. Ordinary fascism whose plain essence lies in that same unholy trinity of modernity brought up by the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – namely, uncertainty, unsafety, and insecurity. It is the same phenomenon of the escape from freedom so aptly described by Erich Fromm in his famous book of the same title. Yet there is something different in present Russia from Nazi Germany where the *Blut und Boden* ideology and global racism were fanatically advocated by the Nazis in an attempt to establish the global hierarchy among the races. Present Russia does not have an ideology. Its ideology is gas, oil, and power. Putin does not have any plausible historical-political narrative.

This time Russian fascism comes straight from a mafia state and the mindset of the criminal world which embraces not only the political class but the media and

most of diplomats as well. In fact, it is quite Orwellesque – the jackboot trampling on the human face, and power exercised for its own sake. A state organized as a criminal gang with no true-believers – just the mob and its idols.

Russia's Tango with the Devil

Immediately upon the occupation and annexation of Crimea by Russia, a group of prominent Russian culture personalities signed their letter of praise up to the skies fully endorsing and blessing the occupation and annexation of Crimea by Russia. It dealt a blow to many people who tried to convince themselves that a déjà vu trajectory undertaken by the revisionist state and its revenge-seeking regime would be met with contempt or at least some reservations by the most noted Russian music, theater, film and arts celebrities.

Among those who discredited their names, are dozens of talented people whose merits and credentials in music and arts are too obvious to be put into question. Yet the fact that the conductor Valery Gergiev and the violist Yuri Bashmet have signed the disgraceful document hardly came as a shock. Both had long been and continue to be the hundred percent court musicians – overpaid, overrated, posh, easy to manipulate, and, in effect, devoid of any independent political views and liberties if they, God forbid, contradict those of the Master.

The names of such noted actors as Oleg Tabakov and Mikhail Boyarsky, stand-up comedians as Gennady Khazanov, or film directors as Karen Shakhnazarov led the entire generations of the admirers of Russian culture to dismay and disenchantment. The question floating in the air was as simple as that: What happened to Russia? We can understand all ups and downs in a country where a promise of political liberty and individual freedom failed once again leaving all of us in a sad and silent agreement with those Russian dissenters who spoke about the matrix of Russian captivity and the country's inability to embrace the modern political and moral sensibilities.

Happily, the pride of Russian culture people was saved by the veterans of Russian culture, such magnificent movie and theater actors and directors as Mark Zakharov, Eldar Ryazanov, Liya Akhedzhakova, Oleg Basilashvili, Valentin Gaft, Armen Dzhigarkhanyan, and also by such widely admired and beloved writers as Mikhail Zhvanetsky – they all refused to sign the letter.

The sinister paradox is that among those who signed the aforementioned infamous letter are two people of cinematography who are closely related to the immortal works of Russian literature. The film director Vladimir Bortko made a cinematographic production of Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Heart of a Dog* choosing the work of literature that seemingly left no doubt as to how the film director viewed the Soviet Union and its legacies – as the greatest political and moral catastrophe of Russia, or as the greatest achievement in Russian history and

politics whose destruction was to become the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century, as Vladimir Putin put it. We had long thought, and not without reason, that Bortko opted for the former assessment of the evil empire, instead of the latter.

This feeling was strengthened by his production of the far and away the greatest novel on revolutionary Russia ever written – Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. A plethora of talented Russian actors allowed the miracle happen, and the name of the miracle was the liberating and absolving effect of a great work of literature translated into the language of cinematography. It was widely assumed that Russia is on the way of putting behind and rejecting its horrible past (and even putting Putin aside). That was not to be, alas.

Researchers of Eastern European literature and culture have noticed how greatly forms of modern anxiety and tension differ in Western and Eastern Europe. In the twentieth century, Western Europeans and Americans most often experienced an anxiety of influence because of the way they were manipulated and their moral character was being deformed, whereas Eastern Europeans experienced an anxiety of (physical) destruction. *The Master and Margarita* purveys precisely such a form of Eastern European existential anxiety.

In the novel's constructed reality no one doubts that people almost fatalistically fall into the categories of sinners and saints, cowards and braves; therefore, the main question is how much chance nobility has in a world in which the worst thing is not even candidly self-identifying evil (personified in the novel by Satan, calling himself Woland) but our own forms of life standing under its influence, the most dangerous of which are moral relativism, faithlessness, and the nihilistic rejection of everything not associated with power or the possibility to survive physically here and now.

We thought naively that this obsession with power and its exercise over the rest of the world was something uniquely belonging to the twentieth century – something we would bid farewell to in the twenty-first. The emergence of the fascist regime before our eyes brought us back to history and reality. Now we can only bid farewell to all our postmodernist fantasies about post-material, post-national, and post-historical world. Dream on...

It is a farce that Vladimir Bortko who chose the Ukrainian-born genius of Russian literature, Mikhail Bulgakov, to express his longing for a decent and free Russia, should have ended up as a sycophant of the Kremlin – precisely like the actor Sergey Bezrukov who played the role of Yeshua in *The Master and Margarita*; a farce that repeatedly turns into Russia's tango with the Devil. Ironically, hope comes from Woland, the Prince of Darkness, played by Oleg Basilashvili – a wonderful and fearless Russian actor who had the courage to condemn the 2008 Russian invasion in Georgia, and who refused to sign the letter of consent to be

non-persons and non-citizens in Putin's Russia. He chose his conscience, instead of brutality and cynicism of his country.

The New Fascist International

In his book of correspondence with the noted French writer Michel Houellebecq, *Public Enemies*, the French journalist, activist and philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy wrote on present Russia: "Not only does this Russia inspire no desire in me, it fills me with horror. I'd go so far as to say that it frightens me because I see in it a possible destiny for the late-capitalist societies. Once upon a time, during your postwar 'glory days,' the middle class was terrorized by being told that Brezhnev's communism was not an archaism restricted to distant societies but rather a picture of our own future. We were wrong: it was not communism but postcommunism, Putinism, that may be the testing ground for our future".³

How true! That Putinism is far from the madman's follies whose mention would suffice to prove the political and moral superiority of European values, is obvious to anyone not devoid of the sense of reality. Lion Feuchtwanger, André Gide, or Jean-Paul Sartre, that is, European writers and thinkers, infatuated with the Soviet Union as a rival civilization to the West (as Ernest Gellner once put it so aptly), are all old news. And the real and hot news about the Kremlin's new apprentices in Europe is not only about Gerhard Schröder and what the British journalist Edward Lucas termed the schröderization of the European political classes, but rather about the new disturbing phenomenon.

The former Soviet Union was a Shakespearean tragedy. The Second World War and the defeat of the Nazis unthinkable without heroism and sacrifices of Russians, Ukrainians, and other nations of the former USSR provided the Kremlin with a historical-political narrative which partly softened the horrors of Bolshevism and Stalinism. After all, wasn't it the USSR which dealt a mortal blow to the Nazis and which had the greatest burden of WWII? After Stalin's death, a certain *modus vivendi* between the West and the USSR was worked out, and to equate Nazism or Fascism with the USSR, no matter how tempting it was to do after the Holodomor and all other horrors of Stalinism, was the last thing that European or American academics and journalist would have done.

The USSR won much sympathy and support from Europe's and America's Left in terms of their shared critical attitude to the iniquities in their societies, not to mention such core sensitivities of the Left as the working class people and their exploitation, down-and-out in big industrial cities, etc. Present Russia with its image in the West as a country of tycoons with their luxurious mansions in France

³ M. Houellebecq and B.-H. Lévy, *Public Enemies* (London: Atlantic Books, 2011), 68.

and Spain as well as its billionaires so admired in London City as cash cows would have appeared in the old days of the USSR as the worst kind of nightmare, if not as a series of political cartoons in a Soviet magazine published with the aim to poke fun on the bourgeoisie of the West.

In addition, great Russian poets, actors, film and theater directors have greatly contributed to the sense of the tragedy of Eastern Europe: whereas the USSR has richly deserved the immortal pen of Nikolai Gogol or Nikolai Leskov or Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin for its grotesque political life publicly depicted as genuine democracy and freedom, the geniuses of twentieth-century Russian culture, such as Sergei Prokofiev, Dmitry Shostakovich, Grigory Kozintsev, and Andrei Tarkovsky, have become the best antidote against the portrayal of Soviet Russia as a country of barbarians. It was a continuous tragedy of the nation whose politics was sinister, devilish, posing an existential threat to the entire world, yet whose magnificent culture was the best redeemer from the moral and political disaster created by the aforementioned state. Modern Russian culture appears to have been the best antidote against the tyrannical state of Russia and its political barbarity.

And now for something completely different: in Putin's Russia, we have a farce, instead of a tragedy. The murderous and unbearable banality of corruption, kleptocracy, mafia state and political gangsterism is concealed there by a program of the defense of every single Russian soul all over the world as well as by a revisionist state which walks in the disguise of the supreme Russian political agency that is bound to restore the unity and indivisibility of all "historic" Russian lands. This is far from plain nationalism and chauvinism; Vladimir Putin speech on 18th of March in the Kremlin was a sheer copy-and-paste version of the Sudetenland speech of Adolf Hitler in 1938: the concept of the Russian World (Third Reich) went hand in hand with the idea of the necessity to restore Russia's political influence and presence everywhere where the tiniest Russian minority lives.

The specter walks in Europe – the specter of Fascism. No matter how difficult the political hangover will be for the EU and all those pragmatic, cynical, banal and shameless ways with which it used to proceed with Russia for the sake of its gas and oil interest, this is a fact that can no longer be denied. To defeat the new Fascism will take an immense amount of the concentration of courage, political will and commitment not only in the West and Ukraine but in Russia itself as well.

The most disturbing aspect of this horror story is the Kremlin new useful idiots whom it has found in Europe successfully fishing among far Right and populist politicians. Andrei Piontkovsky once made a joke describing the Kremlin's apprentices before the Second World War as a sort of collective Feuchtwanger.

This time we need a different metaphor, as the new apprentices of the Kremlin and its Master today happen to be the leaders of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), Jobbik, le Front national (FN), and the like. This is the New Fascist International with its headquarters in Moscow.

History repeats itself twice: first as a tragedy and then as a farce. QED.

Wag the Dog. Russian Style

The extreme power of manipulation, in terms of public opinion and imagology, and its political and moral implications are well revealed by one film that has contributed to the critique of today's controlling political structures. This is Barry Levinson's film *Wag the Dog*. The film tells us the story of Hollywood producer Stanley Motss and Washington's spin doctor Conrad Brean, who are supposed to save the White House due to the President's scandalous romance.

The duet of Dustin Hoffman and Robert De Niro reveals with skill a world of people who are talented, but also amoral and value disoriented. At any rate, the revelations of instrumental mind and instrumental morality are not the only merits of this great film. This film, created in 1997, foreshadowed a military campaign in Yugoslavia (the film mentions Albania) during the height of Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky's sex scandal. Of course, it would be silly to claim, wearing a serious face, that the war in Yugoslavia was required because of U.S. domestic politics, and as a means of smothering the scandal. "Pacifist" Western Europe wanted this war perhaps even more than "militaristic" America. The U.S. was the wand that was used to solve the problem.

But this film leaves an impression due to its emphasis on something else – it just so happens that a war can be fabricated. Just as, as it turns out, one might direct public opinion in such a way that a war would be wanted or even much desired. Create an artificial crisis, sacrifice a few dozen innocent lives to a political Moloch, increase people's sense of insecurity – and, everyone, in a flash, almost overnight, will want both a firm controlling hand, tough rhetoric, and, perhaps, even war. In short, something similar to being beyond good and evil.

In fact, the film in question predicted something even more dangerous and sinister than it was able to articulate and address along the lines of its characters' monologues and dialogues. In the contemporary world, manipulation by political advertisement is not only capable of creating people's needs and their criteria of happiness, but also capable of fabricating the heroes of our time and controlling the imagination of the masses through successful biographies and success stories. These abilities make one pause for thought about a "velvet" totalitarianism – a controlled form of manipulating consciousness and imagination that is cloaked as liberal democracy, which allows the enslavement and control of even the critics.

Yet the question remains whether these forms and methods of manipulations, brainwashing and conditioning can be used by dictatorships, thuggish regimes, and rogue-states more successfully than by democracies with all their marketing techniques and paraphernalia. *Wag the Dog*, like other similar productions of cinematography, rests on the assumption of infinite manipulations as an offshoot or a side effect of mass democracy. In so doing, it missed the point that military regimes can have much more success in this than their democratic adversaries. In fact, this is high time for the West to wake up and see the world around us for what it is. We are witnessing the resurgence of real rather than velvet or imagined totalitarianism in Russia. Public opinion was made and remade there as many times as the regime wanted it to be, and hatred for Ukraine was manufactured in accordance with the need for an enemy. Ukrainian “fascists” become the appropriation of the term that best describes its user, for the more Russian propaganda speaks about the Ukrainian fascism, the more family resemblance Russia itself bears to Nazi Germany with all its hatred as a method to approach reality, Goebbels-type propaganda, and toxic lies.

Never before has George Orwell’s *1984* and its vocabulary been as relevant as it is now, due to the sliding of Russia into barbarity and fascism with incredible speed and intensity. A series of interrogation scenes between O’Brien and Winston Smith with all allusions to the Communists and the Nazis as the naïve predecessors of Oceania, who had an ideology and who allowed their victims to become martyrs, sound now as the best eye-opener since Putinism entered the phase of war and terror: the Newspeak, two minute hate, and the jackboot trampling on the human face for the sake of unlimited power have finally acquired the points of reference.

It is a fascism with no real ideology, for a set of tools to boost the morale of its thugs and terrorists consists of the worn-out clichés and recycled slogans largely borrowed from the Italian and Hungarian fascisms with some Serbian additions from the times of Slobodan Milosevic, and with Nazi cherries on top. Irredentism, the need to reunite the disunited nation, the world turned against the righteous people, the necessity to defend history for the sake of its reenactment – these are all ghosts and specters of twentieth century fascism.

The tragedy of Russia is that its population falls prey to the Kremlin’s spin doctors with their ability to create virtual and TV hyper-reality that had hidden reality from the masses. Ukraine for the Russian incarnations and successors of Goebbels, such as Vladislav Surkov, has become exactly what Albania was for Barry Levinson and his film – a piece of virtual reality fabricated for the sake of domestic policies. The funny thing is that the excessive and obsessive use of the term “fascism” appears as a form of cognitive dissonance of Russian fascism: be

quick to apply your own name or title portraying your enemy – then you will appropriate the name and will absolve yourself from it.

It is no consolation anyway. And it doesn't work this way. Once a fascist, always a fascist – no matter what you say about your adversary.

The Question of Guilt

Immediately after WW2, Karl Jaspers wrote a landmark study *Die Schuldfrage* (The Question of Guilt)⁴ where he addressed and articulated philosophically the question of German guilt. As Jaspers felt that his nation not only gravely and mortally sinned but committed unspeakable crimes against humanity, the question of as to whether the nation en masse can be blamed and held accountable for war crimes was far from somewhat detached or naïve. It was straight to the point that Jaspers worked out a pattern for such a philosophical debate defining four categories of guilt: criminal, political, moral, and metaphysical.

The following categories of guilt were specified and analyzed by Jaspers: *criminal guilt* (direct involvement in crimes and violations of laws), *political guilt* (inherited from political leaders or institutions whose actions we endorse as citizens or, worse, political operators and voices of lies and organized hatred), *moral guilt* (for crimes against people from which we cannot be absolved on the grounds of our political loyalty and civic obedience), and *metaphysical guilt* (for staying alive or doing too little or nothing to save the lives of our fellow human beings where war crimes and other felonies are committed).

Jaspers insisted that whereas criminal and political guilt of Germans were directly related to crimes committed or orchestrated by flesh-and-blood individuals in Nazi Germany, moral and metaphysical guilt could not escape from the generations to come, at least due the fact that Germans will continue sharing their language, collective sentiment, and a sense of common history. As long as people feel their attachment and commitment to their society, they would have no way out of the predicament of present guilty for the past otherwise then through the internalization of the drama of one's parents.

The sense of guilt seems to have become a watershed between postwar European ethos and a non- or anti-European mindset marked and permeated by blunt denial of any guilt of one's nation in its recent past. As the French philosopher Pascal Bruckner suggested in his provocative book, *The Tyranny of Guilt*⁵, the excess of guilt has become a characteristically European political commodity which is not necessarily linked to out genuine moral sensitivities;

⁴ K. Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage* (Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1947).

⁵ P. Bruckner, *The Tyranny of Guilt: An Essay on Western Masochism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

instead, it could be an ideological tool to silence the opposing camp or stigmatize the political elite we dislike. This is especially seen in the case of Western Europe's colonial guilt or in the case of American guilt for its racist past.

The strongest embodiment of the ethics of guilt in politics was the Chancellor of Germany Willy Brandt with his tour de force in the moral sense when he kneeled twice, first in the Warsaw Ghetto, Poland, and then at Yad Vashem – World Center for Holocaust Research, Documentation, Education and Commemoration, Israel, a heroic and noble action of public repentance before the world for the crimes and sins of his nation. In fact, it was far from a gesture of the defeated foe, for there was no reason for Brandt to do that – the state is the state, and the individual, even if s/he happens to be its head, can hardly establish a public repentance or apology as a viable state policy.

Therefore, the state that kneels and apologizes, as in the case of Willy Brandt, violates the Hobbesian model of the modern state – the state that never admits its mistakes or regrets its faults, the state that never allows room for any other than naked power. Power is truth, and truth is power – this is how the Hobbesian logic of power speaks. Evil is nothing other than powerlessness. Whereas virtue solely lies in prowess and survival of the fittest, vice is all about weakness. International law and all norms and values are subject to change in accordance with a great power's top priorities and needs. We respect the sovereign whenever and wherever we see one, yet we despise any kind of No Man's Land (which we create, support, and arm ourselves to be able to disrupt any independent and dignified forms of life wherever they tend to appear), as human life there is nasty, brutish, and short – this is the real message of the New Leviathan manufactured by Putin's Russia.

Could we have possibly have imagined the head of the former USSR issuing an apology for the heinous crimes and despicable conduct of its military, officials, the elite, and state machinery in general? Could we imagine any head of present Russia ever offering an apology to the state whose existence they have undermined if not ruined?

The answer is quite simple and clear – no. Germany and Russia are close only on the surface of politics. The pacifist society created in postwar Germany coupled with their successful Ostpolitik in the 20th century (which seems to have blinded the German political elite that lost its track dealing with Putinism) poorly camouflages the fundamental difference between the two former aggressors one of which has radically changed its paradigm in politics, and the other chose to stay the course in the ugliest way. For whereas Germany chose to be the first truly non-Hobbesian state in the modern world, Russia has always been and still continues to be obsessed with how to revive and reenact a predatory, unrepentant, and profoundly immoral political world in the 21st century.

Instead of Samuel Huntington's concept of the clash of civilizations which underestimated the gulfs and moral abysses within Europe itself, we should try to understand the clash of two types of statehood which is really at stake now. This is the clash of Thomas Hobbes and Willy Brandt in their new incarnations. And the fact is that Russia can become a European state with a future only when it proves able to offer an apology to Ukraine, thus settling the historical and moral accounts.

Ukraine's Historical-Political Time Zone

What happened in EuroMaidan a year ago will force West European and North American sociologists to revise their writings. The Ukrainian-American political scientist Alexander J. Motyl and the Russian writer Vladimir Sorokin noted that a new Ukraine was born and that we have had a unique opportunity to witness the emergence of a new political nation. This statement, however accurate, is incomplete, though.

It was assumed by social scientists that the 19th century was an epoch of the emergence of the new collective actors on the political map of the world. True, after the First World War new nation-states came into existence, but the second half of the 19th century paved the way for this new civilization-shaping movement. The epoch was called the nation-building century, and also the era of the springtime of the peoples. What happened after the Second World War was perceived as a turning point in world history in terms of the closing page in the political saga of modern Europe. The nations were born, the state borders drawn, and nobody believed that we can step into the same river twice. Nay, nobody even suspected that we can change our historical-political time zone.

We were taking for granted for a long time that we were living in an increasingly post-national world. The fall of the Berlin Wall indicated the end of modern bloody history of opposing ideologies reiterated by Francis Fukuyama. The blow dealt by a horrible war in the Former Yugoslavia to Europe was twofold: first and foremost, it exposed the impotence, self-inflicted moral and political blindness, and self-deception of all Europe's politics and soft power which culminated in Srebrenica with eight thousand civilians killed in two days before the eyes of Dutch peacekeeping forces – far and away the most horrible crime against humanity in Europe after WW2; second, the ease with which people jumped fifty years back in time arriving in a radically different historical-political time zone.

A most horrifying thing in Bosnia-Herzegovina was that people were slaughtering each other with the names and labels on their lips that had absolutely nothing to do with reality which one should have described as present. Such labels as *Chetniks* (that is, Serbian nationalists and monarchists) came back to

reality as soon as there was a need to justify a new slaughter in a fratricidal war. Were there any real *Chetniks* or *Ustashi* in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s? Of course, there were none.

What happened there was that some disturbed or politically troubled individuals withdrew from present reality choosing to live temporarily in a radically different historical-political time zone and to accommodate it again. They chose to live elsewhere withdrawing from social reality and abandoning it for the sake of a phantom, a short-term logocratic project, a specter of selective memory and willful forgetting. And how about a *déjà vu* feeling on our hearing and reading the label of Banderovites exploited by Russian state-sponsored propaganda? Are there any flesh-and-blood Banderovites in Kyiv today? Were they there a year ago during the EuroMaidan Revolution?

In fact, there is a long way to go from plain brainwash and propaganda to a more complex phenomenon of the withdrawal from present time zone and the return to it. What lies behind this mechanism is historical trauma, suppressed pattern of identity, or conflict of identities and loyalties. We may cease explaining reality as it is and, instead, may switch to the past trying to reenact or recover it. Hence, countless memory wars in Europe. The withdrawal-and-return form of existence can therefore be seen not only in the case of adaphorization of consciousness (abandoning and leaving the zone of our human sensitivity temporarily and then returning to it), but in the troubled historical-political time zone as well.

Deep discontent with present time and the resulting temptation to repeat or reenact history appears as one of the most explosive and dangerous feelings and conditions in our world. What results from it is the loss of the sense of social and political time. Dictators or even perfectly sound individuals with, one would think, unquestionable democratic credentials, may think that they can return justice or derive it from the past projecting it onto the present or the future. Yet not every form of withdrawal-and-return poses a grave danger to the world.

In his novel *The Winter of Our Discontent*, John Steinbeck exposed this mechanism as deeply embedded in modern pattern of human behavior: we may vacate the realm of norms and part with our views and attitudes of today for the sake of well-being, self-esteem, safety, and security of tomorrow. He describes this mechanism of living elsewhere for a while for the sake of regaining or reenacting control over circumstances with the stroke of genius. This is more than true with regard to the world of nations. Nationalism has long been regarded by sociologists as a specific phenomenon of the 19th century, and rightly so. However, this fact itself does not mean that nations cannot be reshaped or that they cannot intensify their daily plebiscite, as Joseph Ernest Renan would have had it. Nations may come into existence repeatedly, one more time, withdrawing

from our postmodern reality and celebrating a set of sentiments and attitudes that sociologists would ascribe to the second half of the 19th century or the first half of the twentieth.

In fact, during the war in the former Yugoslavia, individuals, groups, and societies actively reenacted and relived the periods of prewar and postwar Europe's history. It may well be suggested that Ukraine lives now in its historical-political time zone made up by critical junctures of modern history and politics enabling and repeating similar or even identical moral choices that were made in the twentieth century. All in all, a new nation comes into existence.

Moral Blindness and Ukrainian Lessons

In 2013, I have written conjointly a book with Zygmunt Bauman, one of the greatest thinkers of our times.⁶ It is a book of an intense philosophical dialogue on the loss of sensitivity. The title of our book, *Moral Blindness*, was Bauman's idea, and it came out as an allusion to the metaphor of blindness masterfully developed in the Portuguese writer José Saramago's novel *Ensaio sobre a cegueira* (Essay on Blindness). Yet the subtitle of the book, *The Loss of Sensitivity in Liquid Modernity*, came out from my own theoretical vocabulary, albeit with Bauman's touch – his books would be unthinkable without the adjective “liquid,” be it liquid modernity or liquid fear or liquid love. Much to my delight, this book will have a second life in the Ukrainian language and culture.

Ukraine has become a litmus test of global moral (in)sensitivity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The country paid the price for its heroism, courage, willpower, solidarity, and freedom. Crimea, Eastern Ukraine, threats from the Kremlin, an obnoxious and grotesque campaign of toxic lies from the Kremlin-controlled media bordering on Goebbels-like propaganda and Orwellesque two-minute hate sessions of collective hysteria and mass psychosis – it would be difficult to exhaust the ordeals that begotten the radically new situation in world politics.

And what was the reaction of the EU and the West? Next to none. What happened over the past months did become a déjà vu experience coupled with a flashback from fairly recent European history. A feeling of being back in time with such code names as Munich, the Sudetenland, Hitler, Daladier, and Chamberlain is much stronger than it would have been any time earlier after the fall of the Berlin wall. We bid farewell to the holy naïveté of Francis Fukuyama's vision of the end of history, as if to say: “Welcome back to the twentieth century!”

The inability of the EU to react to the tragedy of Ukraine otherwise than through a series of unintentionally comical manifestations of “deep concern” not

⁶ See Bauman and Donskis, 2013.

only shows the ease with which the EU produces the new Daladiers and Chamberlains; it exposes a deeply selective approach to human self-worth, dignity, and life. As long as war crimes are committed in No Man's Land, in their eyes, such as Ukraine, we can react with our seemingly sensitive rhetoric without doing anything in terms of political and legal action. It happened only after the Malaysian airplane crash when the plane with three hundreds of Dutch, Australian, and other nations' civilians was shot down by the terrorists armed and supported by the Kremlin that the EU showed at last some signs of genuine resentment and protest against this shocking barbarity.

I can only recall Zygmunt Bauman's allusion he makes in his works to the Nazi concept of "life unworthy of life." The phrase "life unworthy of life" (in German, *Lebensunwertes Leben*) was a Nazi designation for the segments of populace which had no right to live. In our days, we witness a liquid-modern designation for the regions and countries whose tragedies have no right to break the news and whose civil casualties or sufferings from political terrorism and violence have no right to change bilateral relations and trade agreements between Russia and major players of the EU.

How could we otherwise explain the unbearable naïveté and totally misguided actions, to say the least, of the German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier who was pushing Ukraine to negotiate with terrorists thus legitimizing them? Or the surrealist political logic of France with its multibillion deal with Russia over the Mistral warships thanks to which Russia can attack not only Ukraine (incidentally, the second warship to be sold to Russia will carry the name of Sevastopol) but any EU and NATO country as well? The Russian political commentator and essayist Andrei Piontkovsky spoke about the collective Feuchtwanger as an embodiment of the European will-to-misunderstand what was happening in Stalinist USSR. This sort of self-inflicted moral and political blindness, or the will-to-misunderstand Vladimir Putin's Russia, could be described as the collective Schröder.

Like Tibet with its series of self-immolations, Ukraine has become a litmus test case – as far as our moral and political sensibilities are concerned. How many more deaths and tragedies do we need to get back to our senses? What the death toll should be like to switch to our sensitivities? We know a winged phrase that the death of one person is a tragedy, yet the death of millions of people becomes statistics. Unfortunately, this is more than true. The struggle between our moral blindness and our ability to see other individuals as ethical beings, rather than statistical units or workforce, is the struggle between our own powers of association and dissociation, compassion and indifference, the latter being a sign of moral destructiveness and social pathology.

We learn from political history that we can withdraw from our ability to empathize with other individuals' pain and suffering. At the same time, we can return to this ability – yet it doesn't say a thing about our capability to be equally sensitive and compassionate about all troubled walks of life, situations, nations, and individuals. We are able to reduce a human being into a thing or non-person to be awake only when we ourselves or our fellow countrymen are hit by the same kind of calamity or aggression. This withdrawal-and-return mechanism only shows how vulnerable, fragile, unpredictable, and universally valid human dignity and life is.

These are the lessons to be learned. The Ukrainian lessons.

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