Freedom, Equality, Solidarity

Thoughts on Europe's Future – from Germany, France and Poland

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Abstract

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Thoughts on Europe's Future – from Germany, France and Poland

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Introduction

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The idea for this book emerged from the depths of a crisis that posed unprecedented challenges to the European Union, leaving many in Europe with serious doubts about the Union and its future. The following essays and conversations address the guiding principles of modern Europe – freedom, equality and solidarity – from French, Polish and German viewpoints. In so doing, they represent a reflective moment in which each author reconsiders his or her country, in the midst of Europe, with a critical eye to the past and recalibrated expectations of the future.

As trust dissipates and fears proliferate during this era of bank, debt and state crises, there is urgent need for reflection on many things: Why is there a European Union? Why do 27 member states and a half billion people cultivate, day by day, a culture of contentious debate as integral feature of peaceful coexistence? What is it that holds the Union together at its core? A common budget of a mere one percent of its total GDP? A handfull of common institutions, most of which are often referred to simply as "Brussels"? A single market featuring widely applicable rules and freedom of movement for goods, people, capital and services?

These things alone will not hold the EU together. It is no accident that Article 2 of the Treaty of Lisbon begins with a reference to the values upon which the Union is founded: "respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights." The values identified here are key to pluralism, tolerance, solidarity as well as gender equality. There is much talk of a "European community of values." But what, exactly, does it mean or entail? In this publication, German, Polish and French nationals have come together as

Europeans with their respective history, culture and tradition in hand. What divides them? How are they different? What unites them when it comes to concepts such as freedom, equality and solidarity?

The illustrious principles of freedom, equality and solidarity have undergone transformations in each of these countries. In some, this has been a slow process spanning a century; in others, like Poland, the change came with breathtaking speed, spanning only two to three decades. But it is more than history that connects these principles; they are connected as well by the network of relations that the contributors here underscore, often in surprising ways. "Freedom and equality" may have been the banner theme under which enlightenment and revolutionary thinkers rallied in the 18th century, but without solidarity, freedom can devolve into the selfish pursuit of singular interests and equality loses the lustre of diversity. Solidarity is therefore also addressed in the pages that follow.

In selecting our contributors, we paid no attention to age, profession, political party or religious background. We were simply interested in capturing what these individuals have to say, each of whom have addressed the broad terrain of these principles in their native Germany, Poland or France either by way of a public speech, a publication or through their personal biography. Our only criteria was that each principle be considered from a German, Polish and French perspective. The points of view offered were left entirely up to the contributors.

The intellectual pursuits of the contributors are mirrored in the eyes of three photographers who sought to capture images of freedom, equality and solidarity in everyday life in each country. The only explicit connection between text and image are these three principles. As such, the photographs are not intended to visualize the texts; they represent instead three additional approaches to "reading" the principles of freedom, equality and solidarity by other means.

The book demonstrates that the ideas of freedom, equality and solidarity continue to capture the avid attention of Europeans. But for those who might think these principles are safe and secure within the European Union, the contributors point to sobering developments: inequalities within and between the member states are growing; solidarity as a task of the Union has been battered by arguments over debt servicing and austerity measures; and the freedoms suffering restrictions in neighbor states to the south and east are under (sometimes open) fire in member states as well. Given this state of affairs, we believe this book and its contributions to hold particular urgency. The principles of freedom, equality and solidarity cannot be taken for granted within the European Union – ensuring their viability requires constant attention.

Epilogue
Of "True Freedom" and Other Threats to Democracy

A CONVERSATION WITH ANDRÉ GLUCKSMANN AND ADAM MICHNIK

Waiting in Tegel airport. The flight from Paris is more than half an hour late. Our window of time is closing quickly. André Glucksmann and Adam Michnik are scheduled to take part in an evening event at the Heinrich Böll Foundation, but want to have a conversation for our book beforehand. The work of both has been driven for decades by the question of freedom and democracy in Europe. At last Glucksmann arrives, and we catch one of the waiting taxis. Michnik is already in Berlin, but we have to pick him up at his hotel. On the way, we talk about Georgia. Glucksmann is a frequent visitor there, observing and providing support in the county's process of democratization. Michnik joins us in Berlin's Mitte district. The two have known each other for years, and the conversation quickly livens, jumping sometimes in the space of a single sentence between French, Polish, German and English. The taxi driver asks me who the two men are. He recognizes many of the names that have come up in the conversation, he says. He himself translates German poetry into Turkish, and publishes a German-Turkish literary magazine. Glucksmann and Michnik are delighted. An enthusiastic debate over the relative merits of Yaşar Kemal and Orhan Pamuk commences, and autographs are exchanged. Soon afterward, we arrive.

We sit in the bar at the Bertelsmann Stiftung's facility in Berlin. Smoking is strictly forbidden. Michnik reaches reflexively for an electronic cigarette. Coffee is served.

Mr. Michnik, Mr. Glucksmann, I want to offer you my sincere thanks for the opportunity to have this conversation. We sit in the middle of Berlin. A little more than 20 years ago, a meeting like this would have been unthinkable. Mr. Michnik, is "freedom" understood the same way by people of the West and the East?

Adam Michnik: First of all, freedom is a quality we only know how to appreciate in its absence. If we have freedom, we complain about it. We say it is too limited, incomplete, imperfect, only for the rich, or that it in fact isn't freedom at all, but only a kind of anarchy.

Moreover, it can be said that every revolution, every significant change, leaves many people unsatisfied. So it is today in Central and Eastern Europe. Here we are witnessing a campaign on behalf of "true freedom." This "true freedom" bears names such as Lukashenko and Yanukovych. "True freedom" also means Putin, and "true freedom" means Viktor Orbán. It operates in my country, Poland, as well. Here, this "true freedom" corresponds to the new Fourth Republic project promoted by Jarosław Kaczyński and his friends.

André Glucksmann: [laughing] Here I recognize the true Michnik and his sense for the paradoxical! But in this respect there isn't a real contradiction. It's true that freedom is a strategic idea; it's only when confronted with enemies of freedom (such as Putin and his ilk), who represent what you term "true" freedom, that one understands what authentic freedom is. The French revolutionary constitution of 1793 was never implemented, but – and this is the interesting thing about it – it implies that the imperative to respect human rights, and particularly freedom, presupposes the concrete experience of despotism. This means that only those who have experienced or been confronted by despotism know what freedom is.

Must freedom necessarily be imperfect, then?

A. Glucksmann: Václav Havel once said that one shouldn't wait for Godot. Because if one does wait for Godot, the Communist Godot turns up – the one with the "true freedom." Freedom is always negative and imperfect, but is for this reason a much bigger thing, not a smaller. And this is exactly what we've experienced in the 20th century, to a quintessential degree. On the one hand, Europe devised horrors in the first half of the 20th century, including total war and totalitarian revolution. In the second half of the 20th century, a minority of Europeans invented an antidote to all these catastrophes, in the form of the

velvet revolutions and the idea of dissidence. This is a genuinely new model, a variety of revolution that differs from Jacobinism and obviously even more from Leninism.

A. Michnik: This reminds me that both of us, André and I, were invited by Havel to the big anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. André spoke, so to speak, on behalf of the West, and I on behalf of the East.

A. Glucksmann: We two were the only ones who were allowed to speak. The others couldn't do anything but sing, like Joan Baez.

What is so exceptional about this new model of revolution?
A. Glucksmann: Ultimately, velvet revolutions are made by a majority. It's a majority of Germans, or Czechs, or Poles, who eventually either act or accept the overthrow of the old regimes. It's no longer revolution along the Jacobin model, organized by a minority prepared for a bloody seizure of power. There are also velvet revolutions that aren't built on blood, that for the most part prevent bloodshed, that give the enemy no opportunity to use lethal force. This results in incomplete revolutions. There is no definitive, absolute freedom today. For this reason, we have the ability to fight better and more easily for freedom.

In your view, do the East and West evaluate the fall of socialism and its consequences differently?
A. Glucksmann: I think one is largely unaware of the true proportions of these events, whether in the East or the West. Everyone was somehow disappointed. Western Europe was disappointed because the Poles, the Czechs and all the others created their own contradictions, their own difficulties. And in the search for the perfect freedom, Eastern Europeans overlooked the fact that liberation is itself perfection. At the same time, this liberation has changed the face of Europe, has destroyed the Soviet empire and is still active in Europe today, for example in Georgia and Ukraine, even if it has had its ups and downs and setbacks. It's finally being felt even in Moscow. The contagion is spreading further as well, with highs and lows and setbacks, with difficulties such as those in Iran in 2009, in the Arab countries and even in China. Fifteen thousand intellectuals there signed the Charter 2008, modeled after the Charter 77. It doesn't matter whether these were "big" or "small" intellectuals or bloggers signing their names – all of

them dared to do this despite being fully conscious of the risk it posed to them. There is thus a dynamic of liberation operating there in which the success, the triumph of European oppositional thought, is the antidote to totalitarianism.

A. Michnik: I absolutely agree with what you say about Russia and China. I know many Russians very well. And I have always been against the racist thought that says freedom is for others, but not for Russians, because they are somehow a submissive nation. I have never thought this. I have always fought this idea in Poland, and continue to do so.

André Glucksmann rises, and sits on the floor at Adam Michnik's feet.

A. Glucksmann: I've always said this in France as well, that one must not confuse Pushkin with Putin, that there are two Russias, and that the Kremlin's Russia is not to be equated with the Russian empire.

A. Michnik: Absolutely! I absolutely agree with this, one hundred percent. A bit about China – I was there eighteen months ago, and met with people from opposition circles. It gave me a feeling of déjà vu. Because they were like we Polish dissidents were 30 years ago, just as impatient, just as courageous, and dressed just as we were. This was simply incredible! They're confronting similar dilemmas, similar paradoxes. I think China is already in a historical phase similar to that of our Central-Eastern Europe in the 1980s, shortly before the fall of socialism. But many Western observers haven't noticed this yet.

It was that way in the past too, by the way. The West simply wasn't able to perceive the unrest. Journalists from newspapers like "Le Monde" and the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" came to Poland and met with their own ambassadors, or possibly with someone from the church, and suddenly they knew all there was to know about Poland. They went back and wrote that there were a few dissidents, but that they weren't of any great significance. Even Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt believed this!

A. Glucksmann: A small anecdote: Solzhenitsyn was in Moscow. He had already been awarded the Nobel Prize, and had already been prosecuted, but hadn't yet been shown the door. He offered to write articles once or twice a month for the "Le Monde" newspaper, which you just mentioned, about the situation in Russia. And "Le Monde" answered him: "We already have our own correspondent in Moscow."

André Glucksmann spoke of a "dynamic of liberation." Nevertheless, authoritarian regimes refuse to accept freedom, and even in Europe, authoritarian and populist solutions seem to be coming back into fashion. What are the mechanisms driving this?

A. Michnik: Putin invokes the mythology of "Greater Russia," while at the same time employing a kind of socialist and anti-intellectually tinged populism. Lukashenko and Yanukovych, by contrast – even if they differ in some respects – simply follow the Soviet pattern. Orbán, in turn, flies the flag of anti-communism. Ultimately, it's not so important whether it's the language of post-communism or of post-anti-communism being spoken. More important is the debate over what the state should be: authoritarian or democratic? Should it be an open or a closed society? That is the core of the issue.

When I look at Central and Eastern Europe from this perspective, however, I feel a kind of schizophrenia, because on the one hand I believe that Poland is a country of considerable successes, and that the Poles themselves have accomplished this. It is probably the best example of successful transformation in all of Central and Eastern Europe. But at the same time I can see the many traps that lay perpetually open, ready to be sprung. There are populist, xenophobic tendencies and a fundamentalist clericalism. These are certainly in the minority, but it is a strong minority.

Another serious danger, in my view, is the complete polarization of public opinion. By this I don't mean only the Central and Eastern European countries. Anyone paying attention to the presidential campaign in the United States can see the same polarization there. If serious people contend in all earnestness that Obama wants to introduce communism in America, then we are dealing with a madhouse and not with a political debate in the largest democracy in the world. Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the opposition in Poland, can proclaim that a sovereign Poland couldn't survive under a German-Russian strategic axis. Nobody in Germany or Russia can understand this. But it turns out that in this intellectual climate everything can be said – and this is very dangerous.

The Polish authors of our book show that even during Poland's great transformation there were bitter debates over the appropriate definitions of ideas such as freedom, equality and solidarity.

A. Michnik: As we Poles regained our freedom, I knew the worst was behind us, but that the hardest part was still to come. The slogans used by the opponents of reform were anti-egalitarian. Against them stood the proposition offered by the

radical, but discredited communist forces, that "All stomachs are equal." In the first ten years, at least in the intellectual sense, a right-oriented, vehement anti-communism clearly prevailed. Very significantly right-oriented! Radio Maryja was one popular symbol of this trend. The journals and publishers produced by this right-oriented intellectual project were more Catholic than the pope. Now we can see how things change. For example, we have seen the development of intellectual circles rooted in the left-oriented tradition, in left-oriented language.

As before, however, there is a danger that we have a resurgence of conflict with a right-wing movement that has not yet been modernized. The problem with all countries undergoing transition is that they lack a civilized right-wing movement. As the Christian Democrats established themselves in West Germany following the Nazi era, Adenauer represented a civilized right-wing movement. In the former communist countries, no such right-wing movement exists. It is a barbaric movement there. In my view, this can become a problem for Europe as a whole, because we see these populist tendencies across Europe today. I remember what a shock it was for me when Le Pen made it into the second electoral round in France. But now with his daughter, I wouldn't find it such a shock. There are already signs that she is virtually in the mainstream. I see a problem there.

A. Glucksmann: I think it represents a problem for all of Europe. The first time I saw this, it was with the figure of Milošević. Like his wife, he belonged to the extreme-left camp, to the extreme-left Marxists, but at the same time had racist and xenophobic henchmen who belonged to the extreme right.

A. Michnik: I argued in 1989 that the last stage of communism is ethnic nationalism.

A. Glucksmann: Yes, I agree, but I wouldn't say it's the last. What I believe is that concepts today fly from one side to the other. One can be xenophobic and simultaneously a communist, even an internationalist, and so on. We're in a post-modern phase, in which one is really allowed to say anything.

Could the Europeans be more courageous in defending democracy on the international stage?

A. Glucksmann: I believe this actually has to do with a deeply rooted European cowardice. The Chinese and the Russians – the Kremlin – have used their veto against any intervention in Syria. But they have long worked together against

all interference. In the name of the supposed supreme law, a government can do whatever it pleases in its own country. However, even they intervene when it suits them best. Chinese and Russian leaders don't always get along, but this is not about communism, it's about their own interests. These are interests that go beyond simply the financial realm, certainly to the preservation of power. They support Iran against possible U.N. sanctions. Not only Syria. And in my opinion, it is this association that is significant. I just said there is a freedom movement that has risen out of the European dissident movement, which has spread across the globe as far as the Mediterranean region and China. If there is in fact such a movement, a new kind of revolution, we see also how a counter-revolution of those threatened by it has risen in response. This means the Kremlin, Beijing, Iran and of course Syria.

And what does Europe do now with regard to this counter-revolutionary power, this "counter-dissidence" against the revolution of the dissidents? What does Western Europe, the European Union, do? Western Europe as a whole has done nothing to restrain Putin, absolutely nothing. The gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea was built by Russia and Germany over the objections of the Poles, the Ukrainians, the Baltic states. France is another example. Of course, Sarkozy said there was a problem with the Chechens, but at the same time he delivered a warship to Russia.

And what about the demonstrations that began in December 2011?

A. Glucksmann: I think there is a fundamental willingness to ignore Putin's despotism and the dangers it poses. We see evidence of this in the fact that all Western powers were totally surprised by the movement in December 2011. They were stunned. Putin was serious, stoic, etc. Medvedev was good, nice – and then suddenly, the demonstrations came. I've been talking about this since 2000, when the war in Chechen started again and Putin took power. But there's been no reaction. And then suddenly 100,000 Muscovites start demonstrating. You have to admit, there is a gap between the Russia of the KGB and cultured Russia, that is, cultivated Russians, the democratically minded.

A. Michnik: You look at Europe through the eyes of a Russian democrat and idealist. My love for Europe bears fewer illusions. In my view, Europe has always been just as you described it. It was never different. Europe has always acted in ist own self-interests. That said, I also think you're right. Europe needs to develop a realistic strategy in order to provide genuine support for democrats in

Russia and Ukraine. It's a slow process, but things are moving forward. Europe of course has a problem with Russia, and it will continue to do so. Humanitarian intervention isn't an option in Russia, not like it is in Bosnia. Given this, one has to look for realistic solutions, and it must be made clear to people that the effects of this policy won't be seen right away, it takes time.

I've traveled twice to Burma. The first time, it was an utterly terrorized country in which people were afraid to speak. I met with dissidents in the middle of the night, like you did in Chechen. Now it's clear that a thawing process is underway, and that this process is a result of economic sanctions. It's important to explain to the public that sanctions are effective if you give them enough time. This kind of policy has proven effective in Poland, Burma and South Africa. But you have to be more concrete: At what point in time will we see effects? Which sanctions? And to what extent? For those of us in Poland, who share borders with Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, these questions are top priority. For these reasons, we have to be flexible in our policy. This means, for example, we need to be more relaxed when it comes to visas for normal Belarusians as opposed to those for Lukashenko's henchmen, who should be handled more strictly.

A. Glucksmann: And for torturers.

A. Michnik: Yes, of course.

A. Glucksmann: I'd like to add something. I agree with you for the most part and I don't think attacking Russia is an option. It's true that Europe has always pursued its own interests. But there are wrong-sighted, short-term interests and there are long-term authentic interests.

First of all, it's not within Europe's interests – call them self-serving or what you will – to subject itself to blackmail over energy issues at the hands of a major power such as Russia. Second, it is not within Europe's interests that the world's second largest nuclear power lack any serious internal control mechanisms, that the Kremlin is able to do whatever it wants without Russian public opinion having any say in the matter. Third, it is not within Europe's interest that rampant corruption within Russia be allowed to spread throughout the world. This runs the risk of subjecting Western Europe, the European Union, to the mercy of Russia and the Kremlin. And nobody's said a word. Not Angela Merkel and the conservatives, not the Linke party, the Greens – nobody. And this will pose a serious problem. That is not within Europe's interests. The point at stake here is

the illusion held by the Europeans that Putin is strong and that there's nothing to be done about him. We could support the Russia that is committed to human rights, the Russia that wants to be democratic. But Europe fails to do this.

In my opinion, the 21st century will be the century in which human rights will be pit against corruption. As long as there are no human rights, corruption will have the upper hand. They can get away with everything. It's exactly as Anna Politkowskaya said: "Everything in Russia is corrupt."

A. Michnik: Anna Politkowskaya chose a critically-minded path.

A. Glucksmann: A democratic country has by definiton an opposition.

Thank you very much for the discussion.

We exit to the front of the building. A taxi is already waiting, but will have to wait a bit longer. Michnik smokes a real cigarette before stepping into the taxi. As he climbs in, he sticks another electric cigarette into the corner of his mouth. The taxidriver greets us in polish.

This interview was conducted in February 2012 by Armando García Schmidt and Cornelius Ochmann in Berlin.

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Although the principles of democracy are in abstract stable concepts, every generation must consider a new how best to apply them in society. What do the principles of freedom, equality and solidarity mean to today's Germans, French and Poles? Twelve authors and interview partners from Germany, France and Poland, including Marianne Birthler, André Glucksmann and Adam Krzemiński, provide moving responses to important questions about a common European future.

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