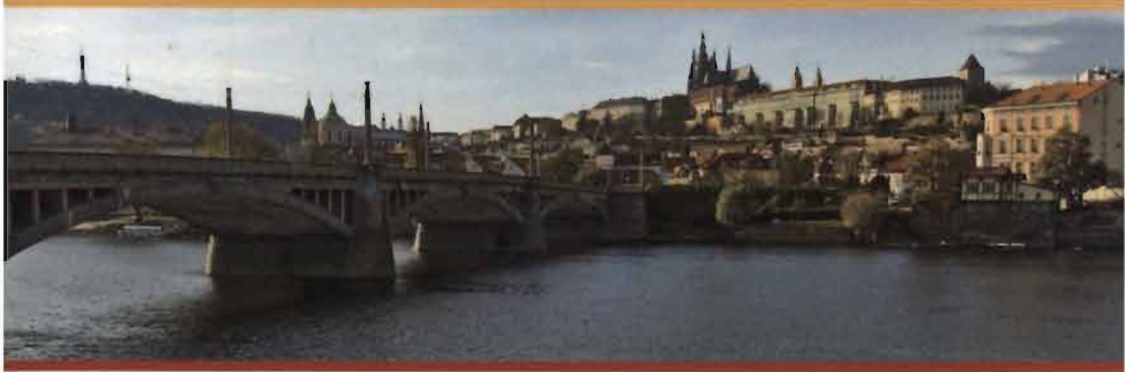


*Edited by Leonidas Donskis*



# Yet Another Europe after 1984

*Rethinking Milan Kundera  
and the Idea of Central Europe*

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Idea of Central Europe

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Leonidas Donskis



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## Five

# EUROPE, CENTRAL EUROPE, AND THE SHAPING OF COLLECTIVE EUROPEAN AND CENTRAL EUROPEAN IDENTITIES

Mitja Žagar

### 1.

When did I realize that Central Europe existed—that it mattered to me, identified me? I believe this happened rather early in my life, already in my childhood. I certainly started to have a sense of this part of the world and became interested in it long before I learned about the complex theories (more precisely, the scholarly definitions and discourses) of identity that have been emerged in the social sciences and humanities. I must have been five when I first visited Vienna. The city fascinated me. I was amazed by its grand buildings and boulevards—its palaces and churches, huge parks and promenades, colorful shop windows, playgrounds and amusement parks, and, in particular, the Vienna Prater and its Giant Ferris Wheel (the *Riesenrad*). I (even!?) enjoyed the museums and art galleries to which my “old aunt” Ela took me, as she managed to explain their exhibitions in a way that spoke to a child. I was consumed by Vienna’s vibrancy, intensity, and spirit. Everything was new to me, different and much grander than what I was used to in Slovenia and Yugoslavia, and yet everything seemed familiar and friendly, and I felt comfortable there. I remember that, though I missed my parents very much, I was sad and disappointed when, after a few days of enjoying the city, we had to return home.

I spent much of my early childhood with aunt Ela, an unmarried and childless family friend and distant relation who lived next door and often babysat me. She was a retired kindergarten teacher, a colleague of my mother’s, and she possessed a rare, but wonderful talent for showing and explaining places, events and developments, even complex phenomena in ways that children could comprehend and enjoy. She told wonderful stories, often based on her own experiences, that stimulated as many (if not more) questions as they provided answers. Although people around me were sometimes annoyed by my endless questions, aunt Ela stimulated my curious and inquisitive spirit by taking me on trips to explore new places, people, and cultural treasures in Yugoslavia and throughout Europe.

The trip to Vienna was one of our early ones—the first longer trip that exposed me to a foreign country, its language, and culture (the republics in

the Yugoslav federations were then parts of the same country, while their languages and cultures were considered brotherly, similar, and domestic). These trips to a large extent shaped me, my thinking, and my view(s) of the world. There was a process of preparation before each trip and I clearly remember that preparation for the Vienna trip took several weeks, which further built up my expectations. We looked at photos and reproductions of paintings and drawings in books and tourist brochures about the city (mostly old ones, from the interwar period), which she presented to me in a simplified way. As always, aunt Ela told stories—some that she had heard since her childhood and others based on her personal adventures and experiences of Austria and Vienna.

Born an Austro-Hungarian citizen at the beginning of the twentieth century, Ela remembered that time and society fondly, which may have been somewhat unusual for a devoted communist, as she then was. At the time of our visit to Vienna in the mid-1960s she still considered it the capital of the “Empire” and associated it with her youth. Although she did not visit the city until after World War I, in the period of the first Austrian republic, she associated Vienna with the imperial “glamour and glory” that she knew from stories, particularly from tales told to her by a distant relative—a seamstress at the imperial court during the nineteenth century. These detailed descriptions of supercilious imperial quarters, noblewomen’s dresses and outfits fascinated Ela as a child, and until the end of her life. For her Austria-Hungary, its lands and peoples, its traditions and her memories of the Empire remained important points of reference throughout her life, and shaped her identities—what, in the context of this book, we could call specific (common) European or (more particularly!) Central European identities. Surely, our common experiences, particularly those study trips, her stories, and many other people’s stories (co)shaped my own perceptions of the region and my identities.

An interesting piece of this identity mosaic was a story from her childhood that I often asked her to repeat. It was a story about a visit by the Emperor Franz Joseph to her home town Jesenice—the first and only time she saw and heard the Emperor in person. I was impressed by her description of the Emperor all dressed up in his festive royal attire, waving graciously to the public that had come to cheer him. I remember particularly that she always emphasized how happy the crowd was when he started his speech with a short, formal greeting in the Slovene language. This symbolic gesture by the Emperor, that showed his respect of the local population and culture, made the crowd enthusiastic. It also showed that the regime, generally considered repressive and unkind to the inhabitants of this “prison of nations” dominated by the Germans (later the Austrians) and Hungarians, was aware of the diversity and multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic makeup of the population of the Empire (from childhood, successors to the throne were taught at least a few phrases in the languages of their different subject peoples). Surely, rather than simply dismissing

Austria-Hungary as a “prison of nations,” contemporary regimes and politicians could learn from such practices of “*K und K Monarchie*” (Imperial and Royal Monarchy), that expressed at least a symbolic recognition and respect for diversity. Even more, they should learn from public and scholarly discussions, particularly those of the Austro-Marxists Bauer and Renner on cultural autonomy, and from practical experiences (both successful and problematic) of legal regulation and of a specific type of collective protection of national minorities that evolved after the introduction of the Dual Monarchy.

The story of the Emperor’s visit—which I often later compared with reports about the public appearances and behavior of political leaders worldwide, but particularly in Central Europe—was an eye-opener that, in a specific way, revealed to me the incredible diversity and pluri-lingualism that have always existed in Central Europe, even though I did not grasp this important fact at the time.

## 2.

One summer a few years later, when I was around ten, my aunt Ela took me on another fascinating study trip that lasted some weeks. This “cultural and linguistic” trip was designed to stimulate my interest in diverse cultures and languages and was something that only she could have conceived. Interested in linguistics and cultures, she read several languages and spoke a few fluently, including German and all of the “Yugoslav” languages. Our trip was a specific introduction to those languages: she wanted me to see how they lived in daily practice in different environments, how they (inter)related, intertwined, and moved in and out of one other. We started our journey in Ptuj, a wonderful ancient city in Slovenia, and visited several interesting towns and villages in the north of Croatia and in Vojvodina (the northern province of Serbia) on our way to the very border between Yugoslavia and Romania, where the trip ended.

On this journey, aunt Ela asked me to listen carefully to the people, to observe how they talked and communicated—to pay particular attention to the local languages (dialects, vernaculars) and their transitions into other languages and dialects. I was surprised to discover that often the local dialects of different languages—particularly Slovene, Croat and Serb—matched and resembled dialects of neighboring languages more than the (official) standardized languages in the respective republics. She deliberately designed the route to include visits to some small towns and villages inhabited by different national (ethnic) minorities, to show me how their languages, habits, and cultures also impacted local dialects, vernaculars and languages, architectures and ways of life. So, in addition to the diverse local dialects of the Slovene, Croat, and Serbian languages I was exposed to Hungarian, Slovak,



Ruthenian, Ukrainian, German, different Roma dialects, and so on. Aunt Ela pointed out different and often inventive ways of communication, both verbal and nonverbal, that people had established and continued to develop in different environments to serve their specific needs. An interesting experience in Vojvodina was visiting communities of settlers—they would speak of the “colonists”—from Herzegovina, who, as poor farmers, had moved there into the “former” houses of Germans (particularly those accused of collaboration with the German occupation authorities) who had left (or had been forced to leave) the province after World War II. They were still distinctively different from other Serbian- and Croatian-speaking inhabitants who had lived in this area for generations. Although these places and the ways of life there were new to me, they seemed somehow familiar, and I felt comfortable, because people often invited us to their homes, particularly when aunt Ela explained the aim of our trip; they even offered us transportation—by car, truck, tractor, or teams of horses—to our next destinations, so that we would not need to use buses and trains as we had initially planned. Surely, this trip gave me a new and personal insight into this specific part of Central Europe; it showed me an incredible linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity, but it also introduced me to the ways of life, modes of coexistence, cooperation and intertwining of the different and distinct people, groups and communities that have evolved in this geographic area over time. These first-hand experiences and insights could not have been replaced by any other source, whether literary, scholarly, or belletristic.

However, the literature and other sources that I later read, as well as trips to the region, have supplemented my earlier knowledge and understanding of Central Europe and have contributed to the shaping and evolution of my European and specifically Central European identities. They have made me aware of controversies and contradicting narratives in and about the region. In time they have also helped me to realize the importance—particularly for daily life, coexistence and cooperation in ethnically diverse environments—of the following words that I heard spoken by an old man who had survived both World Wars, and whom aunt Ela and I met in one of these ethnically mixed villages: “If people have to, they learn to live and cooperate with others and each other, although it is not always easy. If they try hard and continue trying they even learn to enjoy it. Differences should not be problems, but rather advantages and wealth.”

Later trips to different parts of Central Europe were numerous and frequent, and usually connected with my scholarly and volunteer work in civic associations, particularly in the United Nations clubs and youth organizations of Slovenia and Yugoslavia. I was thirteen when I traveled alone for the first time to Macedonia for a conference of the Yugoslav UN Association, and a few months later to Switzerland for an international conference sponsored by UNESCO and UNICEF on the education of youth for peace and equal

cooperation among nations. Traveling at different times to different cities and countries I felt that there were certain similarities and commonalities—in the appearance, features and layout of buildings and settlements—and a common spirit to be found in the cities, towns, and villages between the Benelux countries to the west and Russia to the east, or even in the territory between Paris and St. Petersburg, and between Scandinavia to the north and the Mediterranean to the south. These experiences and the sense of similarities and familiarity that I have discovered have surely helped establish my Central European identities.

### 3.

As a student—particularly from the second half of primary school to the end of graduate studies—I was a bookworm and was passionate about literature. In “good weeks” I managed to read three to six or even more books. One of the reasons that I became interested in “speed reading” and started to train myself in it was to improve and speed up my schoolwork. That gave me more time to read belletristic literature—poems, short stories, novels, plays, and dramas. When it came to reading and literature I could never get enough. Late into the night, when I should have been asleep, my mother often found me in bed with the blankets up over my head, reading with a flashlight. (In the sixth grade, for example, I read the novel *Virgin Soil Upturned* by Mikhail Aleksandrovich Sholokhov<sup>1</sup> through the whole night and then left for school without having slept a minute.) While still in primary school I became one of the editors of the school’s literary journal, which was symbolically called *The Buds*. Dreaming that one day I would become an accomplished writer and poet, I also tried to write, and was extremely proud when a few of my short stories and poems were published.

Initially, I read Slovene authors and translations into the Slovene language, and a few texts in the Croat and Serbian languages that I was able to comprehend. When my foreign languages improved in high school I also tried, and then with great pleasure started to read, English and German prose and poems—often simultaneously with their Slovene translations, which was a great way to improve my understanding and command of these languages. To get at least a taste I read almost everything that I could lay my hands on: starting with children’s stories and books (when I have time and am in the right mood I still enjoy reading stories such as *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* by Oscar Wilde,<sup>2</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s *Le Petite Prince*,<sup>3</sup> Richard Bach’s *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*,<sup>4</sup> or A. A. Milne’s stories about Winnie-the-Pooh), I later continued with poetry, short stories, essays, novels, plays (tragedies, dramas, and comedies), and philosophic works. The librarians at the public library in Radovljica, my home town, saw me

at least once a week, but often two or more times. They were very helpful and often directed me in my exploration of classic and contemporary literature. Many classic works of Slovene, Yugoslav and world literature could be found in our bookshelves at home, but particularly in the library that my aunt Ela collected all her life. These included classical Greek and Roman works, Dante, Boccaccio, Rabelais, Petrarch, Shakespeare, Molière, Leopardi, Goethe, most of the American, English, French, Polish, and Russian classics, as well as Rilke, Kafka, and Hašek (his *The Good Soldier Švejk*<sup>5</sup> was one of the first novels that, at the beginning of my gymnasium years, I simultaneously read in the Czech original and in the Slovene, Croatian, English, and German translations that were all in her library). There were works by Joyce and many other masterpieces, as well as books by Karl May, whose novels about the Wild West and the Middle East stimulated my imagination and desire to travel, and which I especially enjoyed reading from the fourth to the sixth grades. Ela's library also contained many works of important philosophers and thinkers, including Plato, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, Machiavelli, Bodin, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Locke, Kant, Hegel, Marx and the contemporary Marxist and existentialist authors and philosophers, particularly the French ones such as Sartre; some of these I started to read towards the end of primary school, usually before they were mentioned in my classes, and often well before I was able to understand them properly. (At that time I did not consider that many of them were from Central Europe!) I also tried to follow and read contemporary literature, and explored literature from other parts of the world; to a large extent I was dependent on suggestions from our librarians, who introduced me to Asian and particularly Indian, Japanese, African, and Latin American works, all of which opened up new worlds to me.

By the beginning of my university years I could say that I was rather well read and that my literary tastes were quite formed. In the early 1980s Milan Kundera was a well-known and popular author and I tried to read everything that he wrote that was available. However, there were also other excellent twentieth century Central European authors, particularly contemporary ones, who I read and liked, and I developed a special taste and appreciation for the literature of the region. I was particularly interested in the Slovene poets France Prešeren, Dragotin Kette, Josip Murn Aleksandrov, Oton Župančič, Srečko Kosovel, Ivan Minatti, Janez Menart, Ciril Zlobec, Tomaž Šalamun, Tone Pavček, Venko Taufer, Niko Grafenauer, but also poets from other countries. Among writers from the region (in a narrower and broader sense), I should mention Danilo Kiš, whom I consider one of the best authors of the twentieth century and whose books *The Encyclopedia of the Dead*<sup>6</sup> and *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*<sup>7</sup> remain among favorites; Ivo Andrić (whose classic masterpiece, the novel *The Bridge on the Drina*<sup>8</sup> was considered the peak of the "Yugoslav" literature and for which—as the only "Yugoslav" author—he received the

Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961); Miroslav Krleža (who is considered the greatest Croatian author and thinker of the twentieth century), particularly for his plays, poems (especially *Ballads of Petrica Kerempuh*<sup>9</sup>), his novel *The Banners*,<sup>10</sup> and the collection of essays *A Dialectical Antibarbarian*<sup>11</sup>; Branko Ćopić, for *Mehmed*; “Meša” Selimović (for his novels *Death and the Dervish*<sup>12</sup> and *The Fortress*,<sup>13</sup> which I read several times and which offers unique insights into the thinking, nature, culture, history, and historical development of the Balkans (particularly Bosnia-Herzegovina); Ivan Cankar; Slavko Grum; Ciril Kosmač; Miško Kranjec; Lovro Kuhar (Prežihov Voranc); Pier Paolo Pasolini; Czesław Miłosz (Česlovas Milošas in Lithuanian); Václav Havel; Josef Škvorecký; Boris Pahor (who, in my view, should have been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his literary work, particularly his autobiographic novel *Necropolis*,<sup>14</sup> which describes his experiences in a concentration camp during World War II, and for whose firm anti-fascist position and unflagging struggle for democracy, human, and minority rights I have the greatest admiration); Vitomil Zupan; Drago Jančar; Rudi Šeligo; Peter Božič; Imre Kertész; Umberto Eco; Elfriede Jelinek; and many other writers from the Benelux, Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Austria, the former Yugoslavia and its successor states, Albania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Ukraine, the Baltic states, Romania (including those who wrote in German or Hungarian, like Herta Müller, who is usually considered a German author), Bulgaria and Greece, but also from France, Scandinavia, Belarus, Russia and Turkey, (particularly Orhan Pamuk for his fabulous book *Istanbul*<sup>15</sup>). Although each of these authors is very different and specific, their works—in their content, nature, spirit, geographic and symbolic space—reflect the region and its influences, even when some of the individuals belong to a region that is broader than what is normally considered Central Europe.

When I first read Kundera’s essay “The Tragedy of Central Europe”<sup>16</sup> in the mid-1980s I had, to a large extent, already developed my views about the region and my European and regional identities. I remember that when asked, while at an international conference, who I was in ethnic and cultural terms, I responded as follows: “I am from the town of Radovljica in Gorenjska region, and from Ljubljana where I study. I am a Slovene from Slovenia, from Yugoslavia, and from Europe. I am a European, an inhabitant of our Earth and a citizen of the world. And in some way the Universe is too small for me.”

Kundera’s essay and the debate it provoked—of course in combination with other works, views, and experiences—influenced my views of Central Europe (as specific a frame of reference) and my European identities, which further evolved and strengthened as I began to visit other continents. More precisely, I perceived Central Europe as a concept—as a cultural and political space, a frame and state of mind, and a point of reference, but also as a specific collective identity that, geographically originating from the region, I shared.

In this context Kundera's essay and the debate(s) that followed are just a few elements, a few bricks in a huge building—possibly one of those red brick buildings that is so typical of (some parts of) Central Europe. These bricks are helpful in exploring the questions that I consider relevant in defining the region and its characteristics, particularly those that determine the concept(s) of Central Europe and its/their role in the shaping of Central European and other European identities.

#### 4.

When I was preparing the notes for my presentation on Central European identities for the International Seminar “Yet Another Europe and the Legacy of Dissent: Central Europe after 1984,” held at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania, in October 2010, where the idea of this volume was born, I searched for the answers to the following questions:

**What is Europe? What is “yet another Europe”? What is Central Europe? Are there European and Central European identities? If they exist, what are their contents and nature? What are identities?**

Thinking of these questions and considering Kundera's famous essay raised several more questions:

**Can Europe and Central Europe survive if they do not become inclusive and are not successful in diversity management and integration? Are there viable alternatives to capitalism and democracy for Europe's future?**

Although these questions seem relatively simple, they are in fact difficult and have no simple and universally accepted answers. Attempts to answer them usually raise new and additional questions that complement the initial ones—they can help us define the framework for discussions on the possible impacts of geographic, cultural, social, economic, and political concepts (as well as notions and perceptions about Europe and Central Europe) on the emergence, development and evolution of European (and particularly Central European) identities as specific collective identities. These questions prove particularly helpful in determining and explaining the content and nature of these identities.

5.

**What is Europe?**

Even geographers cannot offer an undisputed answer that would be acceptable to all. Which geographic criteria should be applied and how? Is Europe a continent, or is it just a peninsula of Asia (Eurasia)? Where and what are its borders? How far to the east, west, north or south does it reach? Is there only one Europe? Can ideas about Europe be expanded—to consider geographic features such as rivers, mountain ranges, and plains, as well as cultural, social, security and political features and influences? Does it include the Caucasus, particularly its South? Which border areas can be included? Which areas are excluded and why?

Geographically, there are many valid arguments supporting the idea of Europe as just a peninsula or sub-continent of Eurasia (like the Indian sub-continent). Adding cultural, social, political, and security/military dimensions to geographic criteria, however, makes the task of defining Europe more complex, and invariably raises many new questions: How do we define the “cultural, social, political and security/military dimensions” that define this continent? What is culture? What is society? What is politics and what is political? What is security? Shall we observe it just from the military perspective, as the absence of the immediate danger of aggression? Is the concept of human security the right approach? Should we use narrow or broader definitions? I would suggest that it is preferable to use the broadest and most inclusive definitions of Europe. This position, however, is influenced by my desire to develop inclusive social concepts, and concepts of (collective) identities, that I consider effective tools for the promotion of the voluntary, equal and full inclusion and integration of all individuals, distinct groups, and communities—particularly those that are marginalized, and including all types of minorities. In this context I would describe social phenomena, and the above-mentioned concepts, as relational processes that—with all their dimensions and contents, including spatial and temporal ones—are complex and interrelated. Using the concept of folkways presented by David H. Fischer in *Albion's Seed*,<sup>17</sup>

I would describe culture(s) as particular ways of life (in all their dimensions, including food, dress, architecture, and housing ) that are practiced regularly by people at a certain time and that are characteristic of a specific environment. What is colloquially referred to as culture—or creative culture, including so-called high and low culture, alternative culture, and different creative activities—represents just a segment of those ways of life. Societies—at all levels of social organization, ranging from the local to the universal/global (and that, in terms of size, can range from micro to macro levels)—can be described as communities composed of individuals and all types of collective entities

(from families and local communities to states and supranational structures), which are interrelated, interdependent and form some kind of social organization and structure. Ideally, societies should be open, flexible, and inclusive, based on the principles of equality and nondiscrimination, and should provide, in a certain environment, the necessary conditions for equal and full inclusion and voluntary integration of all individuals and distinct collective entities into respective societies. Further, security should be seen in its broadest context as human security, which refers to individual and communal feelings of security/safety—the feeling of people that they are safe and comfortable in all respects and, if necessary, protected by adequate social mechanisms.

The temporal dimension of all of these social phenomena and concepts (including theoretical, political, ideological) should also be considered. Shall our analysis consider only the present or shall we also consider the past, and possibly the future—at least our predictions for the future?

Considering all of these questions and dilemmas, it is not surprising that in the literature and daily discourses there are countless, often very different and even opposing, answers to the question of what Europe is. In my view, at least in cultural terms Europe includes: to the east and south east, Russia (as far east as the people there feel European), the Caucasus and Turkey (again, as much as the people there feel European), and the Mediterranean; to the west, it includes not only the British, the Portuguese, the Spanish islands, and Iceland, but also, for many reasons, Greenland.

## 6.

### **What is “yet another Europe”?**

The very notion of “yet another Europe” clearly refers to certain temporal, political/ideological, as well as cultural frameworks. However, this does not make our attempts to define it any easier. Today and in the recent past this concept has been connected with the European Commission/European Union and its enlargement in the past decades, particularly its (recent and expected) eastern and southeastern expansion. We could say that the EU member countries might be considered “Europe,” although some differentiate between “old” and “new” members (and “old” and “new” Europe). In the views of some, only the “old Europe” is the “true Europe.” Consequently, it could be said that “yet another Europe” might also include recent EU member countries, particularly those that joined the EU in the last two waves of its expansion. From that perspective, surely the current and prospective candidate countries, and possibly those countries that might not even consider EU membership in the future, should be described as “yet another Europe.” But it might not be that simple: Does “yet another Europe” include Turkey, an EU candidate

country which, since the fall of Constantinople, has been seen by Europe as a “key other”—particularly in Eastern and Central Europe, where it is seen as a symbol of Islam, the Islamic cultural circle, and the Muslim people? Does the notion of “yet another Europe” address religious and value issues? In this context, what are European values and moral systems? Are these values and value systems different and possibly conflicting? Do discussions about the future of Europe and “yet another Europe” consider current and future conditions, particularly economic and demographic realities? Can Europe survive with its current standard of living without constant immigration? Does it pay attention to the growing tensions, divisions, cleavages, impatience and exclusion, intolerance and hostility regarding “others” that can result in the various xenophobic excesses that can be witnessed daily in most European environments? Does it recognize their impact on daily politics and their influence on political ideologies? Does Europe accept or reject intolerance, segregation, racist discourses, and xenophobia? How does it deal with diversity? Does it develop its strategies of diversity management? How does the notion of “yet another Europe” relate to globalization and the fact that Europe’s global role is diminishing—that, in the near future, Europe might become just one of several global peripheries, “yet another region” (in our global(ized) world) that can be more or less important depending on the times and circumstances. In the context of our discussions, does “yet another Europe” include Central Europe or has Central Europe already become a part of Europe?

My immediate reaction to these questions would be that the notion of “yet another Europe” is just one of many—possibly inadequate and problematic—attempts to define and describe Europe, its dimensions, and its diversity. Consequently, simple analogies such as “yet another Europe” and “Central Europe” can be considered just two small pieces in relation to the complex mosaic of Europe, or (and this better reflects the dynamic, interwoven, and evolutionary nature of these phenomena) they can be seen as two colors in a watercolor painting of Europe that is constantly changing for different reasons (fading from light exposure; undergoing chemical changes; the color and paper changing due to climate and other conditions; attempts being made, by the painter or other experts, to restore it to its original condition). Considering the current problems and crises in Europe I would hope that “yet another Europe” includes all those who (like the contributors to this book) can conceive and develop alternative and inclusive scenarios and strategies for sustainable and stable development. To be successful and responsive to the current and future needs and challenges of European societies and the continent as a whole, such scenarios and strategies should include comprehensive and effective long-term strategies and policies of diversity management that need to introduce adequate regulation and management of migration, particularly immigration flow, as well as open and inclusive integration policies and practices.



## 7.

**What is Central Europe?**

As explained above, I consider Central Europe simultaneously a part of Europe and of “yet another Europe.” I believe that the three phenomena and concepts are interwoven and interdependent—that they should be considered mutually inclusive rather than mutually exclusive. As such they could be seen as the building blocks for inclusive concepts of Europe and of diverse, common European identities.

We can trace several historic sources and origins of the concept(s) of Central Europe and list several different perceptions of the region and these ideas. Historic traces of diverse perceptions and concepts of Central Europe can, at least fragmentally, be found in various environments and at different times since Antiquity. In this context I would mention particularly the intense and rich (frequently pluri- or multi-lingual) communication, connections, and cooperation between the intellectuals and scholars of this part of Europe who have been nurtured since the Middle Ages and who—though not in a formalized way—can be observed as having shaped a specific (academic) community and common cultural circles. These perceptions and concepts are continuously evolving.

Among the best known was the idea of *Mittel Europa* that generally referred to the German cultural circle and, in a political sense, to the Habsburg Empire, which was perceived of and officially defined as the “Central European and Balkan Empire,” and which encompassed the territories from its Russian borders to the east, to the Ottoman borders to the south and the east, and to the historically shifting western and northern borders. The concept of *Mittel Europa* as a Central European cultural sphere was broader and traditionally included all (historic) German lands as well as Switzerland and Liechtenstein. Regardless of the changing borders of the Habsburg Empire and various historic developments, political and cultural definitions of Central Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also included Northern Italy and often the Benelux countries. In any case, the western political and cultural borders of Central Europe have seemed more uncertain and fluid than its borders to the east and south, where the Ottoman and Russian Empires were usually seen as “key others.” These and other concepts and perceptions of Central Europe that have emerged throughout history have been constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by different actors and in specific historic circumstances.

This was true also of the perceptions and concepts of Central Europe discussed by dissidents and intellectuals, particularly by Czech, Hungarian and Polish as well as Baltic and “Yugoslav” thinkers in the 1980s. Their ideas reflected the times they lived in, and were intended to offer alternatives to the

ruling communist ideologies and regimes in their respective countries, and should therefore be seen as specific reflections of the desires and struggles for democratization, freedom, and human rights in those societies. The authors and promoters of these ideas hoped that they could build upon and stimulate the active role of civil society and its actors in the process of democratization. Taking into account the nature of the concepts of Central Europe that were emerging in the 1970s and 1980s and the intentions of their authors, as well as the actual role and impact of these ideas in the political and social transformations in the region over the past three decades, these ideas and concepts can be seen as innovative and revolutionary. In retrospect, particularly considering recent historic developments, it could be said that these concepts actually contributed to democratic reforms and transformation in these countries—to the dynamic process that is often described as “the transition from Communism” or “the transition to democracy.” Although their actual contribution to bringing about political and social change is very difficult if not impossible to measure, they might have been far more important and effective than was initially thought.

In the early 1980s discussions by dissidents and intellectuals on diverse ideas and (re)interpretations of Central Europe focused on a few then communist countries, particularly those that later established the Vishegrad Group and that, for historic reasons, were separated by the “Iron Curtain” from their European counterparts in the West, which experienced democratic development after World War II. To simplify these discourses, we could say that they saw the Fascist and Nazi aggressive expansionist policies and World War II, but particularly communist totalitarian rule in the post-war years, as tragic external interventions that were alien to their Central European societies, and that interrupted their “natural” evolution and development—an evolution that they believed would otherwise have been democratic, even if the experiences and practices of those countries in the first decades of the twentieth century might have been rather undemocratic. These “romantic” (!?) ideas of Central Europe were alternative responses to the external interventions and historic developments that had divided Europe and Central Europe, and were attempts to bridge divisions between the East and the West. Their aim was to reunify the continent in a common democratic development, possibly through the processes of European integration. However, these (re)interpretations and concepts were often not tolerant, open, or inclusive, but rather exclusive and even repressive. Like many human and minority rights activists and advocates of democratization, I hoped that those alternative concepts would be aimed at the voluntary, equal, and full integration of all individuals, groups and communities. Although I advocated prosecution of individuals who directly violated human rights, and their punishment if their direct individual responsibility was established in fair public trials, I also argued against exclusion and

repressive political actions, and opposed the ideas of “collective blame” and (political) “lustration” or even “defenestration” that were promoted by some radical dissidents.

Consequently, it should be no surprise that I advocate open and inclusive concepts of Central Europe that provide not only for the possible inclusion and integration of additional countries, particularly to the east and south, but also for voluntary, free and full integration of all individuals and distinct communities, including immigrants from non-European countries.

## 8.

### **Are there European and Central European identities? What is their content and nature? What are identities?**

From my personal experiences, particularly those of living in non-European societies, I have realized that I do possess European and Central European identities. Depending on the context, I identify (myself) as European or Central European. Our individual and collective identities reflect the circumstances and environments in which we live, particularly those that we consider important. More precisely, our identities are conditioned by our interpretations of those environments, circumstances, and realities. Consequently, they also reflect the diversity—both internal and external—of every European country. However, people from different parts of Europe who travel to or live in other parts of the world often find that they have common lifestyles, patterns of behavior, perceptions, stories, experiences, attitudes, values, and identities that connect, identify, and differentiate them as Europeans. In comparison with Europeans from other parts of Europe, I have discovered that I have more in common with those coming from the broader region of Central Europe, even though we possess diverse Central European identities. In short, there is no single and uniform common Central European or European identity. Rather, there are as many European and Central European identities as there are Europeans and Central Europeans—and surely more if we consider also the specific identities of different collective groups. However, those European and Central European identities do have their common denominators that might be stronger regionally, particularly in those regions of Europe that are more connected, interwoven, or internally integrated. These common denominators can also include perceptions and (re)interpretations of spatial (geographic and social) and symbolic environments and frameworks, circumstances and conditions, shared history (common interpretations of the past and present), ways of life, culture, values, value (particularly moral) systems, and goals.

At this point in our discussion of identities we need to define and describe these phenomena. What are identities? Identities, both individual and collec-

tive, are social phenomena that should be seen as specific, continuous, and complex dynamic processes that continuously evolve and transform in their efforts to define—through ascription and self-ascription—an individual and/or collective entity. As such they are shaped and influenced by a number of interrelated (f)actors that include relations with other individuals and communities. Like all social phenomena, identities are fundamentally relational and dynamic processes that are defined by their spatial, social, and temporal dimensions.

Analyzing and interpreting identities it could be said that they are shaped in continuous and complex processes of comparing and conceptualizing, based on dynamics of assimilation and dissimilation (with others, particularly “key others”). Throughout our lives we either (try to) imitate others, associate with them, and resemble, or seek to differentiate ourselves from others by behaving differently from them and even separating (oneself or ourselves) from them. It is almost impossible to predict which will be the factors impacting these processes, and how they will affect the shaping of identities. What we know is that identities, both individual and collective, are constantly forming, evolving, changing, decaying, and disappearing. As dynamic processes, they constantly reshape and transform, so they should always be analyzed considering specific relevant (physical, particularly geographic and social, and symbolic) space(s) and time(s). Additionally, it should not be forgotten that different identities (inter)relate, intersect and interweave as well as condition each other.

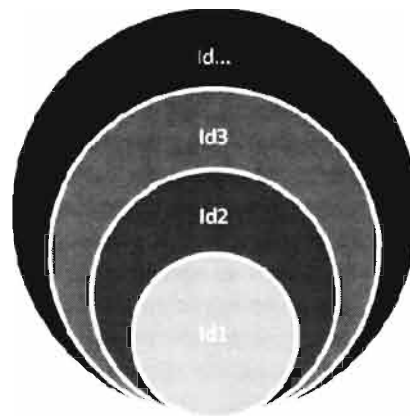
In a simple way we could say that our identities are constant attempts to answer, at a given time in a given environment, two basic questions: Who am I? Who are we? Of course, simultaneously—particularly by comparing ourselves, as individuals and members of diverse collective entities, with “others,” particularly those perceived as “key others,” and by determining the (spatial and non-spatial) borders dividing us from them—we are also answering the questions: Who is (s)he? Who are you? Who are they?

Namely, identity processes do not just define who we are as individuals and members of diverse collective entities, but also who we are *not* by defining others and the borders between us and them. Sometimes those negative contents and definitions that help us identify the (spatial and non-spatial) borders of our identities seem to be more important than defining their positive contents. It could be said that different identities help us orientate and establish our (social) positions and roles by considering different criteria in a certain environment (that determine us as individuals and as members of collective identities), while, simultaneously they determine also the positions and roles of diverse collective entities (as specific units) in this same environment. Consequently, they directly and indirectly also impact thoughts and actions.

Considering the complexity and dynamic nature of identities (identity processes) it is rather difficult to explain their content and structure. Even

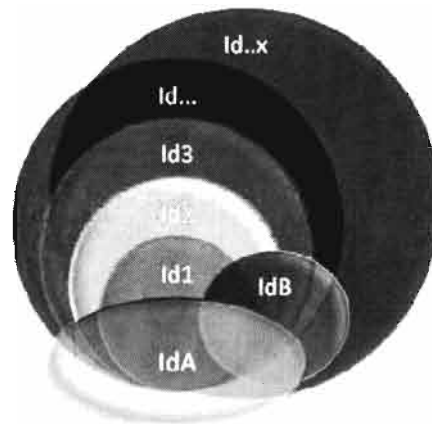
when we explore a specific dimension and content of a certain identity (such as the identity of a nuclear family) we find that in this context we can occupy different roles and positions: we are simultaneously our parents' children, brothers or sisters to our siblings, our own children's parents, and so on. Sometimes these "multiple" identities deriving from a specific identity are described as multi-layered or "onion" identities, with different layers that represent specific dimensions and contents of our identities, while simultaneously determining a specific broader identity or identity cluster (such as our nuclear family identity). Such a perception of identities can be presented by the following simplified scheme:

**Figure 1:** Multiple, multi-layered identity: Basic model



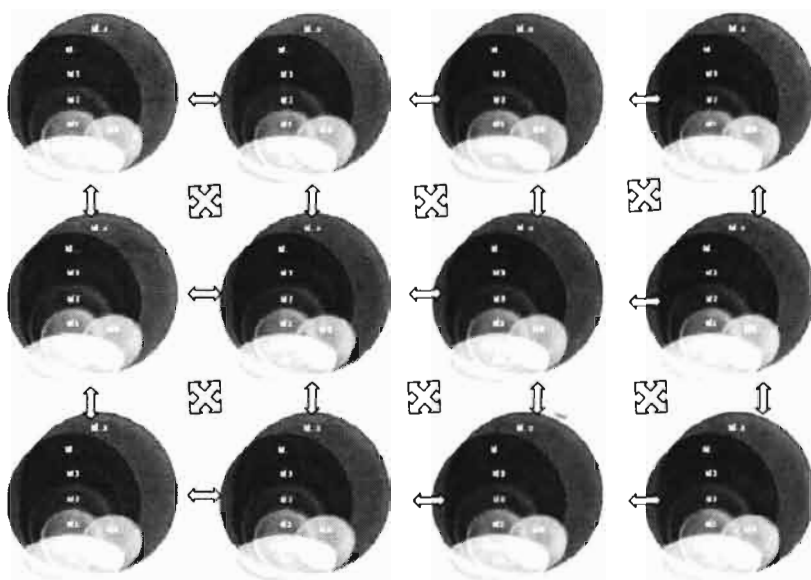
Of course, identities are usually far more complex than this basic scheme shows. Individual segments of identity might intersect differently, possibly moving through several layers as well as taking different shapes. Often, certain layers of identity reach outside the imagined schematic borders, possibly intersecting with several other and different identity clusters. Consequently, the basic model of multi-layered identities and basic identity clusters can be supplemented in the following way:

**Figure 2:** Extended model of a multiple/multi-layered identity or complex identity cluster indicating the interdependence of different layers of identity and of the different individual and collective identities that form the identity patterns and clusters of an individual and collective entity.



Although, for the purposes of scholarly analysis, specific individual and collective identities or clusters of identities might be shown as isolated phenomena, in reality they are not. Identities are always (inter)related and (inter)dependent, constantly influencing and conditioning each other, while they are also (inter)related and (inter)dependent with other social phenomena and (f)actors, as well as dependent upon circumstances and conditions. Although we try to differentiate among independent and dependent variables, such classifications—particularly in specific contexts—can be rather problematic. In most cases we cannot accurately predict which variables in specific circumstances might prove to be dependent and which ones independent. If we consider a broader picture, all variables seem to be dependent ones—at least in specific circumstances. Consequently, individual and collective identities, identity processes, and identity clusters should be considered as interrelated and interdependent nets of complex identity clusters that continually interrelate and intersect. I believe that European and Central European identities can be observed as specific identity nets in this way. Schematically and segmentally, these identity nets can be presented by the following simplified scheme:

**Figure 3:** Complex clusters and nets (networks) of multiple/multi-layered identities indicating the connections and interdependence of identity clusters: basic theoretical model of the interrelationship of identity patterns and clusters of (individual and collective) identities.



A number of relevant factors and actors interplay in the continuous processes of formation and transformation of individual and collective identities, thereby determining their evolution as well as the shaping and reshaping of clusters and nets of identities. Phases in these identity processes go on continuously and often simultaneously throughout the conscious life of an individual, from birth until death, and throughout the existence of a collective entity, from its emergence until its disappearance. Among the relevant and interdependent factors and actors in processes of identity formation and transformation, the immediate and broader environment in terms of geographic (physical) and symbolic space should be mentioned, because it defines the spatial, social, and cultural framework, geographic conditions, and characteristics for inter-personal and other social relations among individuals and collective entities, particularly those that are considered by groups or communities as “key others”; they condition individual and collective identities in a certain environment and for specific ways of life that define social, economic, political and cultural life, and the characteristics of the environments and actors in those contexts. None of these phenomena, factors, and actors are isolated or independent, but rather should be considered as interrelated and dependent variables whose impact should be measured in the context of all other relevant (f)actors, including: technology (particularly technological progress); legal, political and economic organizations, institutions, and systems; government as well as governance; and (social) mobility. Simultaneously, we should con-

sider their temporal dimension, particularly the perceptions and concepts of time that emerge and evolve in different environments.

Additionally, we should be aware that our concepts, models, and theories, as well as our perceptions of reality, that all continuously evolve in time, should be treated as tools and yardsticks that help us comprehend complex realities, at least some dimensions thereof. We shall not confuse them with the realities themselves, as they are always just reductionist and simplified approximations of realities that focus on certain selected dimensions, characteristics, and contents of social phenomena, rather than encompassing their actual complexities. These warnings and considerations are necessary to point out the limitations of our (theoretical) concepts, models, theories, and, especially, our perceptions.

## 9.

All social and political activities (processes, policies, and strategies), and particularly those aimed at the creation and development of social concepts and ideologies, should be understood as acts of social engineering that are never socially neutral or objective. They are the products of social and political circumstances, conditions, and relations in a certain environment and have an impact on all aspects of life, including identity formation and transformation—both at the individual and collective levels. From our observations we know that identity processes can be influenced and directed in different ways: by upbringing, with the key roles of parents, families, neighbors, peers, and the immediate micro environment of early childhood and adolescence; by formal and informal education and learning, that should extend into life-long learning and civic education (in the sense of “education for active democratic citizenship” as promoted by the Council of Europe); by social life, socialization, and, especially, political socialization, which can also occur through political parties; by political institutions and systems, in particular democratic institutions; by international organizations and institutions, including regional ones; by media and public opinion; by civil society and all its actors, including trade unions, companies and other economic actors, as well as the usually mentioned NGOs; by research and science, that provide the necessary expertise, knowledge, and skills relevant for social and political life.

The common interest of local, regional, national, and “European” political, economic and cultural leaders and all relevant social actors (particularly organized ones and civil society), should therefore be—if they truly care about the well-being and development of the continent as well as individual European countries and societies—to promote the development of open and inclusive common European identities. These inclusive and open identities shall allow all individuals and distinct communities, including non-European



immigrants and their communities, to integrate into societies in a voluntary, equal, and full way. In such a concept of European identities, Central European identities should be considered constituent components—specific layers of these multi-layered and multiple identities.

Such European and Central European identities should promote the concepts of open and inclusive European communities and societies based on: human rights and democratic principles; tolerance, recognition and respect of all diversities, including ethnic pluralism; the protection of minorities and the voluntary, equal, and full integration of all individuals and distinct communities; the promotion of democracy, democratic institutions, and democratic participation; solidarity and a feeling of community; and common interests that need to be constantly (re)established and coordinated, hopefully in a democratic way. These inclusive collective identities shall build upon positive, inclusive, and shared contents and values, particularly tolerance, acceptance, communication, inclusion, cooperation, and solidarity as the foundations for successful diversity management and the voluntary, equal and full social integration of all individuals and communities. I would hope that all the relevant actors in Europe—including politicians, public opinion leaders, political parties, state and public institutions, as well as intellectuals, artists, social activists, associations, social movements, enterprises, other economic entities, and all other civil society actors—will realize that Europe's future depends upon the promotion, development, and implementation of such open, inclusive and integrative approaches, identities, and concepts, and that they will pursue such activities and strategies, hopefully based on a commonly agreed upon and coordinated European strategy of diversity management and integration.

## 10.

### **Can Europe and Central Europe survive, if they do not become inclusive and are not successful in diversity management and integration? Are there viable alternatives to capitalism and democracy for Europe's future?**

The activities and programs of the dissidents that contributed to democratic reforms and transition in the former communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe, particularly the role that civil society played in this process, can be considered the most important legacy of the Dissent that took place in the 1970s and 1980s. Another important achievement of the Dissent was the formulation of "European policy" that demanded the inclusion of the Central European countries within Euro-Atlantic integration. This policy culminated in their EU membership during the EU's Eastern Enlargement in the early 2000s. Many dissidents viewed the process of accession and EU member-

ship as the reintegration of Central Europe into the West, something that was frequently described as the “return to Europe.” And they believed that those developments eliminated the former ideological, political, and security divisions and borders between the East and the West in Europe and globally. The ideas and values associated with those developments no doubt contributed to the evolution of new perceptions and concepts of Europe that consequently influenced the (re)shaping of European and Central European identities.

The inclusion of civil society into political processes and democratic transformation was among the most important social and political innovations that opened space for the activation and participation of the people, who previously had not participated in or were excluded from democratic processes and decision-making. These practices gave new qualities and dimensions to the processes of democratization. However, after the formal introduction of democracy, free elections, and the establishment of democratic political institutions, civil society actors such as associations, organizations, and (new) social movements became marginalized and were to a large extent squeezed out of democratic political processes. Once again, as so often in the past, Europe has followed exclusive patterns and practices. Rather than using the demands and experiences of transition to reform democratic political systems and institutions, and to expand political participation and democracy, Europe missed an historic opportunity: it failed to formally include diverse civil society actors into the democratic processes and institutions that were being developed at all levels within states.

Europe also missed the opportunity to use this historic moment and experiences from democratization efforts in Central and Eastern Europe to address problems of democratic deficit within the EU—problems that, two decades later, remain unsolved. Among the main deficiencies and problems of “democratic transition” and democratization processes caused by Europe’s inability to use historic opportunities, or to integrate its own cognition(s) and experiences as well as the cognitions, experiences and lessons of “others” (particularly those from non-European environments), I would list the lack (in some cases even the absence) of openness and inclusiveness. While, during the last decades of the twentieth century, most Eastern and Central Europeans, including some dissidents, looked up to the West, admired it uncritically and wanted to integrate into it through the assimilation and transplantation of western solutions into their societies, Western Europe to a large extent ignored important developments and experiences from the East. Both the East and West, as well as Central Europe, lacked the will and ability to consider, accept and integrate non-European, particularly non-Western traditions, experiences, and achievements into political, social, and economic development or to develop strategies, policies, and practices of diversity management that would promote the voluntary, equal, and full integration of immigrants and immigrant communities.

Although successful diversity management as well as European social and demographic realities and development trends require adequate regulation and management of international migrations and the successful integration of immigrants and their communities, Europe remains resistant to international migration and to the acceptance and integration of immigrants. Rather than seeing immigration as a possible solution to demographic problems and as a factor that contributes to the richness, diversity, and possible comparative advantages of respective regions and countries, Europe and many Europeans continue to perceive migration, immigration, and immigrants as problems and a potential danger to the unity of states, and to cultures and identities in the region. This discrepancy between actual needs and historic trends on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the un-readiness or inability to accept, promote and contribute to the voluntary, equal, and full integration of immigrants, particularly non-Europeans, has already become a problem for European development that could substantially weaken the continent's global position. Personally, I believe that, in the long run, Europe cannot survive and preserve its present social and living standards without the development, introduction and successful execution of adequate effective diversity management—particularly migration and integration strategies, policies, and programs at the national level of individual states as well as at the level of the EU. In addition to the openness and inclusiveness of individual countries as well as within the EU as a whole, these approaches should also be applied to the EU's external relations and policies. It will be impossible to develop a truly open, inclusive, and democratic Europe and European societies if the EU continues to act, in terms of international integration, as a closed and exclusive "Fortress Europe" towards other, particularly non-EU and non-European, societies.

Europe and Central Europe can survive, develop and thrive only if they are open and inclusive, and I believe that their current levels of openness with regards to internal and immigrant communities are insufficient and will have to improve. This will require effective diversity management—the successful regulation and management of all socially relevant diversities, holistic and operational migration strategies, effective integration legislation, and policies to stimulate the voluntary, equal and full integration of individuals and distinct communities, as well as the adequate protection of minorities. These efforts need to be concerted, and whenever possible unified into common regulations and segmental policies if they are to be effective. Their current absence can be considered one of the main deficiencies in diversity management both within individual European states and in terms of European integration, particularly at the EU level.

Open and inclusive ideas about Europe and Central Europe, as well as open and inclusive segmental and global strategies, policies, and practices

are also crucial to the development of democracy in Europe. Among the main necessary preconditions for democracy I would list of the following:

- pluralism, which cannot be limited just to politics but should encompass all socially relevant pluralities and diversities;
- democratic principles including liberty, equality and equal rights, non-discrimination, solidarity, justice, (social and political) participation, and popular sovereignty;
- human rights and freedoms, including adequate minority rights and protection;
- democratic (political) systems, established democratic procedures, and functioning democratic institutions;
- the broadest possible democratic (popular) basis and adequate organizational infrastructures that enable democratic expression and formulation of the specific and common interests of individuals and distinct communities, as well as their participation in political and social processes, if they desire that.

I would consider all closed and exclusive (social, political, and ideological) approaches, particularly those that might ignore or limit socially relevant pluralism(s) and diversities, human rights, and minority protection to be imminent threats and obstacles to true democracy, its existence and future development. Although imperfect, democracy—simply described as the rule “of the people, for the people, by the people”—still seems to be the best framework and system of social organization that we have invented so far. With all its deficiencies this principle and the political systems built upon it still enable the inclusion, in democratic decision-making processes, of social strata that were previously excluded from them. In the Western traditions democracy generally determines the formal inclusion into political processes of individuals belonging to those social strata, while diverse distinct collective entities are not considered. I would hope that democracy in Europe and globally will develop in such a way that it would enable not only full inclusion—the social and political participation of all individuals residing legally in states regardless of their citizenship—but also the inclusion and participation of all socially relevant groups that seek inclusion and participation. The formal inclusion of civil society and its actors into democratic political processes and institutions during the period of democratic transitions and reforms in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s could have been an important step in this direction. However, as indicated above, this opportunity was missed. I would hope that Europe corrects this mistake soon. From history we know that excluded strata have had to fight for (even if only formal) inclusion into democratic systems and processes. Consequently we can expect that the social strata that

are currently excluded (such as residents without citizenship, and in particular immigrants and other diverse groups) will have to do so as well. History has shown that once this was done different democratic systems were able and ready to integrate these new strata. Having been a democracy and human rights activist for several decades I am happy to conclude that democracy still seems to be the best option, possibly the only alternative, for Europe. For it to remain a viable option in the long-term, however, European democracy needs to become more open and inclusive by developing approaches and mechanisms that will enable the formal and actual inclusion and integration of all individuals and socially relevant groups, including civil society actors with their (politically expressed) specific and common interests. From these perspectives democracy remains an ideal and a desire that Europe shall follow and try to translate into practice. In doing so Europe shall take into account that what truly matters is a responsive system that meets the needs and interests of the people and distinct communities, instead of one that merely directs them and imposes its institutional views and interests. If European democracy cannot transform itself and proves unable to meet these challenges, then alternative solutions, that will complement or even replace it, will need to be developed.

Because of the parallel historic development of (political) democracy and capitalism, in particular capitalist economy, the public perceive them as connected and inseparable. Consequently, many now think that true democracy is not possible without private property and a capitalist economy—with the right to and protection of property as among the basic human rights and foundations of capitalism. Of course, human rights also constitute the foundation of modern (political) democracy. In this context, however, property rights are just a tiny segment of the body of human rights that consists of all civic and political, social and economic, cultural and particularly educational rights, as well as the newer universal rights such as the right to peace, to (natural) resources, to social and economic development, and to a sound environment. The right to property cannot therefore be realized as an absolute and exclusive right, but should be observed and considered in relation to all the other rights and basic freedoms that might limit or make it relative. Although those who promote unbridled “liberal capitalism” declare that such a concept is revolutionary and even incompatible with political democracy, capitalism, and especially free enterprise, it is neither new nor revolutionary. Different limitations on private property, which consider the common good and interests of communities, have existed since the Roman period and exist in today’s western democratic societies, most radically in the procedure of expropriation. It can be said, therefore, that limitations on property and even the redistribution of wealth are not incompatible with capitalism, which, in democratic societies, should adhere to the basic democratic principles of (social) justice, equality, and solidarity—principles, that, in their hunger for the highest profit, eco-

conomic actors such as wealthy business owners and managers all too often tend to forget or ignore.

In my view, capitalism and a capitalist economy are not preconditions for democracy, or even essential components of it. While democracy can evolve and exist in capitalist societies, the existence of capitalism in a certain society is no guarantee for democracy. To the contrary, a capitalist economy and hunger for the highest (and often short-term) profit can seriously undermine it: that kind of capitalism does not seriously take into account justice, equality, equal rights, solidarity, or the just and equal distribution of wealth, and does not pay the necessary attention to the common good or the environment. Rather, it sees and treats nature and natural resources, including bio-diversity and genetic material, as opportunities for the profit that it considers the ultimate goal and measure of everything. Consequently, it opposes environmental protection legislation and refuses to pay adequately for the exploitation of natural resources or for damage caused to the environment and the biosphere, but rather imposes patent protections and limits the availability of resources, inventions, and knowledge, even about natural human genomes, that could bring profit. Our earth, nature, and humanity clearly do not matter much to such “perverse” kinds of capitalist morality. Rather than seeing it as a precondition and component of true democracy, I therefore see the global capitalism that is evolving today as a major threat to contemporary democracy, which should have human well-being as its central goal and *raison d’être*. Rather than being a possible solution to the most urgent problems of our world, contemporary capitalism seems to generate problems that contribute to the escalation of crises.

In my view, therefore, a true contemporary democracy has to be one of “limited majority rule” that is based upon and respects human rights and freedoms that include the protection and special minority rights of all socially relevant groups as well as all democratic principles mentioned above, including the principles of social responsibility, solidarity, and the wellbeing of all people. If contemporary capitalism cannot be transformed in such a way as to fulfill these highest standards and requirements and even contribute to their improvement, it should be abolished and replaced by better arrangements able to prevent the irresponsible—and, from the perspective of humanity and sustainable development, irrational—ways of today’s capitalist profit-driven economies.

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