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How does political radicalization threaten artistic freedom in Europe?

Friday, 2 December 2021, 6pm

The question is not easy and requires a couple of initial clarifications. The classic strategy of crime novels is to start looking for the perpetrator from the end, that is, from the crime scene, and to slowly go back, toward the beginning.

So let's start at the end of this question and ask ourselves what is meant by the term Europe. I know we can easily get on very shaky ground here. All useful attempts at definitions have so far failed. Let me just point out that 50 years ago many people in Western Europe did not understand parts of the former Soviet empire, the Baltic States, Ukraine and so on as parts of Europe, not economically, and much less culturally, but today these countries are, of course, an integral part of our territorial and cultural conception of Europe, which means that our concept of Europe is changing dramatically according to the current geopolitical mood. Today, we keep asking ourselves quietly whether Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Albania, Bosnia, Serbia, Northern Macedonia, and last but not least, Israel are meant somewhere, when we generally say Europe. We also cannot stop asking questions that have gone a bit out of fashion today, but were very topical after 1989, namely, is St Petersburg, Moscow, Istanbul and increasingly London also part of what we mean when we say Europe? For our question, this has enormous consequences, which I will not go into in our brief introductory to our debate, but it is crucial, in my view, to think about these questions when we ask about artistic freedom in Europe. In any case, I think that in our alliance of academies we do not think and cannot in any way allow ourselves to think only of the Schengen area or the EU when we talk about Europe.

The coinage of "artistic freedom" in itself implies that there are different forms of freedoms and liberties for different groups of people, depending on who they are and what they do. Fundamental human rights, the freedoms of children, migrants, minority groups, LGBTQ + and so on are something other than "artistic freedom". Artistic freedom itself evades general definitions, most applicable is perhaps its definition in the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions of UNESCO from 2005. There, artistic freedom is understood as:

"The freedom to imagine, create and distribute diverse cultural expressions free of governmental censorship, political interference or the pressures of non-state actors."

The question of artistic freedom is necessarily also a philosophical-ethical question. Do we artists have the right to express just about anything, regardless of the consequences and potential conflicts that our actions and creations may provoke? Can Europe and its societies allow themselves a laboratory of freedoms in which actions, articulations, and interrogations into the most difficult matter can take place, all of which in other contexts are considered potentially questionable, even inappropriate, sometimes morally objectionable or offensive to parts of society? The case of Charlie Hebdo has become perhaps the most pointed and highly tragic example of the conflict between different experiences of spaces of freedom, the sacred and permissible among members of different ideological, religious and political beliefs. Can we in the changing Europe of the 21st century afford art as an autonomous territory of practices that can be potentially offensive or controversial to those who do not accept our division into art and everything else, who do not recognize the special status of art and thus the invisible shield

which defends the practices of artists? Can we afford every art and with it the most extreme artistic positions, can we afford even potentially harmful art and bad art that sometimes, let's face it, misuses the label of "artistic creation" as a cover for practices whose primary goal is not artistic creation but propaganda and strengthening certain ideologies?

These issues are by no means merely only theoretical questions. We who work within the field of art know that the answer to the question of whether art necessarily needs unquestioning freedom cannot be other than affirmative. Even if we demand the irrevocable autonomy of art, we all know very well that in reality the walls of our freedoms are most often very narrow and low set and strongly culturally conditioned. Social taboos, the limits of good taste, questioning the neuralgic points of society, shedding light on cases of self-censorship are in a way a front on which our struggle is more or less subtle, with the aim of slowly integrating the achievements of this radical process of self-examination into a broader society which is tolerant, open and worth living in, a society that is, to put it bluntly, more immune to hatred, lies, intolerance and other nonsense. We who work within the field of art know that any systemic restriction of our already often endangered and violently restricted freedoms would open a Pandora's box in which each society and each government could set boundaries in its own way, thus establishing a free path to systemic censorship and political persecution of artists.

The answer of many other political, global economic, religious, technological and capital actors to our question of whether Europe can afford a free territory of art is, of course, the opposite of ours. This evident contradiction between the notions of artistic freedom has intensified sharply in the last ten, perhaps fifteen years. In some fields, the practice of general restriction of artistic practices and overt exploitation of the art sector has long been established. Years ago, I co-signed a open call by artists from all over the world to strengthen the privacy and rights of individuals in the net. Just as we have achieved nothing with our call to restrict technology giants in exploiting our use of the Internet, so the call for freedom of art online seems a distant utopian idea. For which it is without a doubt necessary to fight. It starts with economic subordination and a set of rules of what is allowed and what is not, with the often very problematic categories of political correctness and self-restraint in the online environment when it comes to art. While Facebook is censoring the posting of art photographs of Greek statues because they show an excessive degree of nudity, the darknet, a parallel world where just about anything is allowed, is flourishing. Our governments of Western democracies technologically enable and even co-finance the schizophrenia of our everyday online reality.

When we see the threat to artistic freedom in Europe, we usually first think of the reality of rich Western societies and a couple of examples of mostly Eastern European countries, where democratically elected quasi-dictators systematically curve democratic principles and adapt them to strengthen their own power and the power of ruling elites. It is a very dangerous phenomenon, where there is a well-founded fear that the phenomenon will become a normality, a kind of principle of the quasi-democratic rule of the future. In this, certainly justified criticism, we forget too quickly the intertwining of the global world, the schizophrenia of the policies of countries that do not want to follow the model of Russia, Poland or Hungary. In short, we forget all too often the pragmatic ignorance, brutal selfishness and blindness of developed Western democracies when their interests are at a stake. The rights of artistic autonomy in endangered societies, where we are facing the disintegration of democracy and pluralism, are in this sense collateral damage, understood by many in a cynic way.

Economic greed, colonial superiority and a low level of in-depth knowledge of the intercultural diversity of European cultures, a very frequent unwillingness to deepen the integration and disarm the local political rulers, make Europe a self-threatening monster, too often allowing the very practices it fears become the future norm. Some time ago, I spoke to an experienced European politician. He waved his finger. That is all, he remarked, what Europe will do when the next time a European leader blatantly violates the rule of European law, agreements and violates the rights of people, including artists. I often remember that moment, the gentleman was from a pro-European, liberal province, as has been said with decades of diplomatic experience, but the realization was rather bitter. Whether we agree with him or not, I think it is undeniable that the greatest threat to Europe is Europe itself, it bears the seeds responsible for the current situation and possible solutions.

Finally, let us return to the initial question of political radicalization in many European countries. The radicalization itself is, of course, not a cause for, but rather a consequence of a long process. There must be a fertile ground consisting of discontent and rebellion, of unresolved traumas of the past and a lack of recognition of one's own possible future within positive European values for radicalization to occur at all. Unlike other classical totalitarian regimes, political coups and violent takeovers of states, we see a radicalization of the understanding of democratically elected systems of power that goes hand in hand with the broadest possible legal interpretations of the frameworks agreed upon by the founders of Europe. The new generations of Eastern European leaders, who learned of the threat of war horrors and devastation only from school textbooks too often appears without any historical corrections. On the contrary, the reinterpretation of historical facts and alleged historic injustices is being used as the central momentum for mass activation. In the agendas of these politicians exist historic traumas in order to be used and abused. These are populist structures that have learned the lesson from democracy that with a powerful legal apparatus and a democratically elected parliamentary majority, it is possible to democratically change everything, including the principles of democracy. And the principles of freedom. These are perfidious, amoral practices that have official coverage in laws and measures. For any curtailment of rights or deprivation of certain social groups there is a corresponding decree, ordinance, law, as well as a legal possibility of appeal, which is doomed to failure.

The coexistence of opponent views and the systemic support of often diametrically opposed ideological and artistic views, which was present there as a rule in the vast majority of European countries from the 1990s until the economic crisis of 2007, has been subject to strong internal pressures and political divisions, an increasing lack of tolerance and understanding for the opposite sides. The brutality of the simple law: You are an enemy if you are not on our side, the middle path, the path of free choice, is less and less possible, and the systemic coercion into corruption and the removal of free-thinking and creative people, given the bureaucratic perfidy and media silencing of the opposition, is difficult to prove. Various forms of intimidation, redistribution of state funds only to own supporters, limiting the possibility of public speech, marginalization of opponents in public space, occasional witch hunts and abolition of free associations under various pretexts, false speech and constant creation of state of exception, emergency measures, radical propaganda, we have already seen all this, but now that it is repeated before our eyes, we remain powerless again.

UNESCO's fundamental postulates of artistic freedom include the right to create without censorship or intimidation; the right to have artistic work supported, distributed and

remunerated; the right to freedom of movement; the right to freedom of association; the right to the protection of social and economic rights; the right to participate in cultural life . All this is becoming more and more just smoke in the eyes of those who still believe in fairy tales.

Even if we do not believe in fairy tales, if we believe in crime novels instead and with them believe in the fact that there is no complete crime and even the most skillful perpetrator can overlook the traces that will eventually reveal it, it is indisputable that we must establish alternative forms of support for the most vulnerable. When a country fails - and every country can fail, I from Slovenia know this as well as you from Germany or from Spain or from other countries - we need a Europe that works. There is no freedom other than the one that has been fought for and preserved, and I understand our socializing and joint efforts here in this light.