

Foundation for a European Union

Maxim Kantor

There is nothing more permanent in the historical sciences than the statement of the “end of Europe”. The collapse of Europe has been recorded many times over the centuries, and the attempts to unify Europe, the attempts to revive the concept of the Roman Empire have consistently failed. Oswald Spengler was not the first one and obviously will not be the last one who proclaimed the sunset of *Abendland*.

Today we observe the regular collapse of Europe, one of the many. The collapse of Europe and the possible conflicts within the European civilisation are scary; two previous world wars started with a European war and the dynamics of the scenario were well known in advance: it began with the Franco-Prussian war. The three previous Franco-German wars – 1870, 1914, and 1939 – were sad milestones for Europe. As long as the Franco-German peace lasts, there is hope for Europe, and therefore for all humanity, because Europe – this is probably an illusion, but a historically rooted illusion – looks like the core of humanity, something like an *eidōs*, which gathered various ideas and fertilized the world with them. That does not necessarily mean that Europe produces ideas itself: it can well be that Europe appropriates or borrows ideas. Regardless of the fact that Europe itself is often fed by the ideas of the East (for example, Christianity), Europe has (or has had) the ability to intensively accumulate those ideas and spread them to all parts of the world, providing them with a typical European orchestration. Hegel’s comparison of Europe with a “hungry lion” means not only the process of colonisation, but also constant hunger of ideas and projects. It leads us to wonder if European culture has an extensive or intensive character: one may come to the conclusion that Europe feeds itself with various concepts. However, Europe itself produces ideas in abundance, scattering them around itself like the mythical beast from European Bestiaries, *Le Tarande* described by Rabelais. This animal, which lived on the island of Midamoti and resembles a deer, constantly changed colour and scattered images around itself. Pantagruel bought it and send to his Father, Gargantua, as a symbol of art. Aristotle also mentions it: “It is said that the Scythians have a very rare animal, the Tarandus. It is said that it changes the colour of its coat depending on where it is located, so it is difficult to catch it, because the colour of the Tarande is similar to the colour of the trees, the terrain and everything that surrounds it. In appearance, this animal is similar to a bull, and the head is similar to a deer.” We can think of *Le Tarande* as a metaphor for art but, more significantly, it is a metaphor for Europe. Extensive and intensive at the same time, loosing itself for others to find itself again and again – this is Europe.

Whatever we could say about the original nature of an European *eidōs*, it is hard to deny the European origin of several basic concepts of human civilization, such as the Gothic, the proletariat, oil painting, socialism, Enlightenment, penicillin, city commune and – as a quintessence of European culture – the phenomenon of Renaissance. Even if it is possible to find resembling phenomena in Eastern history (for instance, using word “humanism” one may also talk about Confucius and while speaking of commune one may recall the Land law made by Joshua or the communities of Ancient China) those events in European history became unique examples for the entire world.

It is difficult to dispute the fact that America, Australia, Russia and Africa were fed with the images of Europe; and so, whilst the cultural *eidōs* of Europe has remained relatively stable, the

whole world has a kind of tuning fork. The trouble is that this tuning fork is short-lived and the European alliance is always fragile. Each historical example of European unification ended dramatically.

Five years ago, it seemed that attempts from outside to break up the European Union were doomed: Europeans are well trained by history; however, we see that attempts to break up Europe were not in vain. A critical point in history was the collapse of the Soviet Union. The end of this totalitarian empire looked like a glimpse of hope, but in the end, it turned out to be a source of danger. Not so long ago, it was seriously discussed whether Russia is a part of Europe and whether the country, nine tens of which are located on the Asian continent should not be considered a “European power” (as Empress Catherine declared). Against the reality of today’s confrontation between Russia and Europe, it is comical to recall those projects, but the projects did exist, fuelling the European entrepreneurial spirit and corporate greed. Even Russia’s accession to NATO was seriously discussed. The development of post-communist Russia “along the European path” seemed to be a natural continuation of the post-war revival of European economies, societies, and democracies. And the fact that Eastern Europe and the whole continent of Russia were involved in a positive and progressive process also seemed to fit this historical pattern of progress. In a way it was an hour of glory of Europe. The very moment when the so-called “socialist Europe” was done away with and the countries of Eastern Europe embarked on the path of capitalist development (in particular, the privatization of the economy) looked both like the finest hour of Europe – and as proof that the vector of development can only be one: from socialism to capitalism. It looked like a confirmation of the historical rightness of “democracy” as a cure for all the ills of tyranny.

It was a period of brief triumph for European consciousness identified with the democratic idea; but the homunculus grown from post-Stalinist Russia became unpredictable; combined with the rapid growth of China, the situation became critical for Europe. There is an expression “to kill the middle-man” (to eliminate the intermediary), – and to be honest in judgement: at that time Europe already played a role of a manager. So the concept of *eidōs* was replaced by the concept of “manager” and the role of the manager is no longer in demand at the moment when the manufacturer realizes his own irreplaceability. Today, it can be stated that the “European idea” of a common space of democracy and the social state (the concept, albeit vaguely formulated, replaced the totalitarian concepts of the mid-twentieth century) has lost its relevance.

The European idea does not show the way anymore. Moreover, now the space of Europe (not Russia and China) has become a testing ground for political intrigues. It may sound paradoxical, but the roles have changed: thirty years ago, Russia and the East of Europe looked like a testing ground for various social concepts; today, Europe itself appears as a testing ground for social speculation. And again, like a hundred years ago – nationalism has returned. By pouring money into right-wing nationalist and left-wing radical parties at the same time, buying European politicians, contributing to the internal corruption of Europe, playing on the most primitive and base feelings – external forces have been successful. Natural national and tribal feelings inherent in the peoples of Europe also play a role - the most stable feeling, more popular than the idea of “workers” solidarity and Christian charity. Unfortunately, the concept of internationalism is no longer popular, it has been replaced by the pragmatic concept of globalism, and this is far from the same thing. There is nothing easier than to discredit the idea of an International of workers: it is enough to replace it with the idea of the market. And soon the working people will say: why do

I need an international banker? It's better to have a family of neighbours by blood. And today you can hear it in poor Greece or in wealthy England.

The European Union was cemented by the idea of democracy, which seemed (at least there was an illusion it is) formative in itself. The concept of "democracy" had to play both the roles of "Christianity" and "internationalism", and to be the ground of the political project of a Republic. Since the nature of "democracy" itself in principle does not contain anything similar, the burden appeared to be too heavy.

In the minds of many human rights activists, the concept of democracy is identified with republicanism, but democracy can equally lead to empire. According to Plato (in fact, his conclusion has never been refuted by practice), "democracy" is a less perfect form of society than aristocracy - and at the same time, the just and unfair power of the majority. Democracy is the equality of all-powerful men, in which the personal qualities of people do not matter. Based on the opinion of the "people", the power may be concentrated in the hands of the strong and the rich; the oligarchy arises as a consequence of the fact that among the majority of "propertied" citizens (whose moral qualities were not taken into account), the most powerful one stands out. An oligarchy is formed as logical continuation of democracy, and then a tyranny. The history of the twentieth century presented several variants of democracies, which began as an appeal to the opinion of everyone but ended with a dictatorship. Hitler or Putin, who received enormous support of the "people", are just those examples that are on the surface; however, we can recall that Socrates was also sentenced to death by a democratic court; Christ, in fact, was executed according to popular opinion - that is, the recommendation of the Sanhedrin, the people's government, while Pilate, the representative of the autocracy, escaped from the sentence. Talking about contemporary "democracy" in Russia we may observe this classical process: from democracy to oligarchy, from oligarchy to tyranny. Not a single one of the "democrats" of the nineties thought about oligarchy or tyranny; they voted for the magic word "democracy", being convinced that democracy means automatically a republican way of state. But step by step society turned in this direction - and it was not only the maleficence of a KGB officer but also a nature of people's will. Nobody spoke at that time that there is any other criteria of freedom than the ability to earn as much as possible - free market was the target; the rest (everybody was convinced) will be done by "democracy".

The blatant example of the notorious Russian sovereign democracy and the so-called "choice of the people" only confirms what Plato warned about. Among other things, the old historical law can be applied: as long as Russia is weak Europe can unite itself. In presence of a strong Russian Empire the unity of Europe does not exist. The collapse of the Soviet Union was a great foundation for the unification of Europe. While a weak Russia expressed a desire to become Europe (a desire that is unnatural even geometrically - the bigger cannot be part of the smaller), Europe had the finest hour of unification. And when Russia decided to become an independent force, and a force traditionally imperial, the chances of Europe's unification rapidly declined. The reincarnation of Russia as an empire was the most significant argument against the unification of Europe as a union of democratic states. In fact, we have to state that the world is turning to a new type of imperialism, a new round of empire-building one century after their collapse caused by the First World War. The Chinese Empire and the Russian Empire, the ambitions of Turkey, the ambivalent role of America - all this makes the idea of democratic unity in Europe vulnerable, if not fatally impossible. The authoritarian state solves any tactical issues much faster, without wasting time on bureaucracy and sentimentality. In empire, it is clearly obvious what benefits the

construction of the state, and what does not. There are too many points of view in the democratic alliance and what is even worse: there is no practical target; Empire always has painfully practical targets.

All that was said above is obvious; and it is obvious to anyone, from the minister to the plumber. Britain's exit from the EU was an expected and tragic episode in modern European history. Expected, because it is in the nature of British politics, tragic because splitting the European core, the first and fatal step towards a new world war has been taken. And, I believe, future historians should note this fatal episode for Europe and the world. The next step will probably be the exit of France – and, as a result, Germany will remain surrounded by dependent, parasitic, and weak states that hate it. For many non-European forces, this will be the most desirable option. During the relatively long period of European Union's existence, the only necessary step was not taken – the creation of a confederation. The Confederation of Europe (or even Federation) – could possibly save the essential place of the world; but it remains now only as a fantasy. It turned out that there is a law more powerful than democracy, freedom, religion and peace; it is a sense of greed. Europe has once again become a victim of greed, nationalism, and petty passions that take precedence over big plans.

The results of the above-described visual facts were less obvious facts, which are no less merciless:

- 1) The moral basis for the unification of Europe, namely the “Christian-democratic” concept of the social state, embodied both in the party (or in the parties) with the same name and in the principle that delegates Christian moral imperatives to social laws is no longer relevant. Alas, we have to claim: European society today is not governed by the Christian democratic principle. The direct proof is the decline in the popularity of the Christian Democratic Party, and the indirect proof is the reality of the mystical phenomenon of “multiculturalism” caused by migration and demographic problems. The word “mystical” certainly sounds strange in this context. Multiculturalism, in fact, is immanent in Europe in principle: Europe is nothing more than a cultural entity that has historically fused several cultures, ranging from Greek, Jewish, Moorish and up to Celtic. Europe is “multicultural” by definition. However, in the twentieth century there is a new interpretation of this concept, which expresses itself through “multireligionism”. Whether Christian Europe (whose complex cultural combination nevertheless took place within the framework of a single faith and defended it aggressively) can organically accept multireligionism – this question sometimes appears precisely mystical. It would seem that there could be no contradiction, based on the internationalism of the Christian doctrine; but as a matter of fact, multi-culturalism and multi-religiosity disqualify the Christian-democratic idea of leaders like Adenauer as out-dated.

A few inconsistent principles of society became contradictory and this proved fatal to the Christian democratic idea. The fact that a single concept of democracy at least needs to be clarified, does not help Christian democracy as an aggregate connection of ideas – and as a result: the Christian-democratic political concept lost popularity.

- 2) The shift in the political orientation of the “left” and “right” parties led to the discrediting of the socialist idea, which traditionally united the working class of Europe. The substitution of left discourse with right and the shifting of reference points already happened before the Second World War; today that is expressed even more grotesquely. Left-wing parties advocate “right-wing” nationalist platforms, and right-wing parties proclaim the principles of “internationalism”

based, of course, on the international activity of corporations. The most grotesque is the movement of left-wing parties aimed at splitting Europe and nationalism; In particular, Brexit is a typical example. The logic of the left of Britain states that instead of serving international European capitalism it is necessary to focus on domestic problems. At the same time, Britain's financial policies have turned the country into a financial laundry: accepting and legalizing money stolen from other nations. This policy leads to a world war in which the poor will suffer the most; however, these considerations are not taken into account by the "left" and "Labour", which is, of course, a profanation of the left idea.

3) The class stratification of European society is painfully palpable, although thirty years ago the gap between classes was not so noticeable and the vast middle class, located between the highest and lowest, seemed to smooth out the boundaries of inequality by its existence. Today, the inequality is glaring. It is also important that in the new stratification there is no "proletariat", that is, there is no motor of society, a potential hegemon- the class that produces the product necessary for the development of society and is the conscience and blood of society. The gradual mutation of the proletariat into the working class, the mutation of the working class into the "working aristocrat" and into the manager, into the employee, seemed to gently level the problem. However, society needs a motor: the ideology of society is created by serving the social leader; the role of the engine of society is claimed by the class of the "rich", who set the criterion of morality and lifestyle; this claim is offensive and does not contribute to the unity of society. Moreover, it can be stated that the engine of society does not perform the functions necessary for the engine: in the face of the Nouveau riche, society has received a new class of "lumpens" – a stratum that is not tied to the problems of society, living outside of it and at its expense. The lumpen-bourgeoisie differs from the lumpen-proletariat in that it is above society, not below it, but in both cases-the lumpen is outside of society, and cannot, by definition, be the hegemon of society. At the same time, the proletariat, the class of workers who are conscious of their mission, no longer exists in Europe. The manager (most citizens are managers) is a necessary participant in the labour process, but he is as much a recipient of the benefits of production as the owner. In fact, this makes it possible to qualify European society and Europe itself as rentiers, or as "pensioners", using the offensive terminology of European neighbours. The reasons for the elimination of the proletariat are diverse. Probably, there were ways to avoid this loss, which is irreversible for society. It was possible to reorganize trade unions, to transform the types of political representation in accordance with the changes in labour. This was quite difficult in terms of the service nature of European employment, but it was not impossible. However, no one really tried: as a result, trade unions have ceased to be a political force. In current modernity, a "people" is an abstract being that has no distinct features. The people in Michelet's understanding no longer exists. The common instinct of the people, the collective sense of employment that surpasses the intelligence of the bourgeoisie (according to Michelet), no longer exists; and this common instinct of European labour was the spirit of Europe. The common instinct is in demand – only nationalism can become it.

It is not difficult to find an explanation, the reasons are objective: financial capitalism, service capitalism, production outside of Europe, transnational corporations, the transformation of Europe into a management network-but the main reason is that the role of the "proletariat" has passed from the working class of Europe to other societies. The disenfranchised producer, the one who works without owning property, is by no means a European. The proletariat, of course, has not disappeared in the world: as long as there is a product and labour that is used by someone who

treats another person as a means of enrichment, as long as there is disenfranchisement, there will also be a proletariat-even if we use the term “precariat” today to denote its fate. But, whatever you call this stratum, the precariat / proletariat is no longer in Europe. The proletarians in today’s world, however paradoxical it may sound, are the poorest population in the Muslim countries and the population of Russia working at the oil pump. It is quite possible that the arguments about cultural/religious/racial confrontation describe a classic class phenomenon. The moment when the “precariat” recognizes itself as a “proletariat” in classical Marxian terminology will be fatal.

4) Democracy, the system of organisation of society, the declared ideal of Agora, is discredited. It is impossible to use the “opinion of the people” to strengthen class stratification: one factor contradicts the other. Not immediately, but people realized that they were needed only as an electorate, as a management tool that legalizes power, and in another capacity, people are not needed. For the past fifty years, democracy has been considered the ideal of historical development, “the sum total of all that the mind has accumulated” to use Goethe’s expression. Democracy could not play a role that was inadequate to the content of the concept for a long time. Democracy is a form of social organization in which the people choose their representatives as governors – and only that. As soon as the crowd managers create a state in which the rights of the crowd are violated, democracy loses its meaning. More precisely, it mutates. Plato and Aristotle did not appreciate the possibilities of democracy, considering this system one of the least promising. Nevertheless, “democracy” acquired in the twentieth century a kind of sacred function, not taken into account by Plato. In a secular society, in which the authority of God, the church, and the Scriptures is absent or extremely weak, the function of moral guidance is performed by the abstract definition of “freedom” – a property not clearly attributed by society. The rights and freedoms of the individual in relation to his own kind are discussed in the civil codes, but since the goal of the whole society is declared the “free” state of all its citizens, the term “freedom” outgrows the utilitarian meaning and becomes a social idea, a euphemism for the idea of religion. Democratic procedures, which were declared to be the only reliable guarantees of “freedom”, were endowed with the functions that were assigned to the church in the Middle Ages. However, religious functions were imposed on democracies, and this was a mistake for Europe and a disaster for the unfortunate concept of “democracy”. The fact that in Russian political history just the concept of “democracy” contributed to the elimination of “people’s property” (confirmed by the Socialist constitution) turned the term itself into nonsense.

5) As a result, the most significant achievement, thanks to which Europe is a unique culture, has disappeared from the culture of Europe. We are talking about the quintessence of Renaissance culture, the concept of humanism. Charity for every member of society, the value of every life and destiny, regardless of class, race, or citizenship - a social concept that found aphoristic expression in Kant’s imperative and embodied in the philosophy of the Enlightenment – for some time seemed to be the moral basis for European republican legislation. Ficino’s “Christian humanism” or Palmieri’s “civil humanism” – since the Renaissance, the concept of “humanism” has defined European culture, and in the darkest times (wars, fascism, revolutionary terror), the saving rod of Europe was the “humanism” of European culture. In modern culture, this concept of “humanism” is absent for technical reasons: neither art, nor the market, nor democracy, nor management does need humanism. Contemporary art in Europe is consciously dehumanized, the human image simply disappeared, and narrow-profile studies in science practically exclude the idea of a “Person”

as a “whole Universe”. Coupled with the secularization of society – and thus, the elimination of the connection between the image of God and the image of Man (the second likeness of the first), pragmatic dehumanization changed the culture of Europe. Needless to say, the concept of democracy in the absence of a concept of humanism is absolutely absurd.

6) The identification of the concepts of “democracy” and “market” was critical for the post-war development of Europe; of course, no one literally said so, but European political thought claimed that only the existence of a market can ensure the smooth operation of democracy; and the dependence of democracy on the market was indicated – market embodies freedom and democracy appeared as the flag of freedom. The logical consequence of this controversial statement was that the market leader automatically became a person important to democracy. Even if a successful businessman did not become a senator, he was inevitably included into the élite by which the senator is elected, and almost always a senator turns out to be among his friends. We cannot say that by declaring the connection between “democracy” and “market”, corruption is inevitably formed; but it is also impossible to deny the regularity of cases of corruption based on this alliance. The leader in the market is usually a person who is cunning, calculating, tough, and greedy, but all these qualities are unacceptable for a democratic leader. Yes, in reality, the longing for a strong hand (this is increasingly observed in “democratic” countries) is a natural consequence of Republican discord. However, it is not a question of a natural leader who can unite a nation in trouble (like de Gaulle, for example), but of the process – inevitable in the dependence of democracy on the market – when the leader of society becomes an entity that has been distinguished by capitalist achievements. So there are examples like the president of occupied Ukraine, Poroshenko, whose personal fortune increases six-fold in six years of war.

7) As a result of the social and political paradoxes accumulated over half a century, the concept of “opposition” has been reduced in European countries. A grotesque example is Russia, a country in which the opposition simply does not exist, and the stratum that calls itself opposition in any case does not protest against the feudal structure of society, capitalism, which replaced socialism and the privatization of the earth’s bowels. There are claims only to the electoral system, that is, to the democratic procedure, but not to the market. If to count that market shapes democratic procedure anyway – and wild Russian capitalism without trade unions demonstrates that in the mostly ugly way – the fidelity to feudal system and voting for true elections appears to be endless nonsense. A good example is the support of the brave political, charismatic nationalist and capitalist Navalny – by the “democratic” opposition. The “democratic club” makes up a very low share of the electorate of this very promising politician; the majority are young offended managers dreaming about the so-called «social lift». Therefore, the statement of the crisis in Russia (we may enlarge the question to the measures of Europe) cannot lead to a renewal: there is no republican development program; unfortunately, only nationalists have a clear rhetoric today. It is not known what exactly to build: an empire, a republic, socialism or capitalism?

8) Traditional forms of European art are what distinguishes the aesthetics of Europe from the whole world, namely: an oil painting that combines a portrait of a particular person with a sacred plot, historical event or myth; a novel that describes the biography of a particular person with the care of the life of a saint; a symphony that presents a complex orchestration of various feelings and emotions that does not lend itself to a single and simple scenario – classical “European” genres

of art are recognized as an anachronism that does not correspond to the current state of society. In other words, the aesthetics of Europe has abandoned the most important thing that Europe has presented to the world. The aesthetic concept of Europe, contained in the oil painting, in the novel and in the symphony, is that the fate of the individual is equal to the fate of the universe; by exploring the portrait of a single individual, his biography and the structure of his conscience, Europe asserts the significance of each in the face of a common history. The history of society is embodied in a person, in each of us - this is the aesthetic code of Europe. Thus, a unique European society was formed, the highest point of which was the cathedral, the republic and the oil painting. And in order to destroy the idea of Europe it is enough (or nearly enough) to replace cathedrals with entertainment malls, to replace oil paintings with an installation, and the human image now is replaced with a sign. This was done in the course of how European society was adapted for manipulative decisions in the first third of the twentieth century; after a short post-war Renaissance and a brief return of the picture and the novel, the trend continued. Thus was destroyed the main thing that made Europe: its unique cultural being.

9) Unfortunately, the combination of the above-mentioned factors (the “service capitalism”, the absence of the proletariat, the elimination of the urban commune, the oblivion of the picture and the novel, the discrediting of democracy, etc.) has led to a condition of society where neither art nor social life produces a “hero”, that is, an individual who embodies the goal of a healthy society: charity, justice, work for others, the responsibility of one to all.

Characters of art like Jean Valjean, Dr Rieux, Till Eulenspiegel, Hans Schnier, Ivanhoe, Don Quixote do not exist in modern art. Such heroes are simply impossible in entertainment-focused manipulative art. Moreover, the general cultural attitude towards “freedom”, understood as the emancipation of emotions, contradicts the essence of Dr. Rieux and Jean Valjean – namely, Christian charity, accepted as a social imperative. The character brought up by modern art is easy to describe: this is a parasite who defends his privilege to be a parasite by armed means. And the fact that the outside world hates this character is, alas, natural. The deheroization of European society usually provokes fascism – the latter always begins as a romantic attempt to restore Europe to its former greatness; however, this “greatness” is not at all connected with Christian charity. This has already happened in the twentieth century, and there is no reason to think that today’s deheroization will lead to a different result. Perhaps the new Nietzschean hero will not appear in Europe by himself and in such case, it will be even easier for him to blow up the sleepy European world.

10) To say that Europe has become “an easy victim” is to say too little. Rather, Europe has embarked on a suicidal path, saving its enemies from unnecessary work. Its treasures (including sacred territories, famous centres, not to mention art) are sold out by external forces, its castles and vineyards belong to foreign thieves, and there is no idea – other than the nationalist, fascist idea – that can oppose this process. Unfortunately, Europe has no one to blame but itself. However, there is a hope that the process of “deconstruction” of European values, which for half a century the best minds have revelled in, will end not with fascism, but with a renaissance.

Freund’s article, which once again points to the “Decline of Europe”, sounds rather traditional; and this, in its own way, is reassuring. The author reinforces the obvious facts with metaphysical considerations: in his opinion, Europe has fulfilled its historic mission. In addition, there are no

more virgin territories left in the world, and Europe will have to take this fact into account. The idea that there are no more territories left in the world that can be developed sounds dramatic, like a sentence for Europe; this idea was already expressed in 1902 by Halford Mackinder, the creator of geopolitics, however, since then they have split the atom and flown into space, showing that it is possible to go deep and to go far. Nevertheless, no matter how expected these considerations of the end of Europe are, those considerations of fatal fate are always appropriate.

It is quite possible that the “decline of Europe”, announced countless times, has finally happened. But before making a final verdict, it is worth to remember that only 200 years ago it was considered (by absolutely everyone, but Hegel put it very simply) that China “fulfilled its historical mission” and “fell asleep forever”. Hardly anyone shares this opinion today.

There is one necessary condition for thinking about the completion of Europe’s mission.

If a case is completed, we can certainly determine what the case was. For example, if a carpenter is busy creating furniture, the result of the work is a chair. If the artist draws and has finished the work, the result is a picture. And the work of the carpenter and the painter should be judged by the result of the work. In other words, mission means a product.

If the mission of Europe is really complete, it is necessary to say clearly what the mission of Europe was.

2

From the imperial attempts to unite Europe (Charlemagne, Dante, Napoleon, Hitler) up to the republican projects (Campanella, Montesquieu, De Gaulle, Sully) and up to the modern concept of the European Union, the political thought of Europe is located within the discourse designated by the social concepts of the Renaissance, the dispute between Republican and imperial thought. In part, this dispute is described by the conflict between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, but, going beyond this confrontation, it reveals the mechanism of the reciprocating movement of the European state. Political theories – counting the most grotesque: fascism and communism – can and should be considered within this reciprocating mechanism, the very functioning of which is nothing more than a form of European self-consciousness. The Renaissance, which armed the political thinkers of the fifteenth century with examples of Roman statehood, established historical reflection as an actual tool for state-building.

The Renaissance – that is, palingenesis, a process that constantly updates the culture and civilization of Europe by rethinking its own resources – has become the principle of Europe’s life. In this case, the phenomenon of “Rebirth” is considered not as a local phenomenon of the history of Italy in the fifteenth century, but as a fundamental phenomenon for the vital activity of the cultural organism, as a permanent self-knowledge. Palingenesis is a phenomenon that brings to life deep layers of history and consciousness, and such a permanent reincarnation is the life of Europe. We cannot expect from palingenesis that this process will certainly revive the concept of Greek republicanism (as Palmieri hoped), and not the Roman Empire, as it was revealed in the totalitarian European retro-empires of the twentieth century.

When you delve into the past, you cannot predict how deep you will go in your return, and what exactly will become the subject of reflection: paganism, monotheism, imperialism, or the republic. Sad as it may sound, twentieth-century fascism was also nothing more than a palingenesis characteristic of European political thinking, and Hitler and Mussolini are no less heroes of the European Renaissance than Michelangelo and Rinuccini. (It is interesting that Göring defined

himself as “the last man of Renaissance”). The historical reflection of Europe is an ambivalent process, and, most likely, we are now in the phase of palingenesis, which revives empires and fascism. The step taken by Europe today by which it once again recognizes itself as a set of nations, and not as a single organism, seems already critically dangerous; only a new emperor can govern a nationalist Europe; and politics provokes exactly this development of actions. Europe has reached its fascist stage of palingenesis. Do not think that this is an irreversible process, that this is a verdict.

Our ability to resist ideology, to preserve the values of humanism, may and should overcome the time of common blind enthusiasm, natural greed, aggression. Whatever happens: whether Europe becomes a victim of any of the new Empires or Europe itself produces an unexpected leader of the European Empire (Putin, Navalny, Erdogan are just sketches of possible figures) – this is not of fundamental importance for the process of palingenesis: the return to the roots will produce necessary figures. Much more important is how to overcome another reversal.

Regularly recurring fascism is one of the forms of Europe’s reflective self-consciousness, which does not mean that the Republican humanist Renaissance will not be repeated; it will certainly be repeated.

The algorithms of the new humanistic Renaissance are already clear today. Neo-pagan, nationalist Europe (we have to speak now about it as if it has gone already to extremes, although, as an example, we can consider the European past of a century ago) will change the vector of its development when the aesthetic code of Europe changes, as was done in the Renaissance of the 14th and 15th centuries. This is exactly what happened in the forties of the last century, during the struggle against European fascism. With regret, we can state that the return to the humanistic Renaissance paradigm was short-lived; the return to humanism was not typical of the aesthetic code of the twentieth century, and it is the key question of European history: it is the aesthetics of Europe that determines its history and politics. Only at first glance, it seems that the problem of the aesthetic code of Europe is a secondary, servicing thing, not the main one in comparison with the pressing issues: with geopolitics, the nature of labour, migration, and the stratification of society. In reality, the opposite is true.

Using the aesthetic code to characterize a culture, to understand what to expect from the carriers of this genetics, is most fruitful. It was the “aesthetic code”, by the way, that Spengler also used to determine the time of the life of the Western culture. A person builds society in accordance with the aesthetic code that has formed his personal morality and judgment about society: otherwise, social construction does not occur. Throughout the twentieth century, the time that Hobsbawm defined as the “age of extremes”, humanity lives in a new aesthetic paradigm, in the paradigm of the so-called “avant-garde”. Since the aesthetic code of the “Renaissance” was replaced in Europe by the code of the “avant-garde” in the tenth years of the twentieth century, many social changes have taken place: wars and border movements, retro-empires and decolonization, terror and rehabilitation. Power changed, revolutions and counter-revolutions alternated, and only the code of the “avant-garde”, the new style of thinking of the European man, remained unchanged. Resisting the new style of thinking proved as difficult as resisting revolutions: any aesthetic Vendée (neo-Thomism or neo-Kantianism, as well as the so-called religious tradition) was by no means limited in influence. Avant-garde appeared as a language necessary for a mass audience, as a manipulative and directive declaration. Bright, passionate, democratic (intelligible to everyone) – it became necessary to say so, because no change could be made outside of the appeal to the “people”, even in the direction of counter-revolution, of royal power, and “democracy” needed a manipulative, symbolic language. The avant-garde has changed the consciousness of the

European: the entire twentieth century is the age of the “avant-garde” consciousness, and the “new man” is already a being created not in the image and likeness of God, but the product of the avant-garde aesthetics: a man of the elements and passions, the product of primary elements.

The language of the avant-garde, the new aesthetic code of Europe, has become the ubiquitous language of democracy, which until now had no aesthetic code of its own. This is a very important point: until the avant-garde of the twentieth century appeared democracy had no language which would not differ from the language of the empire. Winckelmann explained to us the difference between the aesthetics of the Greek Republic and the Roman Empire, but to tell the truth, the general classical lesson that Europe learned from this explanation turned out to be imperial. The Great French Revolution used the plastic language of the empire, and the transition from the Bourbons to the Jacobins, then to the Napoleonic Empire, then again to the Bourbons and again to Napoleon, now the Third, then to the Republic of Thiers – all this ornate path of searching for a social form remained within the same, imperial figurative language. “The street writhes without language, it has nothing to shout and talk with” (a line from Mayakovsky’s poem) – this was noticed at a time when democracy imperiously declared that from now on a different aesthetic code is required in the world: the language of the masses is needed.

The European avant-garde revealed to the world the spirit of daring, renewal, and so-called “freedom” hidden in the depths of culture, and many associated this spirit with social renewal and progress, but the most adequate description of this spirit is the “will to power”, in the completely Nietzschean sense of this metaphor (and if Nietzsche himself was a great individualist, he paradoxically awakened the mass will to power). Very quickly it became clear (it became clear empirically, in the practice of unsuccessful revolutions) that it is impossible to build a republic out of the material of the vanguard. In the new aesthetics, the power of the sign over the image, the power of the element over the mind, and – as an inevitable result – the power of ideology and propaganda over philosophy emerged. The specific matter of the avant-garde consciousness, namely, the power of the elements and natural forces, produces only tribal feelings, which are given the meaning of radical, breakthrough in relation to tradition. Tribal feelings are cast only in the form of totalitarian hierarchical states, although at first glance they appeal to “freedom”. It so often happens that the impulse of national liberation is shaped into a nationalist dictatorship, since the motive is tribal feeling. The power of the natural chthonic impulse of the vanguard is used by the dictatorship with the greater success, because this is the essence of the dictatorship: the power of the natural hierarchy. Many avant-gardists realized this highly annoying paradox after the fact. Nietzsche, like Malevich (the most Nietzschean artist), or the futurists, or the surrealists, embodied this imperious impulse that destroys the familiar (declared obsolete) morality of the Enlightenment – in the name of a new system, and what exactly this system will be, what exactly democracy will be, what will be the choice of the people – this remained a guess. In fact, the neo-pagan impulse of the avant-garde was returning the consciousness of European man to a state that preceded the short-lived historical experiment of “Christian humanism”. In the future, the so-called “Christian civilization”, while retaining its name, actually dispensed with the adjective “Christian”. Throughout the brutal twentieth century, Europe tried to build republics from the material of pagan elements – but it turned out to be dictatorships.

Reason refuses to accept the fact, common sense protests, and yet the so-called art of the “vanguard” inspired both fascists and Communists, both those who built the camps and those who resented their existence. And this is understandable: a sign (unlike an image) is filled with any content, sign art is manipulative, designed to control the enthusiasm of the masses. For the modern

average progressive Democrat, it is natural to dislike Stalin, Ezhov and Mussolini, and at the same time it is natural to love Rodchenko, Malevich and Marinetti; and this is despite the fact that Rodchenko and Marinetti are the same singers of violence as Ezhov and Mussolini, and Malevich is the same totalitarian organizer of public space as Stalin. The progressive democrat not only does not feel the contradiction of his tastes, he will be outraged if it is pointed out to him; this is as offensive as pointing out to the progressive demonstrator that he is fighting for the power of the element of the market, which inevitably gives rise to dictators.

There is a myth that Hitler did not like the avant-garde, and this, they say, is evidenced by the exhibition “Degenerate Art”, where the Nazis showed the avant-garde tendencies of painting. This is a false myth. The exhibition “Degenerate Art” was not directed against the avant-garde and abstraction, in no case against glyph-creativity and idolatry. In fact, the exhibition Degenerate Art showed only figurative works depicting a person - just not an Aryan idol, but a flawed intellectual. It was an exhibition that denied figurative art. The exhibition showed mainly works by Chagall, Kirchner, Beckmann, Kokoschka, Gross and other representatives of expressionism and the “new objectivity” – not Malevich’s squares and Duchamp’s urinal. Hitler really preferred “classical” forms, Mussolini adored futurism, Goering collected Renoir and Matisse, but the main thing is that the style of retro empires, the style of dictatorships (what we call the neo-classicism of Hitler’s Reich or Mussolini’s Rome or Stalin’s pompous art) is exactly the same pagan creation of idols as Malevich’s squares; this is exactly the same pagan art. The art of empires is by definition pagan – even if Empires pretend to use Christianity as ideology. This contradiction, hidden in the culture of Christian Empires, was also manifested in the era of the counter-Reformation - in the fires of the Inquisition (actual human sacrifices), and in Mussolini’s corporative state, which used Christian ideology along with the Roman, pagan ritual of organization, and in modern Russia, which combines Orthodoxy with a purely pagan nationalist ideology.

The fundamental contradiction of the history of the twentieth century is that by means of pagan propaganda, creating totems, they tried to build democracies – but by means of neo-paganism, only retro-empires can be built. The pagan language of the sign is the language of totalitarianism, and the consciousness of a person who believes in the element, in the sign, and in the idol, can produce nothing but dictatorship in principle. The Vanguard of Europe revealed the very process of *palingenesis*, characteristic of Europe, which resurrects deep, pre-Christian layers of culture. Unlike the Republican Renaissance of Florence, it was a total fascist *palingenesis* – and the twenty first century still lives in the paradigm of this return to paganism. The aesthetic code that Europe armed itself with at the very beginning of the twentieth century turned out to be adapted only for the construction of dictatorships; using this code, they tried to build republics – but democracies rapidly mutated into colonial powers, and the latter – into retro-empires. A new person, “free” from moral imperatives, was building a new “democratic” society, and what it would turn out to be was a surprise.

The paradox of the consciousness of the modern European is that the individual, whom the surrounding peoples perceive as a lazy rentier, a “parasite”, a museum exhibit, a vestige of the past, feeds his consciousness with radical elements of the avant-garde, non-objective elements of natural force and primary energy (this is what avant-garde art is designed to embody). This “pensioner” (as he is understood by the Russian nouveau riche or American dynamic businessmen), excites himself with violent melodies and totemic signs, this essential contradiction makes the pensioner dangerous, and above all he is dangerous to himself. It is by no means a question of replacing the secular consciousness of the modern citizen with a religious

consciousness (as the hasty reader or the religious fanatic may imagine). This is not only impossible, but also unnecessary: “vanguard” (that is, the resurrection of natural instincts and totems) is not just evil incarnate – it can also be perceived as a medicine: it depends on the dose. To deny the experience of the “avant-garde” and neo-pagan aesthetics is as absurd as to deny the aesthetics of Egypt or Rome, on the grounds that they do not know the Christian doctrine. We are only talking about the fact that the experience of the twentieth century, which led Europe to where it is now, should be rethought by a new round of Renaissance *palingenesis*, no longer pagan, but Christian. We are talking about the process that the European Enlightenment began, which translated Christian morality into the field of critical secular law-making, into the field of ethics, like Kant, or into the field of law-making, like Montesquieu. We are talking about the necessary continuity of the Enlightenment process, which in the history of Europe was aborted first by the Napoleonic wars, and then by the “age of extremes” and the “paganization”, that is, the neo-paganism of the twentieth century.

The mission of Europe, which consists primarily in the revival of the humanistic imperative, in the affirmation of the responsibility of everyone to the Republican society, must be embodied aesthetically again, with a new force – otherwise the Republican idea will never take place in social practice. A new effort of Rebirth (it should be borne in mind that Europe has made similar efforts more than once under similar conditions) will undoubtedly bring European society to a new level of self – consciousness – but this step must be made in aesthetics first. Once Europe managed to overcome idolatry, and then its mirror image – iconoclasm, overcame the vulgarity of the Empire style, outlived the aesthetics of fascism – but now a new effort is required, similar to the one that Moses made when he broke the golden calf.

What Europe needs to do today sounds extremely simple: it is necessary to eliminate the link between art and the market. Since democracy, whose identity with the market is practically legalized, recognizes the value of art only in the market equivalent, the transformation of the tablets into the Golden Calf was easy and natural. But Moses refused to build a free republic with a people who worshipped the Golden Calf. European civilization expresses itself primarily in aesthetics; what is happening in the twentieth century is the result of the mutation of European humanistic culture, namely, the result of the victory of the pagan idol over the human face, the result of the victory of the pagan sign, which replaced the human image. And the fact that the history of Europe has required neo-paganism as the language of democracy is disturbing.

The realisation that the image of an individual person is not a sign, not an element, but the image of a moral person that exists as a mirror reflecting God (or Platonic *eidos*, if a less didactic construction is required) can change a lot. And only an aesthetic change will change the social nature of society. The image of the moral man is lost in Europe – and the loss of trade unions, the loss of the freedom of the middle class, the elimination of the proletariat and internationalism are only consequences. There is nothing religious in such a statement, just an observation of the connection between aesthetics and ethics, as well as pure pragmatism: if the human image does not appear again, humanism has a very low chance. And waiting for the renewal of Europe in this case is hopeless. When and if the mystical concept of “multiculturalism” is replaced by the working concept of the Federation (the Federal Republic of Europe), then elementary social pragmatics will require the revival of a humanistic idea based on the responsibility of everyone to everyone, on the principles of Christian humanism. And then there must be a person – Hans Schnier, Picasso’s harlequin, Dr Rieux – who can implement this idea.

A European federation and a union of European republics are still possible, workers' solidarity and internationalism cannot be completely forgotten, and even Christian humanism still has a chance to consolidate such a federation, but in order to unite something, you need to have obvious moral values that require unification and complement each other. The elements cannot be combined.