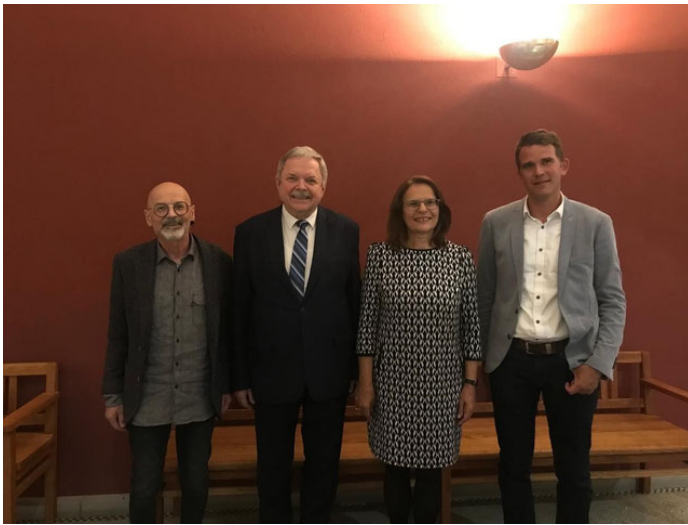




MYROSLAW MARYNOWYTSCH · 07. November 2023

An evening with Myroslaw Marynowytsch at the university of Zurich



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25 October 2023

Photo: from left to right: Max Hartmann, Myroslaw Marynowytsch, Nada Boškowska, Stefan Kube

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Stefan Kube from the ecumenical forum Religion and Society in East and West welcomes the large audience. He is also editor-in-chief of the journal "Religion and Society in East and West".

Nada Boškowska, Professor and Chair of the Department of Eastern European History at the University of Zurich's Department of History, will interview Myroslaw Marynowytsch and give him the opportunity to answer questions. In between, Max Hartmann will read excerpts from the German translation of Myroslaw's memoirs "Das Universum hinter dem Stacheldraht".

Introduction Stefan Kube

Myroslaw Marynowytsch is vice-director of the Catholic University in Lviv, human rights activist and author. In his book, he takes us into the world of the prison camp, which he himself experienced as a punishment for his commitment to human rights. How was it possible to act as a free person in an unfree country like the USSR, which was opposed to this?

He raises this question in his memoirs. Here is a quote from his book: "My life on the path of the dissident led me into the world of the camps, which was previously unknown to me. And what did I bring home with me?" This evening, Myroslaw, we want to follow in your footsteps as described in your memoirs. How was it possible to act like a free person in an unfree country like the USSR?

Myroslaw quotes another dissident and categorises his commitment as a double reaction to the dual nature of the USSR as a totalitarian state and a Russian empire disguised as a communist union. For him, the Ukrainian dissident

movement was, on the one hand, an attempt at democratic opposition to the totalitarian regime and, on the other, a national liberation struggle of the Ukrainian people.

I am very pleased to be able to introduce Myroslaw Myroslaw Marynowytsch to you. Nada Boškowska will talk to him later about social and political life in Soviet Ukraine, dissident culture, the beginnings of the Helsinki movement and the system of prison camps in the USSR. I will only briefly outline a few details of your life. Myroslaw was born in 1949 in western Ukraine, today's Lviv Oblast.

His grandfather was a priest in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Despite this, Myroslaw described himself as a temporary agnostic in his youth. His birth as a dissident took place in 1973, when he laid some flowers in front of the monument to Taras Shevchenko in Kiev. Three years later, in November 1976, he became a founding member of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group. In April 1977, he was arrested for so-called anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda.

He was interrogated for almost a year. In March 1978, he was sentenced to seven years in the notorious Perm 36 prison camp and five years in exile in Kazakhstan. Myroslaw was released in 1987 and returned to western Ukraine. In 1991, he was one of the co-founders of the Ukrainian Amnesty Group. From 1997 to 2007, he was Director of the Institute for Society at the Lviv Theological Academy, which later became the Ukrainian Catholic University.

He is still Vice Director of the Ukrainian Catholic University today. In 2010, he became President of the Ukrainian Centre of PEN International and is still its Honorary President. I think it is no exaggeration to say that Myroslaw is a widely recognised intellectual figure in Ukraine, who naturally also raises his voice on issues relating to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

It is above all thanks to Max Hartmann that we are able to welcome Myroslaw here in Zurich today. Max is the editor of the German version of Myroslaw's memoirs and will tell us more about the publication process in German later. Max Hartman is a former reformed pastor who is interested in social life behind the Iron Curtain.

First reading

After the outbreak of the Great War, Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, I started to find out how the media in Lviv, the city I knew and fell in love with from my visit in 2017, was reporting. I came across the very well-designed website of the Catholic University and the Vice-Rector Myroslaw Marynowytsch. I read about him there, that there is an English translation of his memoirs "The Universe Behind the Barbed Wire" and read it. The book made a huge impression on me and I thought that there should be a German translation right now, at the time of this war, that would allow us to understand the history of Ukraine and the struggle for its independence in depth.

I found Myroslaw's e-mail address and wrote to him with my feedback and the idea. He then wrote me back that there was already a German translation by a friend and colleague from his student days at the Polytechnic in Lviv. However, this text would need a lot of linguistic and stylistic revision, which I then did, always in contact with Myroslaw.

Now the first words of the book:

I experienced my birth as a dissident in Kyiv in the cabinet of an officer of the KGB. He headed the so-called "First Department" at the "Positron" company in Ivano-Frankivsk and all the employees of the plant were under his

surveillance. I had just returned from a business trip from Kyiv, where I had been arrested by the militia at the instigation of the KGB on 22 May 1973 because I had laid flowers at the memorial to Taras Shevchenko. For a KGB functionary from the provinces, it was an extraordinary case that threatened him in the form of an official reprimand. His pupil had committed a criminal offence, and this in front of the capital's KGB! I received a stern warning.

However, I realised that the "fatherly" advice had failed to have the desired effect when he warned me urgently:

"Remember: anyone who is not for us is against us."

I simply replied: "Well, then I'm against you."

I still marvel today that I risked speaking so clearly. Today, I would probably be more cautious: "On the one hand ..., on the other ..."

It was a great relief for me, like giving birth, when the first cry of the child promises that the labour pains of childbirth are over. Anyone who has experienced a similar release from fear will realise how much the soul breathes a sigh of relief when it is freed from the burden of uncertainty.

I will not be able to squeeze all the traits of a homo sovieticus out of myself until the end of my life: A person retains their "innate trauma" possibly forever. At the same time, I am grateful to God that on this day, which was so important for me, I emerged from the ideological cocoon of a "Soviet man" and began an active life as a dissident and dissenter.

Conversation between Nada Boškowska and Myroslaw Marynowytsch

Thank you for being here with us, for coming to talk to us about your book, which has been translated into German. It was first published in Ukraine in 2016, if I'm correct. Perhaps first a few words about the Helsinki Committees and how it came about that these committees were founded. You were arrested in 1977 as a co-founder of the Helsinki Committee.

So I would first like to say a few words about the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, which was very important, because this conference led to the establishment of all these committees.

The conference was decisive for the later development in Eastern Europe and even for the collapse of the socialist system. The irony is that it was originally Eastern Europe that had proposed such a conference in 1967. When the idea had already ended up on the scrapheap, it actually materialised a few years later. The conference opened in Helsinki on 3 July 1973. All European states, [...] with the exception of Albania, took part in this conference, as well as the neighbouring states of Eastern Europe, the USA and Canada.

The conference was not a single conference. It was a whole series of conferences. And in the end, two years of negotiations took place in Geneva. The Final Act was signed in Helsinki on 1 August 1975. It was a declaration of intent. In it, the signatory states committed themselves to the inviolability of borders, the peaceful settlement of disputes and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states.

What is it all about? Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms was important for us and for the Eastern European states. The Eastern European states committed themselves to respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, and co-operation in the areas of business, science and the environment was also agreed. The Helsinki Panel Act is not a treaty under international law, but a self-committing declaration by the state. The aim was to help East and West in Europe to live together in an organised way.

It later turned out that the agreement on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, became very important for the Eastern European states. Since these states, including the Soviet Union, had signed the declaration, their citizens could claim that their states had committed themselves to this fundamental freedom. This was therefore an argument that citizens could use. Numerous groups were founded, including in the Soviet Union, including the Ukrainian group that you, Myroslaw, co-founded. Hence my first question to you:

Can you tell us about the beginnings of your human rights group? [...] What were the specific reasons for founding it in the first place and how did it work? How did you work?

Thank you. Good evening everyone. Let me postpone answering your question for a few minutes to take this opportunity to start with my gratitude. First of all, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Pastor Max Hartman for putting so much effort into bringing this volume, this translation, into German for publication. For me, this is a great honour and a privilege. Now I can say that there is also a German translation of my book. Thank you very much.

Then I would like to thank Stefan Kube for supporting my trip to Zurich financially and for giving me the opportunity to meet you all here. Thank you for inviting me to the university, because it's a privilege for me to be here, and thank you all for coming tonight.

Now to your question. I remember that time as a time of opening, a new wave, because after the two waves of arrests of Ukrainian cultural workers in 1965 and 1972, it was clear that real socialism could exist with a human face. There was the idea that it was possible. No, at least in the Soviet Union it was impossible. But what then? Where is the way to fight for human rights, for freedom, for the right to express ourselves? And then came the idea of human rights, and the idea of the Helsinki movement, the idea of the third basket of the Final Act, of human rights. It was a compromise between the West and the Soviet Union. But for the Soviet Union, the first and second baskets were very important, and therefore stable post-war borders. Securing its sphere of influence.

For the West, the third basket was important as human rights. And we decided to support this idea. Because we knew very well that Brezhnev's signature on this document meant nothing. We knew that. But we needed someone to illustrate it.

And all these five Helsinki groups that appeared in the Soviet Union did this work. We acted as a litmus paper to show that the Soviet Union was not honouring its promises. And yes, after several months of hesitation, the Soviet Union decided to conclude with the Helsinki groups. In the Soviet Union, the first arrests took place in Moscow and then in Kyiv.

And all of us who were not arrested were warned that we would be arrested if we did not stop our activities. Well, we didn't stop. We were arrested. I remember hearing from my interrogator that if I didn't repent, my official title would be that of one of the most dangerous state criminals. I laughed and said: "Wait a minute, are we more dangerous to Soviet rule than murderers? The answer was yes, because a murderer kills one or two people, and you kill the spirit of the souls of so many people.

So the idea of human rights was not at all acceptable to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union insinuated that this idea would undermine Soviet rule, the Soviet system, from within. And that was very true, because the most important thing that held the Soviet Union together was the fear from the Stalin era.

But the Helsinki Movement did not give up, could not be stopped. The Helsinki movement put an end to this feeling of fear. We proclaimed that we were not acting against the government, we were not questioning the Soviet Union system. We were fighting for human rights. We published our names, published our address, I mean, in our materials that were published abroad, not in the Soviet Union, of course.

But it was important that we were not an underground group, because it was easy for the Soviet population, if the group hides, then he is an enemy. We did not hide. We announced our goals, we gave our names and addresses and that was it. So it was a pure human rights activity, without additional goals, but perhaps a little more concrete.

What were your goals, the concrete activities?

We had the Final Act, especially the third basket, the text of it. And then we had our reality, when some poets, some writers were arrested and spent some time in prison just because they were spreading their ideas abroad. They published their works abroad. Their punishment was a clear violation of the Helsinki Agreement, which gives people the right to spread their ideas everywhere, not only in their own country.

And we then collected many situations, many facts about the violation of human rights and thus of the agreement.

By the time I was arrested, we had compiled twelve documents. Twelve documents on the violation of the Helsinki Final Act. [Of course, we had no way of publishing them in the Soviet Union. So, together with other Moscow friends, we passed this document, this memorandum, on to Western journalists or diplomats, and these documents were brought to Western countries through diplomatic channels, I don't know exactly how, by post, and published there. And later we heard our documents on Radio Liberty, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle and so on.

So that was our activity. And all these documents were later mentioned in my conviction as documentation, as evidence of my guilt.

Which article did you violate? Actually, it couldn't have been freedom of speech and so on. So they had to invent an offence against something?

Yes, there was Article 62 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code and almost the same in Article 70 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, the one about "anti-Soviet activities" with the aim of undermining the system, the state. This was punishable by seven years in prison and five years of exile, the maximum penalty.

Did you really have such plans, which were perhaps dangerous for the Soviet Union? What were your goals? Did you perhaps dream of an independent Ukraine? Or were you just fighting for freedom of speech, for example?

Of course, we didn't talk about the independence of Ukraine in our material, but we did talk about the cultural rights of Ukrainians.

We talked about the religious rights of Ukrainians. There were some religious communities. For example, the Greek-Catholic one. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Also some Protestant groups, some Baptist groups, which were not allowed to exist in the Soviet Union.

And we campaigned for their freedom. Religious freedom. Incidentally, it was interesting that during the interrogation the interrogator showed me an appeal from the Baptists, who were not recognised in our country, from the USA, in which they appealed to their believers to pray for all members of the Helsinki groups who had been arrested at that time. So they had learnt that we were fighting for their religious freedom.

Second reading - The arrest and the moment just before entering the prison camp

The new rhetoric on human rights was particularly evident when Brezhnev signed the final document on behalf of the Soviet Union at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) on 1 August 1975, the "third basket" of which included the obligation of states to respect human rights. It obviously did not occur to Brezhnev that there could be people who took the rights and freedoms he had signed unmistakably seriously.

At that time, every word that was mentioned was written in blood. Every note left on someone's desk was secretly scrutinised by KGB agents or confiscated during searches. The mention of any person in the papers was a reason to order them to the KGB for interrogation. Even a trivial visit or an encounter with someone on the street automatically led to the person being added to the KGB's list of suspects. This meant that attention had to be paid not only to one's own fate, but also to the fate of others. ...

On the morning of 23 April 1977, Mykola Matusevych and I were in his sister's flat on Lepse Street in Kyiv, where we had spent the night. At half past six we suddenly heard the doorbell ring. Tamila got up, went to the door and asked: "Who's there?" Outside, a woman's voice called out: "A telegram!" Tamila opened the door - and there was almost nothing left in the flat except these "heroes" of the state. Again and again we heard: "Quiet! Quiet!" But Mykola's raised voice was not easy to calm ... It was one of the KGB's typical tricks. ...

We were told that the whole flat would be searched and that a body search would be carried out, but somewhere else. We got ready. ... We were taken back to the KGB's Kyiv city precinct on Rosa Luxemburg Street and placed in different rooms. That gave us time to calm down.

The iron door crashed shut behind me - and I landed in a completely different world, a completely new life. My body continued to twitch for a good week. I pondered what still needed to be done and what needed to be passed on to whom. The feeling of mental stress kept coming up ... Then I calmed down and finally came to terms with it: "You, young man, you're staying here for a long time. You can't change it, so calm down." This brought a certain relief, as everything became clear and predictable. The uncertainty was over. I used to get up and think: "When will I be arrested: today or tomorrow?" Now it was simply a fact: you're under arrest!

Before being sent to the camp

During this time, I was once taken to the prison yard to be released. Suddenly I saw a hinged window open to the outside - and didn't see anyone, but then I heard a voice: "I'm Semen Glusman. Who are you?" I gave my name. "Did you know that

all the members of the Helsinki Groups have been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize?" "What? No, that's impossible!" For me, this news was like an "earthquake of magnitude seven". Back in the cell, I began to think further, completely astonished: "Oh my God, Nobel Prize winner! If this was really the case, how could it be possible? Would I be released for the award ceremony?" I wanted it so much ... if it weren't for the temptation of a special honour. What I experienced back then was extremely important for my whole life, it became like a kind of medical immunisation for me.

Continuation of the conversation and questions

We have heard how you were arrested and sent to the camp, how did you survive those years under very harsh conditions in that notorious camp?

I have great respect for explaining my actions back then with what I would say today. That is often a great temptation. But, as I remember, I was a young man then and I was 28, and to say to myself then that I was afraid and that I didn't want to start this group and join this group would mean that I would lose my self-respect.

There were two of us, my boyfriend and I, and it's always easier to go together. We made up our minds, didn't we? Yes, we understand that this activity could end with an arrest break. Well, that's just our way.

And when, after I was arrested, I read the material that had been collected about me - I just said to myself: OK, this is what it looks like now, so this is it. I accepted it. The second thought, of course, was about my mum, how she was going to survive.

So it wasn't just theoretical, of course it was painful, but that was my path. And I remember all those difficult moments in my life in prison when I was close to death. Well, let me give you an example. I was transported on a special train from one place to another. And a guard took me out of my cell on the train, put me in a special place, pointed the gun at me and said I'm going to kill you now.

He was either drunk or drugged, I don't know. But it was the moment: well, maybe my life will be over in a second. But I can't remember the thought. Oh.

Why did I do that? I'm young and now I'm going to die. I accept what this path means to me, and I'm very grateful that I went down it. You can believe that you can keep peace in your soul in places like this. Because you are on the right side of history.

Reading your book, I got the impression that language is also very important. The Ukrainian language was very important to you. You even spoke Ukrainian with the guards in the camp. So can you tell us a bit about what the language means to you? Why is it so important and what status did the Ukrainian language have in Ukraine at the time?

First of all, the Ukrainian language is my mental space. I live in this language, I think in this language. So it is not a question of whether I have accepted it or not. It is my nature. I remember how it was when I spoke Ukrainian openly with my friend in Kyiv, not today, but back in the 70s on the transport in Kyiv, when we spoke Ukrainian loudly, many people looked at us as good nationalists, something dangerous - many, many faces looked at us because it was too challenging.

I can't say that we immediately read newspapers in Ukrainian. There were some radio stations in Ukrainian. The vision at that time in the Soviet Union was that there would be a transformation of nations into a Soviet nation with a Russian language. Presenting yourself openly in Ukrainian meant that you didn't fit in with this official line. When I came to the labour camp, it was easy on the one hand because most of the prisoners were Ukrainian and we could easily communicate in Ukrainian.

There was also a KGB officer who spoke Ukrainian freely with us, but we preferred that he didn't speak Ukrainian, but he did speak Ukrainian with us.

We didn't miss Ukraine in the labour camp, it was among us. At the same time, I remember my mother's brief visit to the camp. It took her three days to get from the Lviv region to the Perm region near the Ural Mountains. She arrived and then I was warned that I was only allowed to speak to my mother in Russian for those two hours. I refused.

Then my mum persisted. She conveyed to me the request, please, please, I had such a long journey to you, please speak Russian. Okay? I decided that I would speak Russian.

My mum's Russian wasn't that good. So it was an ordeal for the two of us and we knew perfectly well that the KGB officer spoke perfect Ukrainian and there were others among the guards who were Ukrainian, so it wasn't a problem that nobody spoke that language. It was just a special kind of torture. I was wet with humiliation during those 2 hours and I decided that I will never personally force anyone to speak a language other than their mother's because that is torture. It is torture.

You said that when you came to Kyiv from western Ukraine, people looked at you suspiciously because you spoke Ukrainian. How did you perceive the people in Kyiv, who mainly spoke Russian? What did you think about them? Did you think they were Ukrainian or Russian? Why don't they speak Ukrainian?

Well, first of all, we have to distinguish between Russians, ethnic Russians who speak their own language, Russian, and Ukrainians who speak Russian. The first group speaks Russian legitimately and I have nothing against that. My perception of those who spoke Russian at the time, even though Ukrainian was their mother tongue, was the following: They are the result of massive and ongoing Russification. I can't say that they need to be forced to return to Ukrainian today. Above all, I would like to see the Russification stopped and then the opportunity for them, for their families, to return to their mother tongue.

But no pressure, give the opportunity, encourage; not violence against them.

Stefan said that as a young person you were not really religious. You were agnostic, as you write in the book, but you became more and more religious. What role or importance did religion have in your life? Maybe in the camp, to survive the camp as a human being, as a sane human being, or for your life?

Well, this big question for Ukraine, what does religion mean in Ukraine? Ukrainian people then and now, if we go a little bit into the present. To answer this question, I need at least two. I will try to be brief. First of all, there was no big

change in my soul due to the change from agnostic to believer. Because as an agnostic, I fought for the truth, for justice.

Then when I became a believer, I understood that these are another name of God - and that's all. So there was no tension in me.

But then, from a Christian point of view, it is very important to me to be prepared to be persecuted for the search for truth.

It's a direct link to the gospel.

I didn't realise that at the time when I was in prison, it was just peace in my heart, as I said. But later, when I left prison, the labour camp, I didn't feel so peaceful. What changed in me? And then I understood that I was at peace then because my daily life was justified by the fact that I was fighting for the truth and being persecuted for the truth. When I left prison I had to earn that blessing, I have to work now, it's not automatically justified.

I'm not sure if you understand me in the full sense, but it was very visible that I even feel that way. We all probably remember the following word from Jesus. He appealed to the believers I was in prison and you have come to me. So this is an important moment, because Jesus did this first. He comes to us in prison. He invites us to do what he does first, and he comes to the prisoners who are suffering in vain.

This religious moment very clear, very visible in the prison, of course, the solidarity with the people. Some people were not immediately ready for the religious dimension. But the fact that the Soviet Union is an atheist country and we are forced to be non-religious in a prison, everything religious was forbidden, everything, you were not allowed to pray, not even together. Because of this pressure, the typical reaction of people is: I want to reject this atheism, I want to get close to religion.

Let me give you a few examples from religious life in the camp, where I desperately needed the Bible.

When I became a believer, I had to read it and of course there was no Bible in the camp library. But it was strange that there was a strange gospel there, an atheistic book. The trick, which was very important for me, was the following: This atheist book quoted some verses from the Gospel, so I didn't read all this atheist blah blah blah. I read these quotes, but in the end that wasn't enough for me and I decided to announce a hunger strike demanding the right to read the Bible. And I went on this hunger strike for 20 days.

At some point, perhaps on day 14, I was fed through a tube. The tube was pushed all the way into my stomach and they filled it with liquid food. That's how they tried to keep me alive.

But on the 20th day, there was a serious conversation inside me. On the one hand, I still want to read the Bible, but on the other hand, even without the Bible, I know that suicide is against Christianity.

So I have to make a decision. I have decided to give up. Maybe I have to say it was the voice of my body, maybe, who knows? But at least I have decided to give up. What should I say? Because I would like to say how I was rewarded by

God for this hunger strike.

The KGB officer wanted to punish me for this hunger strike and they transferred me to solitary confinement when I decided to eat. A person wants to eat after 20 days, but then during the transfer they give you half a loaf of bread. 450 grams of bread and a salt fish.

That's not the food you have to eat after 20 days of hunger strike. But I ate slowly, slowly, but an hour later there was no more bread and no more salt fish. I still want to eat more. They took me to another cell where three criminals were sitting and looking at me. I greeted them, sat down and without a word, I didn't hear a word, they took their bread out of their pockets and put it in front of me.

It was a wonderful moment, above all a very moving moment. I remember crying and eating the bread because they saw that I was hungry. So they gave it to me. Later, I decided that it was my duty to return this gift. And when I was in exile in Kazakhstan, there were people who worked at a very low social level, people with no family, semi-criminal, so to speak, but they worked in this village and sometimes they had nothing to eat. They knew that they were allowed to come to my house and I looked after them. I had my little room at that time in Kazakhstan and I would definitely feed them - in memory of these criminals. So that's the religious experience. There is a human nature, even in criminals.

I think it's time to give the audience the opportunity. I'm sure there will be questions.

I would like to ask a question in Ukrainian. I really appreciate the decision of the former Russian-speaking Ukrainians to change the language and switch to Ukrainian and I am proud when I see the enthusiasm with which they do it.

I remember the moment when twenty Ukrainian soldiers were brought from the front to Lviv to rest for a few days and to have some meetings and discussions and so on. I talked to them about my experiences in prison.

They asked questions. Two of them spoke Russian, asked me questions in Russian. I couldn't tell them that I don't speak Russian with them because they are now fighting for my freedom on the front line. On the one hand, I appreciate those who change the language. On the other hand, I would prefer that this is their own decision. I don't want some people to be forced into a violent solution.

I would like to thank you for visiting us and for organising this. I have a very small comment on your story about Kyiv, because I am from Kyiv and I really want to tell you that. And then one more question and a short comment: I was born in 1985, so in the Soviet Union. But when I went to school, Ukraine fortunately became independent and I had the opportunity to learn Ukrainian. My mother was born in Kiev in 1960 and had no opportunity to attend a Ukrainian school.

So her generation was completely uneducated. But my grandparents, who are from Kyiv, always spoke Ukrainian at home, but when they went to work they had to switch to Russian for their protection. So I would also like to tell you that it is not true when people say that Kyiv is a Russian-speaking city, because many people who come from Kyiv originally spoke Ukrainian. And a question for you, you inspire many people with your story as someone who fights, who is willing to sacrifice his own life. You knew the danger you were putting yourself in to fight for rights and freedom. And I also read a lot about dissident movements.

These were people who had no clear future in the sense that nobody told them that Ukraine would be independent. It was just a dream. During the Soviet era, nobody promised them that either. But even in the camps, people went on hunger strike or protested and fought for their freedom. How do you explain this Ukrainian phenomenon of people not giving up despite hundreds of years of Russian propaganda? They were still people like you with this phenomenal will to freedom, because other nations don't have that.

Thank you for this comment. You are right. I remember a moment told to me by Oleshchevchenko, another dissident, who was traumatised by the fact that his mother had a heart attack.

He called the ambulance and began to explain the situation in Ukraine in Ukrainian. The ambulance's response was: "Speak a human language."

At the moment when his mother suffered a heart attack, he was so frustrated that he had to hear this from the mouth of a human being.

Now I would like to challenge the proposition that other nations do not have this urge for freedom, because it seems to me that there is no nation at all without this desire. We can talk about the differences. For example, some eastern nations in Asia are more suited to autocratic rules and do not need freedom of speech.

For example, I remember a Kazakh, an old Kazakh, saying to me during perestroika, oh, this is a wrong tendency, a wrong tendency, freedom of speech.

Only one person has to speak, everyone else obeys. So this is the mentality of another civilisation, but they are also human beings, and they want to live in freedom. So this is a small correction, but the peculiarity of the Ukrainian nation is really the fact of the urge for freedom, and it was described very eloquently by our interrogators. They told it like this:

Ukrainians are always rebelling, and these rebellions are constantly increasing. We have to keep cutting off these excesses until we have peace. So we will cut them now during our arrests, we will cut now, and then we will have a peaceful existence for ten years. I have the impression that Putin is now very sorry that Ukraine had the opportunity to develop for 30 years, and now the whole population wants to be free. Not just dissidents, but the entire population.

First of all, thank you very much for coming. It's a pleasure to meet you and to hear about your experiences. I have a question, and if it's too personal, you don't have to answer it, of course. Both you and Professor Boškowska mentioned earlier the very diverse religious landscape in Ukraine in terms of Christian denominations. Since you were first an atheist and later became religious, I wonder which denomination you chose and why, or if you belong to any denomination at all.

I am a Greek Catholic.

Greek Catholic means that we are Orthodox in our rituals but belong to the Catholic family and have the Pope as our spiritual leader.

This church was banned since 1946 until 1989, when Gorbachev visited John Paul II, the Pope, and they agreed on religious freedom for Greek Catholics. And after that it was able to come out of the underground into the open. Now this church [...] is not the largest in Ukraine, but I would say quite influential.

Thank you for everything you have shared with us. I would be interested in a part of your biography. You spoke about your imprisonment in a labour camp. After that, as far as I know, you were exiled to Kazakhstan. I would be interested to know how I can imagine this life in Kazakhstan. What was your life like? What was your daily routine like? Did you work? I have no idea what it was like to be exiled somewhere in the Soviet Union, as opposed to being imprisoned, for example.

Thank you. For seven years, actually six years, one year of which was in pre-trial detention, then six years was in a labour camp. That meant that I was locked up in a small compound surrounded by three rows of barbed wire.

Of course, we couldn't move outside the camp. Later, in exile, I was placed in a village, a Kazakh village, a fairly remote village. I was able to move around freely in this village. I worked as a carpenter. I had a small room for my private needs and my relatives could come and stay with me.

Later my wife came to me: I had no right to leave this village and move more than 30 kilometres around. But the first place of residence between this village and the next village was 50 kilometres away. So there was no chance of visiting any human beings. And I also had to be checked by the police from time to time to make sure I was really there. But the Kazakh militiaman understood that I wasn't a criminal.

He trusted me not to run away. So he didn't do all the checks. He was also the first person to tell me that God had pardoned my guilt and released me two years earlier.

I would like to know how you assess your personal influence or the influence of the Helsinki Group on the further course of history in Ukraine? Or perhaps on the collapse of the USSR?

The influence was quite big. Perhaps not in a political sense, because the members of the Helsinki Group were not politicians and I did not want to join any political group during independence. But of course the Helsinki Group had a political significance and consequence.

I would say that the most important consequence was that people realised for the first time that they no longer had to be afraid. Not because they didn't see that we had arrested people: No, that there are people who are not afraid. That is important, the example of such people and then the idea of moral authority.

Where is the moral authority to be found? Lenin, other communist leaders? After that, people heard nothing more in this sense. Yes, these dissidents sacrificed their freedom. Then they really are moral authorities.

I'm sorry to have to say this now, because I belong to this group: I don't pretend to be a moral authority. But that was people's perception. So the influence was great. Later, some members of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group became politicians and turned the human rights groups into a pre-political [...] activity. It didn't give them the right to organise a party, but it was possible to organise something like a party, and that was also important.

Third reading: "I have a dream"

I believe that the day will come when what has not yet been achieved will be realised:

- 1) the crimes of communism will be categorised as crimes against humanity in a worthy trial. The true nature of communist wickedness will be exposed and all the illusions and temptations that led to the sin of communism will be recognised just as consciously as was the case with the sin of National Socialism.
- 2) Putin and his clique, together with all their Janokuvych-type satellites, will be condemned by an international tribunal for their attempts to renew the past evil of communism and thus destroy the basis of civilisation.
- 3) All peoples that were communist until recently, and Russia in particular, must undergo a catharsis that cleanses them of the legacy of their own communist "demons" (Dostoevsky) and with which they jointly recognise their guilt for glorifying the communist beast. Western Europe will also have to undergo a cleansing catharsis, where the trivialisation or even enthusiasm for communism, the apocalyptic beast in the Eastern European peoples, has been cultivated and even legitimised.
- (4) The peoples who until recently were dominated by communism must accept their own responsibility for their bloody past and repent.
- 5) God's hour will come when all these spiritually purified peoples take off their clothes soiled by the countless victims of communism and then do what only the victim is morally entitled to do: forgive.

Only when the crimes of communism are truly condemned in solidarity, the common guilt for its glorification is recognised and all the crimes they have inflicted on each other in the state of communist aberration are mutually forgiven, will these peoples achieve the final victory over communism and the formerly "blood-soaked soils" be transformed into a place of true reconciliation and well-being.



Kommentar schreiben

Kommentare: 0

#1

Name: *

Eintrag: *