



Czech Ex-president Václav Klaus: The Progressively Growing Self-Destruction of the West and Its Acceleration by the Covid Epidemic

Description

CZECH REPUBLIC: Many thanks for the invitation. It is great to visit Warsaw at this beautiful time of year and to have the opportunity to address this important gathering after a year of no travels, no conferences and no speeches abroad. Many thanks to the organizers for succeeding to push this event through in spite of all obstacles connected with the corona epidemic. In the last couple of months, people like me have been receiving countless letters with cancelations of already scheduled conferences. Once again, many thanks to all who made today's meeting possible.

Preparing, organizing and carrying out a conference in the present days of **the artificially created panic, confusion and chaos** is a great achievement. **I deliberately mention the man-made factors rather than the Covid-19 epidemic itself.** I have no doubts that the consequences of **the politically driven, politically formulated, politically motivated methods** to fight the coronavirus by means of flat restrictive measures, so called lockdowns, are bigger, deeper and more dangerous than the threat connected with the medical aspects of the epidemic itself. And they will have longer lasting consequences. I know that explicitly saying this is politically highly incorrect. The exponents of the coronavirus apocalyptic doctrine would no doubt not be happy hearing it.

In the first of my two books devoted to this issue[1], published already back in April 2020, I stressed that I am **more afraid of the people** who would try to abuse the epidemic to suppress freedom and democracy **than of the virus itself.** I also dared express my fear that **"the epidemic would open the door to a huge expansion of government intervention into our lives"**. And this is what bothers me. And not only me.

In the moment of the fall of communism, we were convinced that this evil, corrupted and oppressive system was over and believed it could never come back. We wanted to make full use of our historic chance and go ahead and reestablish freedom, traditional values and institutions, free markets, sovereignty of nations, free and independent universities, academies, etc. The titles of today's panels – academic freedom, classical values in the postmodern world, the heritage of the Latin civilization – suggest that the organizers of today's gathering see it similarly, if not identically.

In our part of the world, we still remember communism. I used to have very friendly, productive and quite intensive contacts with my Polish colleagues both in the communist era and in the first years that followed. We were at that time very resolute in our refusal of communism, in spite of the fact that we had many productive disputes about where to go from there and how to do it. The goals we wanted to achieve were, however, the same. We were no empty idealists, we believed in pragmatism and realism, not in the irresponsible promotion of wishful thinking and of all kinds of utopias. As the distinguished French political philosopher **Chantal Delsol** once put it, we wanted to cope with “all the unlearned lessons of the twentieth century” and didn’t want to repeat the old mistakes.

Our thinking was based on three constants, on three fundamental building blocks of free society, on three entities which we considered crucial for the European (and Central European) civilization – **the man, the family and the nation**. Not long ago I used to call them constants, but I have become more and more nervous that I might have been wrong. They ceased to be constants.

These three pillars have been brutally attacked during the last decades by the new progressivist ideology which succeeded in controlling and dominating our today’s world. The exponents of this ideology try aggressively to discredit the past and the values and behavioral patterns connected with it. Achieving this asks for nothing less than for “a revolution against our culture, against our history, our countries and ourselves” says **John O’Sullivan** (Hungarian Review, No 4, 2020). It is our task to stop it. We have to interrupt moving into the brave new world, so eloquently described by **Aldous Huxley** 90 years ago. We shouldn’t capitulate to the powerful, loud and unscrupulous opponents of free society and to the various aggressive pressure groups (financed by well-known “unselfish” and “altruistic” sponsors and patrons).

I discussed these issues many times in Poland. In 2012, when receiving the honorary doctorate from the Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University, I said that “we probably had not fully understood the far-reaching implications of the 1960s. **This was a moment of the radical denial of the authority of traditional values and social institutions**. As a result, generations were born that do not understand the meaning of our civilizational, cultural and ethical heritage, and are deprived of a moral compass guiding their behavior”. I also warned against the ideology of human-rightism, juristocracy, NGOism, mediocracy, and against transnationalism and supranationalism. Only nine years later, it sounds familiar.

In 2017, when receiving the Jagiellonian Prize at the Kolegium Jagiellońskie (Toruńska Szkoła Wyższa) in Toruń, I asked whether “it is possible for Central and Eastern European states to preserve their identity in the European Union.” I warned that we are undergoing “a slow return to a more socialist, more centralistic, more etatist, less free and less democratic society than we had wished and planned”, that we live “under the umbrella of political correctness, multiculturalism and human-rightism” and that we, with our experience with communism, have a non-transferable task “to become the custodians of old European values, traditions and customs”. I feel it even more strongly now.

I know that to make an unstructured comparison of the current EU arrangements with communism is a slightly provocative statement. And may be misleading. The contemporary degree of manipulation and indoctrination, however, reminds those of us who were grown-up, who were alert and who lived with open eyes in the era of late communism that it is our task to explain it to the current generations. It is a special task for schools and universities. The universities are – or at least should be – the citadels of a free discourse, of a free exchange of views, of a sophisticated argumentation. They should fight

prejudices, apriorisms, politically motivated half-truths or non-truths. I wish your university much success in this effort.

When I mentioned the covid epidemic at the beginning of my today's remarks, I didn't mean covid. **Covid** is "just" an illness. What should bother us much more is **covidism**, an ideology which asks for forgetting the allegedly discredited and denigrated past and for promoting a radical transformation of human society. This heavily promoted change threatens to demolish and deconstruct our life-style, our traditional values and our free society. It should be explicitly stated that **what is going on these days is not the result of covid, but of covidism**.

I don't underestimate (or play down) the death toll of the covid epidemic in all our countries, but I am not ready to accept the strange and suspicious silence of politicians, media, as well as the academy as regards the other side of the coin, as regards the undergoing social and political shifts and their consequences.

It is the task of all of us and especially of the universities and the academy, to speak out loud about it. We should ruthlessly analyze the economic and financial costs of current lockdowns, the consequences of the closures of the educational institutions, as well as the growing fragmentation of our societies as a result of social distancing and of the expansion of virtual contacts and home-offices. We should explore the consequences of the pandemic of fear-spreading alongside the coronavirus epidemic. We should criticize the increasing role of social engineering and of technocratic expertise (as compared to the role of democratically elected politicians). We shouldn't accept the loss of common sense, moderation and decency, the victory of selfishness and immorality as well as the advocacy of new forms of personal privileges. It asks for our courageous activity. We shouldn't become passive fellow-travelers.

Our already "soft, decadent and defenseless" society (**Anthony Daniels**) has been weakened by **the artificially created fear of the silent majority** of our fellow-citizens and by **the aggressiveness and radical ambitions** of the exponents of modern progressivism. This "ism" is a product of a mutation of the old socialist ideas with new progressivistic stances of fashionable environmentalism, violent genderism, climatic alarmism, utopian egalitarianism, multiculturalism, globalism and Europeism. I would add also the relatively new term covidism.

Those who have been carefully studying social phenomena know that these "isms" are not that new and that they are not connected with the covid epidemic, with last year's lockdowns or with the obligatory use of masks. We are the witnesses of **a continuation and acceleration of pre-existing tendencies**. In January 2020, a year and half ago, I spoke at a conference in Vienna[2] about **the growing social isolation of individuals** and about the expanding processes of **exclusion and of the impoverishment of personal relationships**. It was before covid.

These processes have been strengthened by the digitalization of our societies and by **its impact on democracy**. China's digital social credit system represents an extreme version of a digital society. We see its coming, however, not only in China. Digitalization unnecessarily and dangerously centralizes a vast amount of data in unknown, uncontrolled and uncontrollable hands. It also helps to create "a secondary reality, which is steadily displacing the primary reality" of our lives. This seems to be unstoppable and irreversible. We should look at it sharply. It is a threat, not a positive symptom of modern era as it is often wrongly interpreted.

Some of us – and I am convinced more so in Poland than in the Czech Republic – are afraid of **an empty world without nations and religion**. Your specific experience tells you that these two traditional pillars of Polish society proved to be absolutely irreplaceable for rapid resurrection of Polish society after the communist era. The postmodern **progressivist project of supranational governments and of the libertarian preaching of disorder and anarchy** is a dangerous step backwards.

Let me say a few words about the progressivist project of supranational governance so radically realized in Europe these days. The European integration process – which started almost innocently after the Second World War – has been transformed into a European unification process. Both the Maastricht Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty transformed **the original concept of integration**, which meant better and deeper cooperation of sovereign states, into something else, into **a transnational unification**. These two treaties substantially augmented the power of the bureaucratic central agency in Brussels. They helped to suppress democracy and turned it into a post-democracy (misleadingly called liberal democracy).

Due to it, **Europe itself has changed from a historically evolved bundle of sovereign and independent countries to the very authoritative and centralistic empire called European Union**. The friendly, but innocent and naive slogan of our Velvet Revolution era “Back to Europe” turned out to be rather problematic. I was the first Czech politician who tried to tell my compatriots that “back to Europe is something else than Avanti (forwards) into the European Union” but my voice was not sufficient. To my great regret even now many Europeans don’t apprehend and grasp this difference.

The European political elites, the uncritical admirers of the EU in politics, media and academia as well as the huge and permanently growing EU nomenclatura see these two terms – Europe and the European Union – as perfect substitutes. I am not surprised. They have a vested interest in pretending that the EU and Europe are identical. **They want to be the owners of Europe**. They want to be recognized as the authentic heirs of all European historic events and achievements. All European democrats should oppose this way of thinking. They know, I suppose, that Europe is a historically evolved cultural and civilizational entity, whereas the EU is a man-made construct.

The EU itself is also a moving and variable entity. Every EU summit redefines its substance – some of them only marginally, some fundamentally. The changes go, however, all in one direction. The well-known ratchet effect functions in this field as well as in many others: **every treaty or summit takes Europe closer to a centralised European state**.

I do believe that the nation state is the exclusive and irreplaceable playing field of democracy, and its only guarantor because the state is a political community. Europe is not a political community. European political communities are the nation states. We are Czechs, Poles and Slovaks. We speak Czech, Polish and Slovakian, not a European Esperanto. We don’t want to erase our borders and to get rid of the distinction between a citizen and a foreigner. Some of us don’t feel to be – in President Obama’s terminology – either citizens of the world, or citizens of Europe.

Returning to the world. I am not an expert on geopolitical issues. I don’t have a theory which would give me a compass to look at it. Therefore, just one remark. I agree with **Ed Feulner**, the founder and long-time president of The Heritage Foundation, that we are deeply in another Cold War but this time – according to him – **the struggle is internal**. I am afraid this kind of struggle is more damaging

because it leads to a struggle among ourselves. Some of our fellow-citizens seem to be ready to give up personal freedoms and liberties and to accept forms of governance resembling that of communism. They are getting prepared for the Great Reset which would lead to **the reincarnation of communism under a new banner**.

To summarize, our present discussions do not represent a clash of views about coronavirus, but a clash of views about human freedom and the substance of our societies. We, the Czechs and the Poles, received our own vaccination of communist propaganda and should have developed an immunity to the similar virus. I wish it were the case because it is necessary to fight back, to be prepared to resist the destabilization of basic values of our societies.

By Václav Klaus

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