**‘Making Europe from the Margins: The Politics of Conscience and the Fall of the Berlin Wall’**

**Talk by Prof. Harald Wydra at 2nd DCW symposium, Brussels, 2015**

Hello, good morning. I am happy you were able to come. It is a sunny day outside, and all the more important, as Gianluca has said, to get our minds ready to break the boundaries or barriers we have in our heads. When you were mentioning what German crowds in Leipzig and other places shouted in 1989 – *Wir sind ein Volk* – I could not help but think of your former Prime Minister, Giulio Andreotti, who said, ‘I love Germany so much that I would love to have two of them’. This gives me the opportunity to explain a little the title of my lecture: ‘Making Europe from the Margins: The Politics of Conscience and the Fall of the Berlin Wall’. It actually brings in the idea of the two Germanies and two Europes that we had, certainly until 1989. Probably we have more than two Europes nowadays, and many new boundaries perhaps, but let us go back to this period before 1989. I will briefly expound what I should like to do. I shall speak perhaps less directly about the Wall, and really about the forces that helped prepare *removal* of the Wall. It was certainly the work of many Germans and East Germans, but I think there was much groundwork done before that a little bit further East, and that pushed Germans – the East Germans – to take their courage into their hands.

Let me start with some preliminary remarks about the terms used in the lecture. The title appears quite counter-intuitive because the conventional wisdom is that Europe has been built on values, norms, as well as concrete frameworks of power such as the nation state, capitalist economies, or deliberate traditions of rule of law. There is a major stream in the work of European studies, which looks at the economic aspect, the strategies and economic rationality of bringing Europe together. There is certainly something like an idea of the *centre* or *heart* of Europe, and we have seen that come up in the debate about to what extent the Caucasusor the Ukraine could be said to belong to Europe. There are certain things in the margins, which do not appear clear. Do they have a Christian heritage, do they have traditions of the rule of law, are they sufficiently democratic? What do I mean by ‘making Europe from the margins’? Can a case be made that you can make Europe from the margins if you do not have a clearly defined centre?

The second part of the lecture is even more doubtful, so to speak. Can conscience be a reliable and effective instrument in politics? If politics is a struggle, what are the weapons or armaments of conscience? How can conscience help in removing material structures, built by coercive régimes, like the Wall? The conventional wisdom in political thought and theory is certainly that conscience cannot coerce, let alone achieve control, security, and peace in political communities. Rather, if you rely too much on conscience you actually produce conflict, struggle and internal strife. ***That unarmed prophet in politics, Max Weber – famous political sociologist and philosopher of German origin – said it is ready to succumb to violence.*** Evidently, I shall make the case that nevertheless this all makes sense and I will try to take you with me on that journey, I hope a nice one. ***There is an Italian proverb: ‘We go slowly, we go together’. I was surprised that you, Gianluca, looked for an African proverb, when you have ready to hand such a wonderful Italian proverb, which impliess by the way that, ‘If you go slowly you go very, very far’.***

So what do I mean by ‘the making of Europe’? I mentioned already that the standard approach – I should claim – is that there is *something like* an historical core of Europe. If you go back in the history of the European community, we can talk abut what people would call ***???????*** Europe: namely Benelux, France, Germany and Italy. Others would argue that what really makes Europe are certain core values; the frameworks of economic and political power; and also a moral capacity based on the values that derive from them, like capitalism, science, technology, individualism or the rule of law. By such standards everything found to the east of the Iron Curtain was by definition excluded from the civilisational identity of Europe. Symbolically the Iron Curtain cemented in place the ‘Yalta Order’ created at the conference in Yalta that decided how far the Soviet Army would go: this would be its sphere of influence. Where the western allies would go would be *their* sphere of influence.

Culturally there has been a longstanding split between Orthodox Christianity and Catholicism. You could certainly add in Protestantism. It was not so clear-cut either, because I do not know if our Croatian friends (I do not know even where you are sitting here!) would consider Yugoslavia to a certain extent within the Iron Curtain even if at that border it could perhaps be penetrated a little bit more easily. Certainly Croatia was always Catholic, and not Orthodox.

But if you simply look at the facts, as to which countries that joined the European Union in 2004 had actually existed (politically) before 1918, you will not find many. There is only one, namely Hungary, and Hungary has really shrunk since 1919. There was not even an Eastern Europe in its current shape, properly speaking, before the end of World War I.

The basic point I am trying to make here is that the eastern part of Europe has little stake in being accepted as a fully-fledged part of Europe. A Croatian writer, ***??? Dragovic***, once said that eastern-European countries wished to push the dividing line between east and west as far east as possible so that eventually Europe might be a whole and undivided continent. She was actually expressing clearly that Europe certainly was before 1989 an entity that *conceived itself* as a whole Europe, but was *actually* only western Europe – the eastern part being there only to define the other’s status as the *only* Europe, being itself the only part that at the time was lying ‘outside Europe’. To make a case about the question, ‘How can we make Europe from the margins?’, we ask how the margins of Europe could be more than passive elements eventually liberated, added to, or enlarged. If the term ‘enlargement’ covers many people living in what is ‘central Europe’ now, or formerly ‘eastern Europe’, but certainly east of the former Iron Curtain, it is actually a bit of an insult: ‘What do you mean, “enlarged”? We have *always* been part of Europe.’

So I should like now basically to try to make a counter case: that what is considered the centre of Europe has never been very surely at the centre. I should question, first of all, the very centrality of the centre, and then argue that Europe could only come together because what is considered the centre has experienced heavy fracturing and massive existential insecurity. When we talk of a European centre, few would disagree that we are looking pretty much at Germany and France. We could certainly argue about this, but these two countries have in practice been considered the heart of the ‘European Project’. Now, before World War I, the *centre* was defined by considerations other than the need to create a united Europe. The consideration then was imperial power, the nation state, competition between the great powers. When ***George Cannon*** and others called World War I the ‘original catastrophe of Europe’ they meant it was the end of the great imperial and nation-state projects of European countries. It was the realisation that we had actually destroyed something. We had actually fractured our power set, and, after World War I, Europe was not what it had been before. The centres of power were removed from Europe, and were now growing in Russia and the United States.

The case I want to make is that when we talk about European identity, about how we establish an idea of the centre of Europe, we have to look first of all at losses and fractures. I should like to follow that with a quotation from Ursula Hirschmann who was one of the founders of the European Federalist Movement. (She was a German, but lived in Italy.) She came to realise at a meeting that she could not express herself properly in any language: she had lost her German, her mother tongue, which had become flat and inflexible, while Italian, the language in which her children had been raised, was a foreign language. So, she said that she felt European because uprooted and wandering, not fully capable of expressing herself. She was like a being ‘in between’, a wanderer between worlds, between her background cultures. She wrote of being the ‘*déracinés*’ (a French word for ‘uprooted’) of Europe, ‘we who have crossed the border more often than we have changed shoes have nothing to lose in a federalist Europe, and so it is that we are federalists’.

Now feeling at the edge and feeling a recognition that there is something we desire very much has been fundamental in ‘eastern Europe’, by which I mean everything sitting to the east of the Iron Curtain before 1989. I know the term is heavily contested, especially in ‘central Europe’. When Czechs or Croats or Poles are called ‘eastern Europeans’, that does not go down well. I use the term only in this limited sense. Havel has now left us. Milan Kundera is another famous Czech writer. He coined the idea that central Europe was kidnapped by the barbarian civilisation of Russia, defining central Europe against Russia. I will say something about that later, because I am not completely in agreement. Calling Russia ‘barbarian’ is a problem, too.

Let us move on with a little outline of ‘eastern Europe’, and of what I mean by ‘marginality’ there, before going into the politics of conscience. What does it mean? Who were the actors? How can we make a case that there is a politics of conscience? How can conscience be political if we define politics as a struggle for power? How can conscience enter into a struggle of power?

I should like to start with a claim that many of the smaller nations in eastern Europe did not even exist properly in the common Western sense: the sense by which we might say, ‘a nation exists’, or, ‘a state is strong enough to defend itself’. In querying statehood I should to a certain extent include even Germany here because it was actually a late developer, wherein the state came together in a way resembling more the eastern-European mould than it did state-formation in a western-European mould.

But let us look first at countries that were parts of former bigger empires, all of which collapsed in 1918. (I *will* talk about 1989 later. I am still at 1918 because I think nothing else makes sense if you do not understand that.) Four empires – Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and the Russian empire – collapsed, and crucially many of the new entities then created did not have territorial frames for their states that were congruent with national consciousness. A very good example is Czechoslovakia. It was established with Hungarian and German minorities who did not really fit into what the Czechoslovaks wanted their state, or their citizenship, to be. Writers often express things much better than philosophers or political scientists, so I take a quotation from Robert Musil, thefamous Austrian writer of *The* *Man Without Qualities*. (If someone wants to read something fantastic in the German language or in translation, they should try that book…) Musil says of his compatriots in 1913, and I quote: ‘If you asked an Austrian what he was, he would say “a Pole, a Czech, an Italian, a Slovene, a Croat, a Serb, a Slovak”.’ This was so-called nationalism. He likened the ‘K&K-ians’ – *kaiserlich und königlich*, Royal and Imperial Habsburg, Austrian and Hungarian – to a squirrel that had no idea of itself, which had no idea of its own tail. When we talk today about Europe and about a centre, we have an idea of a state which is an actor of capacity, with science and technology, which is a developer of a strong economic system, which has a notion of what its borders are. It was not so then. This part of Europe had a tenuous or weak idea of its own identity; a very unclear idea of its borders, of its nationality, of how far its national identity might actually be developed. There were some like the poles who always had a strong sense of national identity but not a state, so they had first of all to construct that state and when they had constructed it they were after twenty years invaded again and their state destroyed again. When they got another state they had a foreign regime imposed to rule them.

It is very difficult in that part of the world and of Europe, to have a clear idea or narrative about who we are, where we come from, what we want… You can argue that it is very different in the West. The French learn at school that their country is a hexagon, so they have a mental shape or form with six angles. This is of a very long tradition, and the French state has not experienced very important changes to its borders in centuries. There were some, but overall it is a pretty longstanding thing. It is similar in Britain, which is an island and has a very long-standing tradition. The further east you go, the less the certainty. Take only Ukraine. Ukraine is a very good example where the state cannot actually protect its borders. Some neighbours do not like the borders established in 1991. There is a very high degree of insecurity. Borders are fundamental to understanding who we are, what we want, how we relate to others…

Now, how does that look when you gaze at the centre of Europe? How does it look in Germany and in France? You might argue, of course, that Germany and France know exactly what their borders are, but, although Germany has been united for 144 years now, in these years it has lost a substantial amount of territory, recovered some of it again, and has had in the meantime four distinct regimes – five if you count the GDR. So for the German case it’s not as clear as the French case. Even in the French case it is not so clear, because in France there have been in modern times several republics and most importantly, during World War II it was divided into four different sovereignties, deeply affecting its sense of identity. There was Vichy France; the German-occupied part; the ‘Free French’ in London; and, finally, the resistance. If the French state was not actually engaged in civil war, there were different projects of France, and it was unclear where this might end up. Germany disappeared as a state in 1945, and it came onto the map again as two states: a divided nation, deeply unclear about what it was. There was a West German government, and an East German one. The former was clearly for integration with the West, but had the vote that made Conrad Adenaur Chancellor been won by the Social Democrats, it might have seemed to them more natural to propose that Germany seek national unity rather than western integration.

I should like you, then, first of all to understand or to make the case in your heads, that if eastern Europe was a marginal region with high territorial instability, no clear identity, weak states – certainly in political terms –, one that that could produce little of the kind that a capitalist economy could, and that could produce little in terms of democratic tradition, at the same time I am not wholly convinced that the ‘western centre’ was any less marginal. Remember, first of all, that it required a lot of conviction and much running up against established ideas and political projects to opt for a European project whose outcome was far from determined or clear. Jean Monnet put it as follows: ‘I have never been in doubt that this process of European integration would one day lead us to the united states of Europe, but I do not try to even imagine what the political framework will be’. There was in a certain sense a very strong impulse to do something thought to be the right thing to do, but there were very hazy ideas about what it might in the end become. Consider again the words of another, even more famous, Frenchmen, Napoleon Bonaparte: **(French words).** (‘You get in and then you see what the situation is and you try to sort it out.’) First you do, and then you think…

So far I have trying to establish what we mean by the margins. Eastern Europe was marginal, but western Europe was also ‘marginal’: certainly uprooted, trying to come together in some way, to fix things, to find a higher project or a higher level of transcendence in order, so to speak, to sort out national fractures.

Now comes a more difficult issue… What was the role of conscience in all that? To put it the other way round – and here I shall focus on Eastern Europe – how could this marginal sphere of Europe actually develop some positive input? How could the east so to speak overcome its own fractures, its own fractured appearance, its weak tradition of the nation state, and overcome a political *régime* absolutely hostile to integration with another sphere of Europe considered not only capitalist but fascist and considered under American rule. There it was thought that the dignity of what the communist ideological regime would consider to be the people was suffering, the miserable proletariat being humiliated.

What then was the case for a politics of conscience? The well-known ‘liberal’ English political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, abhorred conscience politics. He would have argued that the wars that tore apart seventeenth-century Europe were all based on conscience and faith and religion. Later on, the German philosopher and political sociologist, Max Weber, argued that conviction politicians took no responsibility for the consequences of their actions. He argued that you cannot undertake politics with the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount in St. Matthew’s Gospel: if struck on one cheek, holding out the other for similar treatment.

Can a case be made for a politics of conscience that is responsible? Is there a case to be made for the seeking of truth as a political weapon, so to speak? Is there a case to be made for the unarmed prophet? To get back to Weber again, his context was the end of the World War I, and his question one of how could Germany could become a respectable state again. He was surrounded by conviction politicians. Revolution was seemingly coming, with the Bolshevik revolution in Russia only two years old. There was, meanwhile, quite a lot of pressure from the nationalist right. All had very, very strong convictions and they tried to link their convictions to the power of violence. Trotsky had argued very clearly that an unarmed prophet cannot go very far. You have to take arms to the core of the state to push through your convictions. Trotsky wanted to go very, very quickly.

Weber would have said that if you have conviction, an ethics of conviction, some conscience so to speak, you should have also an ‘inner weight’. It is said that, if by the age of twenty you are not a communist, you have no heart; but, if by the age of thirty you are *still* a communist you have no brain. The inner weight you can probably get only through experience, or by considering other perspectives and by trying to find the way to achieve a certain consensus.

Power can be challenged. Going back to antiquity, to ancient Greece, we know of a woman who disrespected the command of a king who had refused burial to her brother. This she did in the name of human dignity which called for proper burial. Many centuries later Thomas More claimed, against the power of the King, that he had to follow his conscience. Often people do follow the precepts of their consciences all the while knowing what the consequences will be. Weber himself mentioned Martin Luther, who declared: ‘Here I stand; I can do no other’.

What then of dissident intellectuals in post-1989 democratic movements? We know that Vaclav Havel and others became politicians, often disenchanted ones. As politicians they had to sit over bureaucratic apparatuses and negotiate and deal. Weber himself speaks of how ‘Politics is a strong and slow boring drilling of hard boards’. It is a very tedious business, and the boards can be very, very thick. But the dissidents of eastern Europe – and I shall consider particularly Poland and Czechoslovakia here – had experience behind them. Unlike Trotsky, they knew that you cannot go very far with violence. First, their own régimes had been born out of violence, they out of the revolutionary Soviet regime Second, they had had experience of attempts to liberate with a revolution, often a non-revolutionary revolution, as in Budapest during 1956, or in Prague and Bratislava during 1968. Both failed, and resulted in invasion by Soviet tanks. The Poles attempted it differently – the Solidarity movement of 1980–81 which was largely a non-violent national protest movement, started from a trade union. Even that was threatened by Soviet invasion and was resolved by declaration of martial law in 1981.

So they had that something, the inner weight, that made them see how violence is not an option: not only because a régime is unlikely to succumb to the very, very few means of violence available, but also because if you *really* want to get rid of it, you have to show moral superiority. It is necessary to show the régime that you completely disrespect and abhor its means, and that you do not want to beat it with those same means.

Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian activist and philosopher who coined the term of ‘soul-force’, is a strong inspiration here. Then you have [Czesław Miłosz](http://www.google.co.uk/url?q=http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czes%25C5%2582aw_Mi%25C5%2582osz&sa=U&ved=0CBYQFjAAahUKEwjPvN70vJHGAhXlcdsKHRrDAH0&sig2=S5YCNFQ3gthNe3s5ne_34w&usg=AFQjCNGBEJ7zdSxr6DxLCV_yX0gYWIrhyA), a Polish or Lithuanian-polish writer, who writes of why communist/totalitarian regimes were so susceptible to challenges on moral grounds. He said that the only true friend of the regime will be the man who accepts its doctrine 100%. If he accept only 99% he will necessarily have to be considered a foe. From that remaining 1% something new can arise. In a way what dissidents had to do was to convince people that they could tap into the 1%. From that point onwards to undermining the system you would see people fall away from following the prescriptions of that system. Vaclav Havel argued very clearly in ‘The Power of the Powerless’ that what maintains the system is for people to follow habitually the nonsensical habits and prescriptions of that system. If they only started not to follow it, the system would lose ground.

Evidently you can argue and make a case along these lines: ‘I know the truth, my conscience is clear; I know the truth and I want to go to it, and I want to convince you’. There are plenty of examples in history that speak against that: from the puritans associated with Oliver Cromwell, to Robespierre who knew what virtue was, and thought that if everybody could be as virtuous as he, the world and France would be a perfect place. However, in the case of those who could not be as virtuous because they were born differently, like aristocrats, well, off with their heads! The problem with truth is how to convey it. Do you leave people with a choice between accepting and rejecting, or do you want to beat it into people? Is the apparatus of the state to be used to impose enshrined dogmatic truths? It was almost a blessing for dissidents under communism not to be able to have recourse to means of violence, always a strong temptation for anybody wanting to introduce a revolution. The key thing for them and others was to convince people by their lifestyles and examples. But how do you convince others to follow a truth enshrined in an ideal not immediately executable, in an end you cannot immediately coerce, without a clear timeline? Politics works by timelines, by deadlines, but in the old eastern European case, a communist system, there was of course no politics, only a parliament or a party that was like an orchestra following the commands of its conductor. The only politics was to be found where there was opposition, resistance, another opinion. The anti-politics of the search for truth was actually political, and that was why it was so dangerous. It was massively political, because it undermined the ‘dogmatic religion’ of the communist system.

I could adduce plenty of other examples here but I shall just seek to consider perhaps two more things: the case for a spiritual approach, a conscientious approach, to politics; and the fundamental reflections on Europe, dissidence, self-defence, and the fight between good and evil offered by Pope John Paul II. I am by no means disinclined to answer later on questions specifically about Germany and Berlin in 1989 and about the fall of the Wall, but I should still wish to claim that what I am talking about is absolutely at the core of that. It is needed, was needed, to bring down the Wall.

But what gave the push? In order to get to that you really need to study the history of communism, and of anti-communism and dissidence in eastern Europe. That is not to say that I would wish to downscale the importance of what happened in eastern Germany, because I know that, especially in the second part of 1989, a lot of effort came from inside. However, we know also that pressure on the East German régime from inside was possible only because civilisational prosperity and civilisational progress was more powerful in the West.

But here is the point: John Paul II anchored that in the Cartesian revolution. René Descartes was by the way an exact contemporary of Thomas Hobbes, and after his ‘*cogito, ergo sum*’ being, creation, nature become the content or function of one’s own human conscience. Philosophy started to deal with beings only insofar as they were the content of human conscience, rather than to the extent that they really exist outside human conscience.

Come the Enlightenment project, come the fact of an absolute power of science and technology, and as Eric Voegelin, the German-born, Austrian-educated, political philosopher, once put it: ‘The price of progress is the death of the spirit’. John Paul II held that that a backward country like Poland, and other backward countries in eastern Europe, had more resources to withstand the evil of communism because it was in a way an evil drawing largely upon negative aspects of the *western* European tradition. I come back to what I said earlier about ‘barbarian Russia’. I think it too easy to say that Russia is barbaric. Lenin and Trotsky and their associates took up Marxism after all. Although it was a *Russian* revolution, Soviet communism was, ideologically speaking, a dogmatic enterprise largely based on a western ideology arising from the centre of the West, in Germany and England. So Marxism, with the Leninism that gives it a very important Russian touch, is not a barbaric ideology, but rather a product of the *western* Enlightenment. It is a product – an anti-product, if you like – of capitalism, a reaction to the industrial revolution, and so on and so forth.

I should really like you to reflect upon this when we speak of ‘marginal’ parts of Europe: the relatively less important ones, those that did not produce wonders of architecture, or of religion, or of technology, or of science, or of capitalism... They were placed in a specific geographical space, with specific resources which they used in order to defend themselves. Pope John Paul II used the term ‘self defence’ **(polish words)** which is used for a party. This is a key thought, one that links the politics of conscience to the making of Europe in its own marginality. We must not take everything we get from the West, and from the absolute dogmatic ideology that rules even today, as the fundamental line down which to go. When you hear of the need for austerity because of the necessity of budget discipline, when you hear that we have to have economic growth, these are (and I am quite serious) *dogmatic beliefs*. I do not say they are dogmatic in the same way as was the red paradise of Trotsky or Stalin, because there is much more discussion and consensus going into them.

But here we must also ask ourselves if in 2015 we are now in a situation in which we have new walls in Europe. We have new and different ‘Europes’. We have now a *southern* and a *northern* Europe. We did not talk of these twenty years ago. Now we have a poorer Europe, which is not only southern. There are countries that have more trouble with their budgets, and are forced to comply with certain regulations – important because if you take on debts you have to pay them back. It is not simply the case that once there was communism, since gone and overcome, such that now we move on to business as usual. There is always a danger of succumbing to dogmatic, un-reflective, fanatical ideas. What is going on in Ukraine at the moment cannot just be attributed to ‘that bad guy, Mr. Putin’. It is never as simple as that. There are also pressures from the other side which wants us to believe we are in a new ‘Cold War’. In these complex situations we cannot just assume that what *we* take for granted is the truth.

The key thing is that ‘inner weight’ of which we have spoken. What is the inner weight of your convictions? What conviction do you have about the need for austerity? What is the inner weight of your conviction that Ukraine must become a NATO member? What is the inner weight of *all* your convictions?

Conscience is important because you bring it to discussion, to exchange of opinions, to making judgements and even to taking decisions. You do need to be, as Havel said a bit ‘suspicious of yourself’.

What are the fault lines now? What will happen to the younger generation with their degree of unemployment in Spain, Greece, France and Italy? How do we transcend such fractures? The younger generations have now created new political forces in Spain and elsewhere, with leaders under the age of forty. They claim to be breaking the conventional logic of power. If you look at the blog of Pablo Iglesias, the leader of *Podemos*, he talks of civil disobedience. He takes up quite a few of the arguments we have considered. It is too early to judge now whether we can talk about spiritual renewal or only of electoral strategies to achieve power. But the power of conscience *does* need to be prepared in the hearts and in the commitments of individuals. It has to adapt, because the challenge is no longer communism. We have to redefine it for ourselves, and get ready to face it.

But don’t forget **(Italian phrase).** Thank you very much.