

PREFACE

by *ZOLTÁN ZARÁNDY*
President of ISHA

A whole year has almost passed by since the publication of the above lines in the international press. Instead of trying to argue that the Founding Conference was of some historic importance, it might worth allocating the intellectual message of the participants in the context of the most recent European historical trends of defining our common heritage.

Europe is much talked about these days. A new paradigm is in the making. The Second European Dark Ages are coming to an end. The paradox about the "unbearable lightness of being" is that it is usually borne for much too long a while. The war is over, four decades are behind us, but peace proper is just now being made. The ghost of Yalta is sleeping discretely under the piles of scrappy and stinky remnants of the Iron Curtain. The naked kings have been spotted and dethroned. Bunches of vagabonds, astrologers and well paid imperial history tellers are now rewriting their autobiographies and are looking for new masters to serve. Our grandparents, our fathers and ourselves have been cheated by history. Or have we played a cruel game with Clio?

1989 was a year of champagne, tears and glory. 1990 was a year of hangover and slow awakening. This year should bring analysis and understanding. The relationship of the historian to the past possesses the quality of intimacy. The scholar of history has a special responsibility for the future. It is not a coincidence, that those nations of the continent, which have been deprived of their past over the last four decades now appoint historians in their governments. The politicians usually speak in ready-made pattern sentences. Language and semantic understanding belong to the writers. The historians should be able to trace down the etymological development of the words and the world(s) they relate to.

Having reunited by herself, Europe exposes a problem of semantic interpretation to the historian. The sacred intellectual triangle of Europe's modern ideological history: liberalism, nationalism and socialism must now be re-identified. These notions have been given different connotations in the different historical regions. Now it is high time that a common European language and channels of communication was elaborated.

Let us here only refer to the controversial way of using the concepts of "nations" and "states", a problem much discussed at our conference as well. This is all the more interesting as nationalism has been a pressing and dangerous as well as creative force. Prof. Hugh Seton-Watson enumerates a number of examples for the inconsequent use of these notions. In the United States the expression "throughout the nation" simply means "throughout the country." In the main European languages the words "international relations" and their equivalent are used to denote the relations between states... The Gulf crisis has reinforced the

professor's claim that "the United Nations in fact has proved to be little more than a meeting place for disunited nations." The frequently quoted cliché that we live in an age of nation-states is at most a half-truth. It is arguably true that we live in the age of sovereign states. For the nations of East-Central Europe it is important to recognize the semantic trap in the quasi-synonyms: étatisation-nationalisation in the age of re-privatisation. The usage is misleading because the seized properties are in reality placed at the disposal not of the nation but of the dominant bureaucratic caste.

Europe, as a political notion ceased to be divided. Europe, as a historical entity has always been one and indivisible. The men of letters now have to re-adjust their attitudes to the actual size of the continent. Where does the continent reach, then? To the River Elba? To the Russian border, perhaps? Or to the Urals? Is Europe only the Occidents? Or the EEC? It is not only Robert Musil's Kakania, where multiculturalism is virtue par excellence. Europeans, unlike some intelligent African tribesmen, do not speak 5-6 languages fluently in order to communicate with their neighbours. The peoples of Europe cannot afford to live isolated from each other. Over the last months Europe's frozen channels of international communication have been revitalised. It has been the traditional European solidarity that provided a spiritual basis for this endeavour. Optimistically, we should like to take it for granted that Europeans do not want to go to war against each other. Europeans have to have solidarity not because it is something of a virtue but because they have to survive. Instead of T72s and F15s Europe's old-new lingua franca is her culture and economy.

In search of a new Europe, from George Schöpflin to Milan Kundera, historians and writers need to have workshops and forums independent of the states and leaving aside provincial nationalism. The students of history also need to belong to international associations to experience the international intellectual community, reminding the observers of the real spirit of "Univeritas Europaensis". The International Students of History Association has been established by largely European citizens with European vision. It is therefore logical that it will try to learn from the other continents and spread its own heritage elsewhere. The Founding Congress provided a solid basis for this.

Post Scriptum:

As one of the organisers and the soon leaving President of ISHA, I now should like to thank all my friends for the tireless help and encouragement they shared before, during and after the conference. Special thanks to the following professors Köpeczi Géza, Balázs Éva, Niederhauser Emil, Benda Kálmán, Roger Chartier. Many thanks to our dear friends who attended the conference and provided a very stimulating series of discussions.

Vienna, 25. 02. 91.