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Societies in bringing closer and turning apart

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Transition countries and independent media

This what finished as a lovely six-months staying in the state of North Rhine-Westfalia, started in a completely different way. For me, in September 1997, everything was worse than bad. I would like to describe it, because it seems to me that situation was not typical just for Croatian media market, but also for many independent media projects in the so-called „transition countries“. These circumstances participated very deep in my later decision to come to Germany. So, I was editor of the media section at one Croatian weekly, whose circulation got every week smaller and smaller. It was very stressfull. I had to stay in the office, for instance, from 10:00 a.m. one day till noon, or 1:00 p.m. next day, and so, at least one but sometimes even two times weekly. Our salaries were very late, for instance, in September we got half the salary for June, and some percentage from May. It was, of course, less than defined in our contracts. With no biorhythm, eating just pizzas in the office, I got a couple of kilos, and lost a lot of hair. Sleeping at home in the short breaks between two deadlines, I did not see any of my friends for months, and even my relationship came to troubles. Together with my colleagues from the editorial board, we actually have been trying something impossible: to save the project. We were very cared about it.

So, it was September when I finally realized that I can not stay there anymore - it just became too dangerous for my health, because - I forgot to say-working for different projects, it was actually the fifth year of that upside-down period of my life. It took me more than one month to realize how to

manage to leave, and at the 4th of November I finally stopped working. At that time, I actually planned to change my job, and not to work as a journalist any more - at Croatian media market, which suffers pretty hard of lack of the freedom of the press, it seemed completely meaningless to me. Then, I really did not have the necessary strength to start to look for something new immediately, and than to be cheer and motivated in some new projects. I actually slept for the next two months.

The real distance

Than, in January 1998, from the Deputy editor of the same magazine I just have left, I heard of the German Media Scholarship and Heinz Kühn Foundation. The Foundation had not its office in Croatia, but looked for a Croatian participant through the two other Foundations - Friedrich Ebert's and Friedrich Naumann's. Psychologically, I already felt myself pretty far away from my profession, and from the complete and difficult Croatian social and media scene. Possibility to improve that state of mind to a real, physical distance, seemed to me immediately like a chance to put myself back in order, hear the experiences of my foreign colleagues, compare them in-between and with the situation in Germany, and even, from around, find new motives to come back to journalism. I found a new job in a completely different kind of magazine, lived at the „low intensity“, tried to manage my life from the beginning, and finally, at the 1st of September 1998, I took a flight to Germany. This what I would like to write does not have any intention to become some crucial was not observation, satisfying the methodological basics of positivistic sciences. Actually, it has the intention NOT to become anything like this. During my stay in Germany, I did not want just to watch the local life - I wanted to live it, to experience it, and to participate in it, as deep as I could. At the end of this period, I don't want to write just about Germany for Germans - I am afraid, they still know much more than me. I would try to compare two societies, and describe my thoughts and feelings about the society I came from, and the society I came to, from the points of view I have already got at home, but also that I made here. When I told somebody where I was from, the typical (and predictable) reaction was: „From Croatia!? Oh, how lovely! I would like to go there for the holidays! But now, excuse me, I have to join my friends.“ But on the other hand, I was surprised to realize that there were also the Germans pretty much interested in Croatia. They asked me a lot. To be away from home helped me to make the things that surrounded me during the hole my life more conscious, and to talk to the interested people gave me a possibility even to articulate them, and then to check them in discussion, almost immediately as they came to my mind. This possibility to see something from the distance, from the other point of view, is for me the most precious thing that I have experienced during all my visits abroad.

Don't keep silent

In Croatia, it always seemed to me pretty strange: contacting to the foreigners, even Croats from the opposition, and intellectuals or artists, very often try to hush up the things that happen in our country. It is some hypocritic model of thinking: „we can fight in the house however we want, but it would be not good if the neighbours heard something from it“. Croats think that it can help the young and undeveloped country, with pretty bad reputation outside. Right on the contrary, this period in Germany and talks I had daily, made me sure of something completely different: to keep silent about a bad situation in your country helps neither to the country, nor to your people. To keep silent about the bad things just helps them to go on. On the other hand, to describe and share them means at least a message „There are people in this country that mean something else, and do not support the picture which official politics or governmental media try to impose. Of course, it is important to „translate“ your message, into the terms your new environment could understand. Deep political, or economical, or social problem which surround you since the time you were born can be completely obvious to you, but completely out of the perception of the people you are talking to. It seems to me that the easiest would be to blame the other society as distant or arrogant, and proclaim yourself as the victim of foreign misunderstanding, or even humiliating. But, I think and hope I'm right, if you make your attitudes clearer, and do not expect from anybody to read your minds, however they could seem obvious and simple to you, most of the people would like to hear your message, to give a period of their time to you, and to advice, consolve or even help you. In the neverending talks about states, societies and politics, in which I took part together with the other fellowship holders, teachers from the Goethe Institute or the people connected to the Foundation, I usually had a much darker picture about the situation and perspective in my country, than the others. Maybe it's just because I'm the only one from our group that works for non-governmental media or maybe the situation in Croatia is more difficult because of the war that was really finished not earlier than in summer 1995. In all these conversations, I have never had the opportunity to add to my attitudes: actually, I do not think that the situation in Croatia is much harder than in the other transition countries, or at least in the transition or developing countries where other fellows came from. But I am very dissatisfied because Croatia in the last 10 years doesn't show any progress at all, actually right on the contrary - the state is ruined and many others ex-communist countries, that 10 years ago were in the same, or even more difficult social, political and economical situation (Slovenia, Tcech-Republic, Hungary), overtook Croatia by now.

BRDigen

Like great hosts, my German friends consoled me - I was told that life in Germany isn't any more like it was. One of the teachers at the Goethe Insti-

tute used to write the German verb „beerdigen“, to burry, like „BRDigen“. We really had the opportunity to talk a lot, and to compare similar things at different places, usually without any fences. Others described to me today's ordinary situation of waiting for a job for five or ten years after the graduation at the university.

„Forget about the prejudices about Germans like hard working, well organised people. Everything changed since the unification“, I heard at the Deutsche Welle Radio Station~18. „Deutsche Welle is, for instance, exactly the same like Yugoslavia in the seventies - you would better come later, and leave earlier, and go to play tennis and to the hairdresser in the meantime.“ While we had been there, the budget of foreign language programs at Deutsche Welle was cut for some 40 millions of German marks, some small sections already had stopped to broadcast and a lot of others were pretty worried of the level of their further production, and even the future work. It was quite a crowd in the house for a while: actually, I have even heard that Croatian section should stop to broadcast in April, but of course, in that situation of the intensive emotional tensions, you can hardly separate rumours from the facts. There were a lot of speculation about political consequences of that decision. Actually, I witnessed a lot of times to the cutting-budget situations, but I do not know what to think about this particular case.

At Deutsche Welle I had seen a lot of administration and sometimes it seems to me that even the broadcasted program is under its influence. On the other hand, I have rarely worked for the media whose financial sources came from the national budgets, and not straight from the market, so that kind of stress and worry about the lack of money was not extraordinary situation for me, or reason to make panic. It is just a sad reality of this job.

Legal alien

During these six months I have rarely felt like a stranger. I was told about the young right radicals, especially from the ex-DDR, who fight the foreigners, but I have never experienced or seen anything like that. Sometimes it happens that I had a contact to some rude person - in the store, or in the street - but I do not believe that they behaved to me in that way because I was foreigner, or my German was not perfect. They were just rude and they would be also rude to Germans. In Cologne, people of my age, or even younger were usually in a hurry, or just answered my questions: „I'm also not from here.“ Because of that, I usually looked for information by older people - I thought they should have more time and there was a bigger chance, that they lived in Cologne for some time. And, I could say, between so many different people I have seen, from guys, with blond moustache and sharp haircut, with a slim pony-tail, exactly like I picture the barbarian warriors, till the girls in Cologne, with narrow and upright faces, with strong, but feminine characters, that look like the Gothic beauties from the medieval pictures, most of all, I liked the „oldies but goldies“- I was really surprised by their kindness, patience, and dig-

nified manners. Personally, if I really have to come to ages, I would like to do that in „koelsch“ way. But on the other hand, inspite of my intention to go out and experience the street life as oft as possible, I must also say I have hardly meet somebody in Cologne in the real sense of that word. Of course, so oft I was shy because of my German, and felt difficulties with the understanding of the urban slang. Also I could hardly decide to call somebody, because it seemed to me, that I was going to interrupt him and bring him to unpleasant situation, to explain to me that he already has a meeting, even if he does not. These reactions of mine were strange even for me, because I usually do not think in that way, and of course, when I am at home, I do not think that the phonecall of some foreigner can interrupt my own evening. Actually, right on the contrary. But for some reason, I felt that I would force somebody to guilt-trips. I thought: „Shit, who would meet me, when I'm leaving in two weeks.“ This idea of „give up“ seemed to me pretty dangerous for the need of social integration. I know that all these states of my mind are supposed to be pretty wrong, but I would mention them anyway, just to show what kind of thoughts can appear on your mind.

Happy hours in Cologne

So, to cut the long story short, during the happyhours in Cologne's caffees. I could relax and watch the people around me, but the socialising, I sometimes looked so much for, was missing. So, although I could say I was surprised by the kindness I experienced in the short and unobligatory, superficial street contacts, I must say I agree pretty much with the pictures of Germans I have heard about before - in the try to establish a closer contact, I realised Germans as distant and closed, and maybe even afraid of closeness to somebody. In that frames I experienced the famous Carneval in Cologne: I heard a lot about it in advance, and maybe I waited too much for it, but at the end - although I can't say I didn't like it at all - All in all it seemed to me not very different from a try of inverted reaction, exaggured in the same way like the German sense of strict, serious, and cold, you can see during the rest of the year, but just with the opposite sign. Of course, from time to time, I met somebody. For instance, through the „Mitfahr Zentrale“, I met two girls, to whom I joined on the way to Paris for a weekend. Actually, they were lesbians in the relationship, and - of course - were preoccupied by each other and didn't pay to much attention to me. However, I liked the younger one, chubby, so I spent most of our travel time trying to realize was she maybe bi, or not? But, at last, I couldn't crash the barrier - so, when we dismissed in Rue Rambuteau, in Paris 1st, I even did not try to give my phonenumber to them. Anyway, they told me to go out to belgian quarter in Cologne, between Rudolfplatz and Friesenplatz, and avoid turist traps in the Rhine river area. So, they saved a lot of my evenings. This distance I could face, on general level seems to me able to become a barrier for the next step of developing of the multicultural integration in this country. It just pushes a foreigner, to realise their social needs

through the community of his own compatriots. For instance, coming to Cologne gave me a connection to the large number of activities of Croatian community in the State of North-Rhine Westfalia. I got the invitations to the celebration of the anniversary of the declaration of the Croatian independence, to the meetings and lectures organised through the Society of Croatian Students at the University of Cologne, to the concerts of Croatian hit singers, than annual meeting of Croatian cooks, etc. Because of their number and of the enthusiasm of some of the people from the Croatian section at Deutsche Welle Radio Station about that events, it seems to me that many of German Croats - and even their here born children - in the heads still live in their old Croatia, and not their new - German - society. I did not agree with that point of view, and except one lecture about some Croatian political movement from the start of the seventies, which I had covered as a journalist, I have never visited any of those events. „If I would like to meet a lot of another Croats“, I thought, „I'd better stay in Croatia.“ I seriously doubt people from my section would share my point of view. I also seriously doubt that if I would stay in Germany for a longer period, I could stand this problem of social being in the state of separation. At last, maybe I would also join the events of my native community. This situation is, of course, not just a problem of German society - same things face most of developed countries, with a large foreign population.

Foreigners: integration or ghetto?

Why I did not like the idea of sinking deep into Croatian ethnic community from the first place? Actually, the problem of social integration seems to me to be one of crucial social questions. I understand society as a common interest of all of its structures and participants. It seems to me that the social nonintegration, which should be substituted by national integration in the non-national society, lead to the desintegration, and than to ghettoisation, or to the different ways how to understand that common social interest. Then in the society begin to apperar the barierrrs, and the function of society is not possible any more. I do not know if Croatian community in Germany solved this problem or not. On the other hand, being together with different people at Goethe Institute in Iserlohn, I had the opportunity to expand my interests for distant cultures, even on the simpliest basis: I could taste Thai, Mexican, Arabic and Japanese food, Lithuanian sweets, Macedinian wine (so bad, that I had to take the pills for stomach, exactly like after a glass of croatian home-made wine I tried at Deutsche Welle). I experienced Corean massage, and tried to teach to swim a friend of mine who grew up under the occupation, suffered from the limited possibility of moving away, far away from the seaside. My German teacher from the Institute invited us for a dinner, but at that time, German food was not scheduled: she prepared some hot spanish sauces from the Canarian islands.

And German influences? I enjoyed very much late breakfasts during the weekends, with sudsy wine Sekt. By Sekt, I like mostly the end of a gulp,

when bubbles bomb the last part of your soft palate, just a moment before they flow down the throat. And, before I forget - just like champagne - I disclosed that sekt was very good against the flu. Then, of course, beer - but I must say that I like Koelsch - tender beer, but with identity, which you should drink quickly, and a lot of it. I like it more than weak, boring, and in a matter of fact patetic Iserlohner Pils, or Schlosser Alt, which has just a little bit more of its sleazy personality, than his light brother. Still to little.

Melting pot

A lot of nation and race mixes - two German girls with mulatto children laughing and drinking capuccino in Gloria Theatre in Cologne or a guy from Wuppertal whose girlfriend was from Thailand - our colleague from the Institute... Now I can remember opposite example from my country, which seems to me like a good illustration of the Croatian social atmosphere. So, friend of mine had a relationship with a man from the Adriatic Sea, the Croatian Mediterranean coast. They moved to his place at the seaside, but then, he suddenly became very mean to her - he beat her over palms of hands, prohibited her to leave the house and work, gave her just approximately 30 German marks to buy food for a whole week. He even forced her to write „the diary of her mistakes“. It lasted for the whole year. In the meantime, she got the baby, but soon after that, she ran away, with the just born daughter. Today two of them live on their own. Last summer they were on the beach and the daughter started to play with other children. But then, other mothers asked the child where her daddy was, and because she could not answer, they did not allow their children to play with my friend's daughter any more. Since then, my friend usually tells to other parents on the beach, or at the playground that her father was killed during the war. After this lie, her daughter is always warmly welcomed - because in this situation she is daughter of „father the hero“, and not of „mother the whore“. I am very curious about present discussions about double citizenship - it seems to me like the last confirmation of everything I saw here. But anyway, I really admire that multicultural melting pot I had found here, specially because in Croatia - unfortunately - obviously isn't like that. German people wandered pretty oft, when I explained the social situation in my country, growing of nationalism, conservatism and hermetisation, which is something right on the contrary from most of the European social mainstreams. Catholic catechism at primary schools, for all the children - without regard for their own religion, taking away the title „Miss“ from a Muslim girl that won the beauty competition, are just some of sad and embarrassing highlights my country exactly faces. So-called „Croatian Studies“, ridiculous try of establishig of university, where teachers lecture „national science“, and produce the generations that we call „Croats cum laude“. By the way, another highlight of Croatian science is throwing away the evolution theory from the primary schools, „because children could be confused by the two types of data - from the Book, and from Darwin.“

The war

I have also an ultimative personal reason to like the multicultural societies. Like many things, I brought it with me, from my home. Profiling itself like a national Croatian state, problem of Croatian minorities became one of the hottest questions of Croatian innern and foreign politics. But I would like to expand that problem for a while: in that national (or tribal, because it seems to me that is a better description of croatian public opinion) terms, I am, whatever it means, a „pure“ Croat - both of my parents are Croats, and even their ancestors were Croats. But anyway, today's Croatia I do not feel like my motherland, because I am afraid, that Croatian just grounded society did not plan with „my kind“ of Croats. After the war, so many people from my generations, who were lucky not have been killed, became depressive persons or alcoholics, suffering of Post-traumatic-stress-disorder, just realised that: a) The war was over. b) We were between 25 and 30. c) We have not got any money. d) We have not got any jobs. d) We have not got place to live, and e) We did not finish the university. Actually, we had a kind of proverb: It was a war without winners, but we lost it. The end of the war did not change our situation a lot. My country is just a big barrier for me, which pushes me to the social environment I do not belong to, does not allowe me to develop myself according to my talents and interests, and to try to earn money from it. It anticipates a place for me, and now excepts me to accomodate to that state, with no regard, is it good for me or not. It seems to accept me just in the moments in which I have to pay the taxes. So, till today, I also feel like minority in my own country and I am not lonley: in the last couple of years, more than 40.000 high educated Croats left the country, and many of them - like me during the last year - spend longer time abroad, than at home. Our president, who runs the country like a king, or even a pharao, shared a lot of decoration to the people who will still have to proove that they were not the war criminals, and promoted some of the most disgusting and sleazy obediencers to some of feudal titles - so, Croatia has its own „keeper of national seal“. When the journalists had asked that person about a catastrophe of middle class, and intelectual professions, he just answered: „One kilo of brain costs approximately two German marks. „And, average weight of masculine brain is 1200-1500 grams, and female 1000-1300. So, from that time, every educated person knows exactly his own price in Croatia. When I read the reports from the other people from the Heinz-Kühn Foundation programs, it seems to me that the word „nostalgly“ comes out pretty often. I can not say I feel any nostalgia, but groove, energy, large number of events, parties for more than 100 people, which we lived before the war, do not exist any more. Because of that, come back home, return to Zagreb, the Croatian capital, the town where I was born, can not solve my feeling of nostalgia and problem of missing developed urban life - yes, you can walk through the same streets, or meet the old friends, but that place is dead, and you can feel it from every minute you stay there.

Cosmo boy

Today, I work as executive editor for Croatian issue of girls' and life style magazine Cosmopolitan, one of the 35 of its international issues. When others ask me what I covered for that magazine, I usually say „microbiotics, fitness, and multiple orgasms.“ But actually, I understand very well that my present employment can look pretty strange comparing to the profile of the papers of the other scholarship holders. Cosmopolitan is really another kind of media. Comparing it to the conventional pictures of the magazines we usually call „print media“, it shares just the DTP technology, but in its meaning it is completely another type of the magazine, with a lot of advertising, and without covering of the relevant public and political events - we could say that in focus of Cosmopolitan you can find the anonymous reader, and not the publicly expounded persons. Actually, I am pretty sure that no one of the Cosmo editors can get this kind of scholarship. So, it seems to me necessary to give a short explanation - how it happend? After the fail of the magazine I used to work in, before I signed a contract with Cosmopolitan, it seemed to me that it didn't remain a lot of the Croatian independent media scene. With my professional biography, I would hardly find a job in governmental media, or national television anyway, and I can also say that kind job would not satisfy me, at all. On the other hand, a couple of remained independent projects were just - full with the stuff. I was also completely disgusted from the situation on Croatian political-media market, and almost complete disappearing of the freedom of the press. In that situation, I accepted the invitation from Cosmopolitan, and got down to the work on the launching process of the just established magazine. But, I am satisfied to say - in the polarized Croatian public scene, even Cosmopolitan can reach the political influences - when that magazine engages in free understanding of sex, independence of women, methods of contraception, and rights of abortion, it can provoke a wide range of reactions from the recently increasing defenders of new Croatian christian ethics, conservatism and excludation.

How the goverments fight the independent media?

Because the society articulates itself through the media, it is pretty predictable that the societies are not free, it should be hard to except the high freedom-level of the press. But, what is todays meaning of the freedom of the press? This question is not simple if you are going to put it in the transition country like Croatia, exactly between postcommunist goverments, who is not used to read bad things about itself, and proto-capitalistic economics, which insists at big titles and large circulations. Both sides are enemies of the profession. Of course, todays editors are allowed to print any article and nobody is going to protect you to write whatever you want, there is no censorship in explicit sense. But then, how the goverments fight the independent media? There is well known Playboy case from the fifties in the States, when Ame-

rican post executed the roll of censorship and refused to distribute Playboy magazine because of the photos of naked girls inside. In the so many ways that it developed to rob the country, Croatian leading party involved so-called auditing committees to almost all Croatian companies. In the major companies, the members of the committee usually are politicians that belong to the ruling party, and membership in the committee is another way for them to duplicate, or multiply, their salary - they are paid for their sitting in the committee, of course not by their party, which put them there, but by the company itself. That is also just one way how the ruling party discharges its own account: it sucks the money not just from the national budget, but also directly from the national economics. (Of course, this money is just a „drop in the sea“ comparing to the robbery of the whole state and nation, which was planned and executed by the Croatian ruling „mafocracy“.) So, this situation seems to me to be a good example how structure and state of mind, preserved from communist period, still exists, but improved by the political and economical plot of the proto-capitalistic rapacity. Sitting in the auditing committee, its members usually have enormous influence at the business strategy of the company - that is the way how politics controls economics. By the example of independent media, there is no such a possibility for corruption, like by the decision about big investments. But, for the political fighting against independent media, it is actually not necessary. Here you can face the logic - if you can not have it, destroy it. And to do that, it could be enough if the members of the auditing committee stop the company to sign, for instance, the contract for the advertising campaign in the independent media. Actually, this is the way how the independent media can lose the major companies as the advertising clients very easily.

Knocked out from the business

Weimar Undercover

We visited Weimar in the middle of retouching of the city which became a cultural capital of Europe in 1999. I do not know if it was connected to the period of DDR, but the mentality there, as far as I could see, was pretty different than in western part of Germany. People are quite and close, and there is not too much certainty in their behaviour. I have never heard „Tschüss“, instead of „Auf Wiedersehen“. Unfortunately for us, but luckily for the city, all the important buildings were invisible, under the plastic covers, and surrounded by iron constructions and hills of sand. „You can not see this house, but this is Schiller's house, this one which you also can not see is Goethe's. This, you can not see it, but this is another Schiller's. Pity because you can not see this, but this is Eckerman's house. Johann Sebastian Bach used to stay in this one, under the yellow plastic...“, talked our guide to us. Actually, it seemed to me at that moment that the only non-covered houses were the exar-

racks of Russian Red army. It was also the holyday, so everything was closed. The only house we could somehow enter was Goethe's house. „Shit, this is huge! You can have the wife and two lovers in the same house, for twenty years, and they should never meet“, we whispered during the minuteslong walking through the six in-lined, connected salons of the house. I do not know very much about Goethe's work - I just could say that - as distinguished from the most of the people - I had more fun reading just a couple parts of Faust, than reading that newromantic bestseller of Werther. About Goethe as a person, except couple of anecdotes we heard at the Goethe Institute, I know even less, although, as far as I remember, at my parents' home, there is at least Eckerman's Talks to Goethe, but, I must admit, I have always been too lazy to start it. Anyway, I was really surprised by his life standard, than such a versatile interests, and the level of his systems, which are all so obvious in his house.

Fog, freezing and wet

However, our jokes about lovers and superficial impressions from the visiting of Goethe's house disappeared pretty suddenly when we passed the lines of fences and iron door with awful title: „Everybody gets what he deserves“, and entered Buchenwald. I was very angry when I had heard for the first time that Buchenwald was also on our Weimar schedule: „Shit, who the hell needs that so-called picture of two Germany with just a couple of kilometers distance from one to another“, I thought, „I have already visited a couple of conc-camps, I have seen so many pictures, and even a couple of movies (I mean documentary movies, not just Steven Spielberg's Schindler's List). So, I am not going to see anything new, actually, I am just going to need a week to throw out all the negative energy I am going to collect there.“ Then, I was embarrassed when I have heard from my teacher that she had been visiting Auschwitz for the 16 times. I still do not know was it my projection or not, but approaching Buchenwald, in the lightgreen thicket, swaying in the wind in the complete, ghostly silence, it seemed to me that somehow, all these deaths were still around. Fog, freezing and wet in the middle of the nowhere were my first impressions when I had left the bus. To stay there, to work outside with no proper clothes, to live in the barracks with no heating, I tried to picture myself in the same situation, walked through the that horse-stable, which was supposed to be the ambulance, autopsy room, crematorium, than through some spacy rooms which purpose I could not guess, clearing one really terrible and awful image of the second world war period.

When Germans and Croats marched together

Second world war was a point at which we came pretty often, during our staying in Germany. With regard to the war, I really had many possibilities to

compare things which I had seen at home, and now here in Germany, because - in the form of so called Independent State of Croatia, my country was also a confederate state of German Third Reich. Germans have a real patience - more than Croats - to talk and talk about war, ever and ever again. It seems to me that Germans still feel a kind of obligation, to listen the foreigners - usually coming from the hostile countries from the war period - at the time again and again, and to express changes in German political and social mainstream during the last 50 years. But, inspite of that positive attitude, sometimes could be very obvious that the subject of second world war still can be pretty unpleasant for Germans. In the classes at the Institute, we once talked about the weather, and step by step, we came till the storms. The girl from States told us she lived in the tornado-area, so she had to go to the shelter in the basement pretty often - every time when a tornado passed by. Then I told the story from 1991, form the last war period in Croatia. Because of the danger of airattacks, we also had to go to basement, sometimes even a couple of times daily. Usually, I was not at home, but in the office, or out of the city, in refugee camps, volunteering as the student of psychology at the project called „Psychosocial structure of Croatian War Refugees“. But this time, it was very late at night and I was already at home, when the sound of alarm woke us up. So, I went downstairs, together with my family. In the basement, I just sat on the first chair I had seen, next to the door. But, than one old lady came, and told me: „Ivan, how could you sit here, you do not know this is my place since 1942?“

„Oooops, there were Yankees!“

Actually, I avoid to tell any of the war stories, because it always seems to me in that way I force my environment to feel a kind of sorry, and I hate that. So, I did not tell this story to „fish for complaint“ - I just wanted to make fun of old lady's point. But, when I mentioned the year of 1942 and running to the basements because of the air-attacks, my teacher's face got immediately serious, and her laugh spontaneously disappeared. I do not think somebody else noticed it, but it was pretty clear to me that I definitely should change the subject. Later in the afternoon I was angry with me, I thought how could I be so stupid and not to anticipate that, talking that war stories I could hurt my teacher. But than, I suddenly remembered - „Wait, there is no sense that Germans would bomb their war confederates. So... shit, at that time that must have been American, and not German planes over Croatia, because of them people ran to the basements! How could I forget that?“ The period of independent state of Croatia is one of the hardest questions in the recent Croatian political circumstances. Because of daily political needs, Croatian history is actually misused. Proves of Croatian glorious past were collected everything what could be any evidence, mostly without any criteria, and actually, with not so many interesting for facts, or at least, common sense. Talking about Croatian history, it is not possible to speak about the state, because Croatian state does-

n't exist since 1102, but „continuity of Croatian stateness“, which lasted for centuries. But, the period of nazi Independent State of Croatia was also proclaimed as „a part of continuity of Croatian statenes.“ Doing this, the very strong Croatian left political wing (not just communists, who took the power after the second world war, but the whole range of left political ideas) was completely ignored.

So, Croatian society was absolutely polarized during the second world war, but the country was ruled by nazis. It was also obvious on the pictures at the exhibition Crimes of Wehrmacht, that we had visited in Muenster. On the pictures from Croatia, the soldiers, who bring the prisoners to the concamps, wear black uniforms, but it is actually very obvious that these uniforms are not German Wehrmacht uniforms. These soldiers were Croatian nazis, so-called „ustase“, in the political structure they were actually pretty similar, not like Wehrmacht, but like German SS-troops, established like another army of the country, and defined like a special, volunteer police-force, belonging to local nazi party. So, these were Croatian soldiers, who prisoned the other Croats, who had different political opinion, and of course, the Jews, the Gipsys, the Serbs, and so on.

Political revisionism and nazification of society

The people from the Croatian resistant movement, who had fought against nazi-state, who after surrender of Italy in 1943 had brought the medditerinean coast back to Croatia, who at last belonged to the forces that had won the war, and who had achieved - during the communist regime - the later constitutional basis for Croatian independence, in the revisionistical interpretation of history, ended out of history, and were substituted by the representatives of Croatian nazi-state. Result: today in Croatia, radical right political ideas are very common, they are actually very deep involved in daily life, and even from the highest ranged governmental politicians you can hear the points of view, or recognize some political acts, that you can very easy compare to the German nazi period. The most shameful were the pictures from the time just before the start of the war in Bosnia. You can see the Croatian minister of defense, on the very big meeting in open-air with Bosnian Croats (so, it was informal visit deep inside another land), wearing black clothes and saluting with a nazi, „Heil Hitler“ salutation with his right, extended and lifted hand. After that, he hadn't to resign - he remained the member of the government till his death in 1998. Extreme conservatism, nationalistic hermatisation, and a parody of democratic institutions we in Croatia call „the social fascism“ for a very long time, but when I really started to live in successfully denazified Germany, one of my most terrible experiences became my comprehension that handle with the term of fascism in Croatia isn't just the word any more, and that we did not exaggerate. To keep silent about that is completely the same like some unconscious try not to know anything about the concentrations camps in the neighbourhood, or some of these thing which are not to clear to Germans even

by now: how could we not to know about that was the question I have heard so many times. There is a typical Croatian joke, which describes a attitude about the place called Jasenovac, the largest Croatian conc-camp, actually local Auschwitz. So, two Croats talk: - Do you know that my father died in Jasenovac? - No shit! How? - Well... he was drunk, and felt from the watching tower!!! Huh-huh-huh! Today, Germans claim they didn't know about conc-camps, and admit they maybe didn't want to know. Right on the contrary, in Croatia, sometimes it seems to me that everybody knows everything, but keeps silent and even contributes into some pervert national complot about the nazi-past as the common community thing, hidden from the rest of the world.

Denazification and its flops

Why was the German denazification after second world war successfull, and, for instance, Croatian not? Croatian sociologists usually maintain that the difference between two societies was not exactly in the nazi period, but in the circumstances that followed the war. They say in Germany was the nondemocratic nazi regime substituted by democratic one. On the contrary, in Croatia nazi regime was substituted by another non-democratic, communist regime. Comparing to the situation in ex-DDR, it could be true - it is also German society, but with a different past, and as far as I know, there are many more right radicals there, than in west Germany. To previous historical, you can add present economical reasons, but also, today's Croatian particularity in a frightening, completely opened political encouragement of growing of radical right ideas.

Guilty or not guilty?

The relationship to the problem of war, that I had noticed talking to Germans, as I already described, reminded me about something which I used to discuss a couple of time with my friends in Croatia: it is the question of guilt, or if I would be more precis - sense of collective guilty. Saying as simply as possible to keep the meaning, in Balkans it looks like this: you have Croatian Catholichs, Serbian Ortodox, and Bosnian Moslims. Everybody fights against each other, on national and/or religial basis. But everybody refuses to pay attention to problem of guilt, because, there is no sense of guilt on the other side. Actually, everybody in Balkans can say: why should I feel myself guilty, and they who attacked my village, killed my parents, burned my brother alive, raped my wife and my daughter just in front of my eyes, and then put me to conc-camp, they do not feel any guilt at all? From that thought, it is just one step to the next idea: „Instead of torturing myself feeling the guilt, I should better do the same in their village! How this brilliant idea already did not occur to me?“ And than, spiral of fights and deaths goes on. I think that Germans would agree: to accuse some whole social structure because of the crimes

committed by its members isn't more than another social crime. Also, to feel guilty because of the crimes of the other members of the group you belong to - not because of sharing the group ideas - but just because of the random facts, like the fact of birth - in the sense of collective responsibility - seems to me like the social suicide. On the other hand, I can not say that I do not feel any guilt when I see the pictures of the crimes that Croats did in the last couple of years: from Croatian conc-camps from the first part of 90-es in Bosnia, or the picture of the ruins of the couple of hundreds of years old bridge, built in islamic style, in the city of Mostar, which used to have the largest arch in the whole islamic architecture, and than was crashed by Croatian artillery troops. (The Croatian general who had orderd to rockett it, said cinically later: „Don't worry, we are going to build another one, more beautiful, and even older than the previous one.“)

It's up to me!

So, I think that the sense of guilt - just like religial senses, or political opinions - should be the ultimative private thing. It is not supposed to be connected to the people or the nations that did the same or even worse crimes to your people. They are not supposed to be connect to the public expectations of the opposite or third side. They are absolutely not the obligation of political correctness. They are exclusive personal choice, but just in the sense of taking the blame, and not at all of blamig somebody else. Sense of guilt can not be the common thing, and if you can feel a sort of responsibility and sorry for the crimes done of course not by yourself, but by your people, for me it is a noble and precious feeling which can contribute the crimes come to the end one day, but it seems important for me to realize that the prize for that kind of thinking can be just and only your own ethical satisfaction, and you can not expect anything else in return. It seems to me, that the question of guilt represents a unification of some philosophical, ethical, political, and even religial points, which belongs to the highlights of wisdom of the west. The question of guilt also seems to me to be basic in the Max Frisch's book *Homo Faber*. Excellent movie, directed by German Volker Schlöndorff, forced me to read it. Actually, there is not to much poetry in it, and Volker Faber, a main charachter, is deep in positivistic sciences, with both legs on the ground, an engeneer who likes to think about numbers. But, it is almost impossible to imagine such a small number, which should describe a poor probability of the things he's going to face. The message could be - the things that are waiting for him, we can say pretty surely, should not be connected to the random appearance of the events during somebody's life, but to - the destiny itself. Although Faber does not believe in destiny - it is against all of his set ups; attitudes and education. But, the way he is going to face the destiny will be pretty cruel. After incestuos episode with his daughter, which he did not know at all, she suddenly dies in Greece. The story which inspires itself in the mythology so obviously, has it tragical end exactly on the locations of anthic dramas. The rest of Faber's life, we can say pretty surely, is going to be filled by guilty.

Wings of Desire or Himmel ueber Berlin

Completely different from the Max Frisch's book is ethereal and out-of-the-dimensions Wim Wenders movie Himmel ueber Berlin. One of the strongest scenes in the movie shows Damiel, walking through the snowy street. Damiel, played by actor Bruno Ganz, one of the Berlins angels, fell in love with French dancer and acrobat, Marion, played by actress Solweig Dommartin. Because humans could not see the angels, that girl actually even does not know that he exists. Comparing to the just discovered love, to stay an angel seems to Damiel pretty boring, and even meaningless. Camera is behind, and we see him walking, but without spots in the snow - he is an angel, so he does not leave any. Suddenly, the spots start to appear, which is the moment of Damiel's conversion. Because of the love, Damiel decides not to be an angel any more, and to become a mortal and limited, but emotional, human being. Instead of abstract love and loyalty to the God, which Damiel, as an angel is supposed to, he decided to love just a person, and because of her, he left - in the matter of fact - the boring eternal concept. The message of the Wenders eternal heroes approach, as I understood it, was: Why to seek something out of the life, when there are enough beautiful things in life itself. In that sense, we realised next thesis: where is your love, there is your real heaven, and also your eternity, and if you find yourself in situations like that, you do not have to seek for the further external influences. For me it is a very posh and smooth way to reject the God. English translation of the title is Wings of Desire and in a matter of fact we could say that Damiel finds new wings in his desires. Now it seems to me that this my descriptions look pretty poor, and pathetic, but, on the contrary – if everybody could tell these points like Frisch and Peter Handke, who wrote the screenplay for Wim Wenders' film, their art works would not be able to be so precious. And even Frisch and Handke, needed some 250 pages, or 2.5 hours to tell these stories in a more distinguished way. I do not believe neither in angels, nor in destiny, but I liked a lot both of these points – to look for love, and to face the destiny, and actually, I would like to leave Germany with that plan on my mind.

Thank you, people

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